

Khenpo Sangpo Rinpoche's

Commentary on

Lama Mipham's

Gateway to Knowledge

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Preface

These are transcribed notes from five-day teaching given by Khenpo Sangpo Rinpoche at Karma Shedrup Ling retreat center of Karma Tashi Ling Buddhist Center in July 2002. Lama Changchub, the resident lama of Karma Tashi Ling, served as translator. The Gateway to Knowledge is said to be an essential text to understand Tibetan Buddhism. The text presents ten topics for realizing the ultimate reality. Some of us might have found it difficult to read the root text alone, as one quickly gets lost in a long list of scholastic classifications. However, receiving a commentary by an accomplished master such as Sangpo Rinpoche makes understanding easier.

Sometimes oral teachings use repetitions that seem unnecessary when written down. These have been removed. Also, themes can be a bit spread out in oral teachings as one goes along. It made sense to group such themes. The reader should know that Tibetan and English are very different languages, and to convey the meaning as well as possible, Lama Changchub often uses several words to express a single Tibetan word or expression. For the sake of simplicity and readability, I have chosen to use just one translation.

I have chosen to use the more familiar "sense faculty," the same term used by Erik Pema Kunsang in his translation of the root text, as opposed to Lama Changchub's "sense power," although "sense power" may give a better indication of the power that these senses have.

During the teaching, sometimes people would ask questions. I have grouped these questions at the end of each main topic. I hope the question and answer sections will be of interest to the reader as I feel they convey some of the atmosphere at the time of the teaching.

To summarize, although I have made some changes to the original teaching, I hope the text has retained the original content, and I hope that readers who are interested in the topics of the Gateway to Knowledge or Buddhism in general, will derive some benefit from reading it.

Oslo, 2007
Aksel Sogstad

Introduction

It is delightful and fortunate that we have come together in this way to share the teachings of the Lord Buddha. Therefore, I would like to express my thankfulness for you being here. I am also very delighted to be in Norway, where everybody can enjoy democracy and peace. I would also like to express my thankfulness to those who have organized this course at Karma Shedrup Ling.

The topic that we have chosen to discuss is a teaching composed by the Tibetan master Jamgön Mipham Rinpoche, also known as the Great Mipham. In Tibet, there are many Buddhist academic institutes and monasteries, and the primary curriculum studied at these institutions were for the most part written by the great master Mipham.

Lama Mipham was born in East Tibet. At the age of seventy, he was widely known throughout Tibet as the emanation of the Buddha Manjushri¹. He was very learned in the sutra as well as the tantra presentation of the teachings of the Buddha.

It is rare to be given an opportunity to speak on the topics composed by the great master Mipham. The Tibetan name for the text is Könchog. *Kön* means knowledge. If one would like to become an expert in the teaching of the Buddha, one should study this text.

The Buddha gave many teachings on how to counteract wrong views of fixation onto the self. This text presents ten topics that counteract such wrong views. The first topic is the five psycho-physical aggregates (Sanskrit: *skandhas*). The second topic is the eighteen elements (Sanskrit: *dhatu*s). The third topic is the sense sources (Sanskrit: *ayatana*s). The fourth topic explains dependent origination. The fifth topic describes the correct and the incorrect. The sixth topic presents the faculties. The seventh topic explains time. The eighth topic is the Four Noble Truths. The ninth topic presents the different vehicles in Buddhism (Sanskrit: *yanas*). The tenth and last topic is about the composite and non-composite. These teachings were presented by the Buddha from his own experience of interacting with his disciples, who had many ways of imagining a self. We should also meditate and become knowledgeable of the subjects of this text.

1 The Five Psycho-Physical Aggregates

Since we were born, we have had an intrinsic grasping onto the self. Our birth was immediately followed by the conception of the notion of a self which was then reinforced and continued. We then started to involve ourselves with all kinds of activities to provide happiness for this conceptual self and protect it from suffering. However, because of our notion of a self, all forms of disturbances occur.

If we examine this naïve assumption of a self, we will not be able to discover a self as a separate entity outside our physical and mental existence. Sometimes we regard the self as being identical with our psychophysical existence. Sometimes we regard the self as being apart from our psychophysical existence. Sometimes we claim that my body is well and that my mind is peaceful. Such a claim shows that we have already regarded the self as something separate from the psycho-physical existence. Sometimes we claim that somebody has hit us. When we claim that we have been harmed by others, we identify the self with our psychophysical existence.

If we hallucinate and see a snake inside the house, how shall we overcome this? To overcome this misconception, we must enter the room and sort out everything, shift things around and search for the illusory snake. Eventually, we will realize that we cannot find the snake. Similarly, we have the notion of a self in connection with our psychophysical existence, and we have to search for this notion to see if it exists or not.

Our psychophysical existence consists of five aggregates. The first aggregate (Sanskrit: *skandha*) is the aggregate of form which includes our physical existence. What do we mean by "aggregate"? An aggregate is something that consists of several parts. The physical aggregate is a collection of many limbs and organs, particles and molecules. How is it produced? The basic causes that give birth to the physical aggregate are karma and emotional afflictions. The characteristic of the physical aggregate is

that it can be destroyed or harmed. The rest of the aggregates are connected with our psychology. The second aggregate is the aggregate of feeling, or sensation. The third is the aggregate of perception, the fourth is the aggregate of formation, and the fifth is the aggregate of consciousness. If we understand the functioning of the five aggregates, we can counteract the grasping onto the self.

1.1. The Aggregate of Form

The physical aggregates are subdivided into the internal and the external physical aggregates. What do we mean this? Within the category of external physical aggregates, we find all kinds of phenomenal existences and forms, things that form a part of the external world. The internal physical aggregates refer to our own physical existence. Studying the internal physical aggregates that enables us to lessen the grip of the notion of the self.

1.1.1. The Four Causal Forms

How do the internal physical aggregates of human beings evolve? They are based on the four causal forms which are the elements of earth, water, fire and air. The nature of earth is solidity, and its function is to serve as a foundation. The nature of water is wetness, and its function is to hold things together in a cohesive manner. The nature of fire is heat, and its function is to prevent things from rotting. The nature of the wind element is movement, and its function is to mature. In the same way, the external physical aggregates arise by the coming together of the four causal forms. There is, therefore, a close connection between the internal and the external aggregates.

1.1.2. The Eleven Resultant Forms

The four causal forms give rise to the eleven resultant forms. The eleven resultant forms are classified into three groups; the five sense faculties, the five sense objects, and the eleventh form, imperceptible form.

The first resultant form is the eye faculty. It is essential to make a distinction between the eye organ and the eye sense faculty. The eye sense organ acts as a foundation for the eye sense faculty. We are able to perceive the eye sense organ with our eyes, but we are not able to perceive the eye sense faculty. The eye sense faculty refers to a very subtle form of energy, so subtle and refined that we are usually unaware of it. This imperceptible energy activates the eye consciousness that makes contact with the eye sensory objects through the eye sense organ. The rest of the sense faculties have corresponding sense faculties and functions in the same way.

The first sensory object is form, which is something the eye is capable of seeing. Form includes all kinds of shapes and colors that our eyes can perceive. The second sensory object is sound, the sense object of the ear. There are many different kinds of sounds; meaningful sounds and meaningless sounds, and so on. Odors are the sense objects of the nose. There are different kinds, like natural odors, fabricated odors and so on. Taste, the next sensory object, is enjoyed by the tongue. Again, there are all kinds of tastes: sweet, salty, bitter, sour and so on. The last type of sensory object is the tangible objects sensed by the body.

1.1.2.1. Imperceptible Form According to the Vaibhasika

This presentation of the eleventh resultant form is based on the philosophical viewpoint of the Vaibhasika. Having thus gone through the first and second sets of five we are left with the last resultant form, the imperceptible form. The imperceptible form has the characteristic of form, but eludes our ordinary perceptions. For example, electric current belongs to the category of imperceptible form. The vows that individuals receive when they take ordination is also imperceptible form. It is imperceptible to the individual taking the vow as well as to others.

1.1.2.2. Imperceptible Form According to the Svatantrika

The second philosophical school of Buddhism, Svatantrika, posits five classes of imperceptible forms that are objects of consciousness instead of the single imperceptible form of the Vaibhasika.

The first class of mental forms is the partless particleⁱⁱ that acts as a base for all other particles. Gross material objects are analyzed down to the smallest particle, the partless particle. The partless particle cannot be perceived with our eyes, its existence can only be validated by mental analysis. The Buddha said that if the mind changes, then also the partless particle changes. Thus, the Buddha made it clear that the three realms of existence are a mere projection of mind.

The second class of mental forms is occasionally perceptible forms. These are magical creations, like illusions and dreams.

The third class of mental forms is form acquired through receiving, for example receiving vows on different levels.

The fourth resultant form is imputed form. For example, if we create a doll that resembles a person and name this doll after a person.

The fifth class of mental forms is forms that have power over certain things. This refers to an individual that has attained tremendous power in his or her meditation. For example, if such a person meditates that everything is blue, he or she actually perceives everything as blue. This can also mean having power over certain phenomena that the meditator can gain by very concentrated meditation on the four elements of earth, water, fire, and air. This is called the resultant form of having gained power over phenomenal existence.

To summarize, according to the Vaibhasika School of Indian philosophy one talks about eleven resultant forms, according to the Svatantrika School one talks about fifteen resultant forms. The physical aggregate is the collection of all these elements, and is labeled body or form.

The individual meditator should analyze the aggregate of form in this manner. Having analyzed form, compounded of so many elements, without finding the self, one should rest the mind in stabilizing meditation.

1.2. The Aggregate of Feeling

Next is the aggregate of feeling, or sensation. The characteristic of feeling is to experience something. There are three basic feelings: pleasant feelings, unpleasant feelings, and neutral feelings. One cannot find pleasant feelings within the external or internal phenomenal existence. Pleasant feelings do not exist independently "out there" or somewhere "inside". The nature of feelings is impermanent.

If pleasant feelings were already established by the external phenomena, then it would be impossible for different individuals to perceive other people differently. In reality, some see a person to be pleasant, while others experience the same person to be unpleasant. If you look at someone you regard as your beloved, then naturally this will induce a pleasant feeling within your mind. However, somebody else may look at your beloved with different eyes and experience another emotional reaction. Therefore, the pleasant feeling does not abide within the external object, because a single external object can induce both pleasant and unpleasant feelings.

Long ago in Tibet, there were two friends. One of them met a woman and fell in love with her. However, when he introduced her to his friend, his friend could not see any attractive qualities and said: "Why have you fallen in love with that woman?" His friends answered, "You should not look at the woman from your perspective; you should look at her from my perspective. Then you would see her attractive qualities."

Therefore, truly existing happiness or suffering do not abide in connection with external objects, whether you try to look from another person's perspective or from your own. Happiness or unhappiness, pleasant or unpleasant feelings, do not exist as independent external objects. Similarly, one cannot find independently existing pleasant or unpleasant feelings in the inner perceiving mind.

If happiness is established in connection with the inner perceiving mind, then the individual should be able to experience happiness always. But clearly this is not the case, for sometimes the mind experiences unhappiness.

1.3. The Aggregate of Perception

Third is the aggregate of perception. This refers to characterizing phenomena as good or bad. The aggregate of feeling and the aggregate of perception are included in the aggregate of formations. Still, Buddha classified them separately. The reason for this is because so much conflict arises in society based on the aggregate of feeling and so many conflicts and arguments arise between different religious and philosophical schools based on the aggregate of perception.

Everybody wishes to have pleasant feelings and to escape unpleasant feelings. However, if one uses unskillful means to fulfill one's longing for pleasant feelings by harming other sentient beings, then this is regarded as destructive. Similarly, based on the aggregate of perception there can arise conflicts between different religious communities. To prevent such conflicts, we should learn to respect the philosophical traditions of others, while regarding our lineage and tradition as something precious.

To lessen fixation onto any form of feeling, we should try to reduce the initial response of an object as pleasant or unpleasant. We should try to reduce the notion that our own religious or philosophical views are superior. We should at the same time try to lessen our feelings of aversion and lack of respect for other traditions and philosophical systems.

1.4. The Aggregate of Formation

The fourth aggregate is the aggregate of formation. The aggregate of formation signifies that something is being formed, a composition. The first type of aggregate of formation has to do with resembling. The second type of formation is neither a formation of mind nor a formation of an inanimate object. It is termed formation that is neither.

The resembling aggregate of formation should be understood as mental states. They are called mental states because they stem from the principal mind. It is very complicated to classify the mental states. All kinds of thoughts, apart from the principal mind, are categorized within the category of 51 mental states. The second and third aggregates, feeling and perception also belong to the 51 mental states.

We differentiate between external and internal happiness. External happiness is acquired by collecting outer material and status. However, we are not able to obtain complete and perfect happiness by only collecting external material things. It is essential to develop happiness based on internal development. To be able to invoke inner peace, we need to know the difference between positive and negative mental states. What do we mean by positive mental states? They are any mental states that give rise to inner peace, happiness, and joy. What do we mean by negative mental states? They are any mental states that give rise to emotional turmoil and unpleasantness.

The conceptual states are beyond counting, but since the Buddha was very skillful, he summarized them as 51 mental states, which are again divided into six subgroups. The first is the five ever-present states that accompany all states of mind. The second is the decisive states because they prevent suspicion or hesitation. The third is the eleven virtuous mental states. These are primarily derived from non-attachment, non-aggression, and non-confusion. The fourth is the six root emotions. Why are they called thus? Because these root emotions develop into all kinds of secondary emotional complications. The fifth is the group of twenty proximate emotions, named thus because they are very close to the six root emotions. Sixth are the four variable emotions, called thus because they can change into a positive, negative, or neutral state, depending on the person.

The five ever-present states are feeling, perception, intention, contact, and attention. As long as we are living human beings, these five mental events are always present, hence the name. They are

called ever-present because when an individual gives rise to negative, positive or neutral mental events, these states are also present.

Next are the five decisive states. The first is interest, the second is determination, the third is mindfulness, the fourth is concentration, and the fifth is discernment. A mind in which these factors are inherent will enjoy decisiveness, free from hesitation and suspicion.

The third category is the eleven virtuous mental states. These are virtuous in nature, and we should practice these. The eleven virtuous states are faith, conscientiousness, alertness, equanimity, self-respect, priority, non-attachment, non-aversion, effort, non-violence, and non-confusion.

Next are the six disturbing emotions. These are desire, anger, pride, ignorance, wrong view, and doubt. They are also known as the six subtle emotions that have the potential to manifest on a gross level. If an individual possesses the six root emotions and allows these emotions to influence the mindstream, many other emotional complications will also arise.

Next are the 20 proximate emotions. These create disturbances in the mind of the individual, and one should strive to abandon these as much as possible. The first is anger, the second is resentment, and the third is spite. Then follows malice, jealousy, dishonesty, deceit, hypocrisy, avarice, haughtiness, lack of self-respect, lack of priority, torpor, restlessness, faithlessness, laziness, non-conscientiousness, forgetfulness, inattentiveness, and distractedness. It is essential to recognize these when they occur in our minds; this recognition allows us to abandon the emotion. It is necessary to know which feelings should be cultivated and which feelings should be abandoned. It is therefore critical to do "inner research" by observing our minds and recognizing these mental events.

The next four mental states are the four variable states. The first is worry, the second is sleepiness, the third is investigation, and the fourth is analysis. These final four variable mental states can turn into positive, negative or neutral mental states. We should strive to change them into positive mental states.

1.5. The Aggregate of Consciousness

The aggregate of consciousness is a collection of eight consciousnesses. The term consciousness means being aware of something.

1.5.1. The Sense Consciousnesses

The eye consciousness, the ear consciousness, the body consciousness, the taste consciousness, and the smell consciousness are referred to as the five sense consciousnesses. The five sense consciousnesses are non-conceptual in nature. When the eye consciousness comes into contact with the sense object of form, characterized by shape and color, the eye consciousness can grasp the generality of that form. However, it is not able to distinguish the particular shape, what color and so on. Therefore, the eye sense consciousness is non-conceptual as are the other sense consciousnesses.

When the mental consciousness, the sixth consciousness, is distracted, then in spite of this distraction, the five sense consciousnesses are able to perceive their corresponding sense objects. However, these perceptions will not be recognized.

Of course, there are specific causes and conditions that give rise to the five sense consciousnesses, but we are not going to discuss these here. We will do this later when we go through the eighteen elements.

1.5.2. The Mental Consciousness

The sixth consciousness is the mental consciousness that functions conceptually as well as non-conceptually. When we shut our eyes or block our ears, we are still able to perceive certain forms and sounds. These forms and sounds occur on the level of mental consciousness.

The conceptual mental consciousness can grasp the five sensory objects: form, sound, smell, taste, and touch. The mental consciousness is the primary consciousness. Because of this, the

Buddha said that the mind precedes all phenomenal experiences. Therefore, the mind is the most important and one should strive to train this mind.

When we do meditation, such as the development and completion phase of tantric meditation, we are primarily employing the mental consciousness. All forms of spiritual practice connected with meditation are undertaken mainly by using mental consciousness. The mental consciousness is capable of seeing shapes, hearing sounds, smelling odors, tasting food and so on. This is why our mental consciousness is employed during meditation.

We have to make a distinction between the functioning of the mental consciousness and the preceding five sense consciousnesses. The functioning of the five sense consciousnesses is partial and confined. The mental consciousness is pervasive. It can grasp and perceive all sensory objects and is, therefore, the most important consciousness.

1.5.3. The Afflicted Consciousness

The seventh consciousness is referred to as the afflicted consciousness. The object of reference of the afflicted consciousness is the fundamental consciousness. Why is it called afflicted consciousness? Because this consciousness grasps onto the belief in a self. It is afflicted because it obscures the individual from seeing the selflessness, leading the individual to perceive a self where there is none.

The afflicted consciousness is supported by many afflicted emotions, such as ignorance, belief in, and pride of self. Usually, the afflicted consciousness is inherent in the minds of individuals and is supported by these three emotions. However, there are occasions when the individual is free from these three emotions; they are not present when the individual enters formal meditation and realizes true reality. Someone who has previously recognized the genuine truth in formal meditation will at death have a mind that is free from afflicted consciousness. Similarly, when someone experiences cessation, the mind of the individual is freed from the conflicting consciousness supported by the three emotions. Also, when someone attains the path of no more learning, the stage of Buddhahood, the mind of such an enlightened being is liberated from afflicted consciousness. Apart from this, afflicted consciousness permeates our minds at all times, even when we are unconscious or in a deep sleep.

1.5.4. The Fundamental Consciousness.

The Tibetan term for fundamental consciousness is “the consciousness that is the basis for all” because this consciousness acts as the very foundation for all karmic complexes and patterns.

Suppose a person murder somebody. The act of murder has ceased when the person has died. But the karmic energy of having been involved with such a negative action is stored in the fundamental consciousness. In future, when the presence of the seed of the harmful act is aroused or stimulated by craving, the seed will sprout. The individual will then have to meet the negative consequences of having performed the adverse action in the past.

Not only adverse actions are stored in the fundamental consciousness; the energies of defiled positive actions are also stored here. Positive actions are called defiled because they do not transcend dualistic thought. Because of this, the happiness that we experience is primarily created by ourselves, not by somebody else. So, each individual is responsible for their own happiness and suffering. Therefore, it makes sense to accumulate merit and engage in virtuous acts and to abandon non-virtuous actions.

1.5.5. The Continuation of Consciousness

Sentient beings wander the cyclic existence of samsara because of the continuity of the five psychophysical aggregates. When we talk about the continuity of the five psychophysical aggregates from one life to the next, we are not talking about transferring the preceding psychophysical aggregates to the reincarnated psychophysical aggregates, but instead a continuity of the psychophysical aggregates from one life to the next.

The preceding five aggregates are causes for the resultant five aggregates. It is a relationship of cause and effect; the aggregates are not propagated as such. It is not like entering an airplane in Norway and flying to America.

The texts give many examples to explain that the five aggregates are not transferred as a separate solid entity from one moment to the next. For example, let's say you place a line of candles in front of you and light the first candle. If you use the first candle to light the next and so on, all candles will be lit, but it is not the case that the flame of the first candle jumps into the flame of the second candle. Still, the other candles are lit because the first was lit. As another example, let your image be clearly reflected in a mirror. It is not the case that the image has jumped into the mirror; the reflection is produced because of the presence of your physical existence as well as the mirror. The teacher's knowledge can be acquired by the student, but it is not like the teacher's knowledge jumps into the student. By learning from the teacher, the student is able to acquire the same knowledge as the teacher. When you create a figure from a mold, the original mold has a certain shape, but the mold is not transferring itself, rather the molded object receives the shape of the mold. We can produce fire by using a magnifying glass, but it is not the case that the fire of the magnifying glass jumps into the object that catches fire. In the same way, the five aggregates of the preceding moment act as causes for the aggregates of the present moment. But it is not the case that the aggregates of the preceding moment jump into the subsequent moment to ensure continuity. I have included so many examples to help us reduce our clinging to the idea of a separate self in the five aggregates.

It is easy to understand how the last four aggregates propagate as causes and results in the next life; it is more difficult to understand how the first aggregate does this. When a person dies, the gross body ceases to function, but the subtle physical body remains. It is this subtle physical body that continues from this life to the next. When the individual goes through the *bardo* (Tibetan, meaning "transition state") of death and enters the *bardo* of becoming, the individual possesses only four of the psychophysical aggregates. The mind of the individual is not completely without a body, the physical body is maintained on a subtle level by the mental body of the *bardo*. A sentient being wandering in the *bardo* of becoming will in the early stage experience the mental body from his or her previous life. If the past life was human it will experience a mental human body. But if the individual is going to be reborn as an animal, then in the later stage of the *bardo* of becoming, the individual will experience the mental body of an animal. After going through the *bardo* of becoming, future rebirth awaits.

When the gross body ceases, the subtle body can carry certain information from the past life to the next. Some of the reincarnated lamas have marks on the body that are similar to marks on the body of a previous life. This is taken as proof of the subtle physical continuity from one life to the next.

If we become knowledgeable about the five psycho-physical aggregates, we will be able to counteract the assumption of the self as a unitary entity that maintains its continuity by jumping from the past life to the next.

1.5.6. Stopping Samsara

Why do the five psychophysical aggregates not cease to exist? Karma is the reason behind the unstoppable movement of the psychophysical aggregates from the preceding instant into the subsequent instant. If karma is not accumulated, then the continual flow of the five psychophysical aggregates will stop.

If we are going to stop accumulating karma, we have to stop the emotional complications that give rise to karma. In order to eradicate the very root of the emotional complications, we need to get rid of our belief in a unitary self. This is done through the Buddhist view of dependent origination; each individual is the creator of his or her world, and each is the destroyer of this world as well.

If we continue to involve ourselves with samsaric existence, this involvement will never cease. However, if we do not identify ourselves with the existence of samsara, or renounce ourselves from involvement with samsaric existence, then we can stop at this very moment.

It is a little bit like a hamster that treads a wheel in a cage. The hamster becomes excited and keeps running. Samsara is a bit like that unless we stop. Not long ago, I chanced to see such a hamster, and this reminded me of the vicious circle of samsara.

1.6. Questions and Answers

Question: *You said the eye sense faculty is dependent on the eye sense organ. Will a blind person not have the eye sense faculty?*

When the sense organ is damaged, the subtle sense faculty is also damaged, and the sense consciousness will not be able to perceive the corresponding sensory objects.

Question: *Is the eye sense faculty a completely visual thing? When we dream we can see pictures. Are these images separate from the eye sense faculty? We can also see forms when we visualize in meditation.*

Dream appearances in sleep are not perceived through the eye sense organ and the eye sense faculty. They are perceived by non-conceptual mental consciousness. When the non-conceptual mental consciousness becomes deluded, it gives rise to the perception of a dream.

Question: *Did you say that form comes from afflictive emotions and karma? I don't understand this.*

Take our own physical existence as an example. The mind of a sentient being evolves from positive and negative actions. By accumulating positive or negative karma, the consciousness of the being is propelled toward the womb of the mother. However, this is not enough, the masculine and feminine energy that we receive from our father and mother has to come together as well. Then birth is possible. Do you understand now?

Question: *I understood that. Is this inner form? What about outer form. Is it the same with that?*

When it comes to the external physical existence, we can say that it is the same in general, but there are exceptions of physical manifestations that sometimes do not follow the law of the karma.

Question: *You talked about the four elements. Is the space element not included?*

When we try to describe the first aggregate, the form aggregate, the fifth element, space, is not included. The reason for this is that space is regarded as a non-composite phenomenon. You cannot inflict harm on the element of space as you can on the aggregate of form.

Question: *Are all basic emotions negative emotions? Are there no positive emotions?*

Of course, there exist positive emotions! The eleven virtuous mental states are positive. The last classification of the 51 formations was the four variable states, and these emotions can also be positive. The second classification, the five decisive states are also virtuous states because they create a decisive, unconfused mind.

Question: *How can worry, the first of the four variable states be made positive?*

If you have accumulated certain karma in the recent or distant past, and you remember it and develop a sense of worry of having accumulated certain bad karma, this becomes positive worry instead of negative worry. This worry, or regret, belongs to the five antidotal powers that can purify negative karma.

2. The Eighteen Elements

The second topic is the eighteen elements (Sanskrit: *dhatu*s). Earlier, when we talked about form, we mentioned the five sense faculties and the corresponding sense objects. This makes up the first ten elements. The next seven elements are associated with the fifth aggregate, the aggregate of consciousness. This makes a list of seventeen. The last element is phenomena, which again consists of four sub-elements, the aggregates of feeling, perception, formation and the non-composite element. If we become knowledgeable in the field of the eighteen elements, we will be able to counteract the belief in a self that is the enjoyer of the experience.

The eighteen elements become more comprehensible if we classify them into three groups; the six sense faculties, the six sense objects, and the six corresponding consciousnesses.

2.1. The Six Sense Faculties

The first of the six sense faculties is the eye sense faculty. Remember, we are not referring to our ordinary sense organs, but the subtle sense faculties. Ordinarily, we are not able to perceive the subtle sense faculties. It is a bit like the high and low frequencies that elude our sense of hearing. However, the subtle shape of the eye sense faculty can be seen by someone who has attained the divine eye by achieving profound realization. It can then be seen to have the form of a particular blue flower. This realization also makes it possible to see things that are far away, as well as the subtle forms of the faculties. This is the first type of clairvoyance.

The subtle form of the sense faculty of the ear has the curly shape of the branch of a birch tree. The subtle form of the sense faculty of the nose has the shape of two parallel copper needles. The subtle form of the sense faculty of the tongue is a crescent moon, resembling the curvature of the tongue. The subtle form of the sense faculty of the body is soft like a bird's feather. It permeates the whole body, and in the same way that a fire is hot from whatever direction we touch it, we can feel with all parts of our body.

Next is the mind faculty. The mind faculty is difficult to understand, and what exactly is the mind faculty in this context? When the six consciousnesses cease to exist, the mind faculty immediately arises as cognition of the object at hand. For example, assume the eye consciousness has become conscious of a certain form. At that very moment, the continuity of this consciousness is interrupted and replaced by the mind faculty that cognizes the form that was earlier perceived by the eye sense faculty and the eye consciousness.

2.2. The Six Sense Objects

The first sense object is form. Form is the object of the eye sense faculty. When we talked about the classification of the aggregate of form, most of these things were talked about. Therefore, I will just list the names for the sake of presentation. The sensory object of form is followed by the sensory object of sound. The third sensory object is odor, the fourth is taste, the fifth is touch, and the last is mental objects. The mental objects are a collection of the second, third and fourth psychophysical aggregates i.e. the aggregate of feeling, the aggregate of perception, and the aggregate of formation in addition to imperceptible forms and all unconditioned phenomena. Space is an example of the last category. Also, the genuine nature of our mind is an unconditioned phenomenon and is also an example. Note that in the explanation of the five psycho-physical aggregates the element of unconditioned phenomena is not included, but in the context of the eighteen elements it is.

2.3. The Six Consciousnesses

The first consciousness is the eye consciousness, the second is the ear consciousness, the third is the nose consciousness, the fourth is the taste consciousness, the fifth is the body consciousness, and the sixth is the mental consciousness.

So, all possible existence and experience are included in the presentation of the eighteen elements. If one becomes knowledgeable in the field of the eighteen elements, one can claim to know all phenomenal existence.

2.4. Causes that give rise to the Elements

Do these eighteen elements have causes or is there an agent that causes them to develop? The eighteen elements have causes, but there is no separate almighty agent that creates all the eighteen elements and the various phenomenal experiences.

In Tibetan, “phenomena” is referred to as *kham*. The meaning of *kham* should be understood as potentiality. What kind of potentiality is inherent within the six sense organs? The six sense organs and their respective sense objects have the potential to give rise to the six corresponding consciousnesses. What kind of potentiality is inherent in the consciousnesses? For example, the eye consciousness has the potential to grasp perceived form. The others have a similar potential to grasp their corresponding sense objects.

2.4.1. Causes Giving Rise to Consciousness

The six classes of consciousnesses can arise upon contact between the six sense organs and the sense objects. Consciousness can also arise from the resembling cause, which is the preceding moment of consciousness that upon cessation gives rise to the next moment of consciousness. There is also a maturing karmic cause and an immediate cause that give rise to the six classes of consciousnesses. The main point is that the six classes of consciousnesses depend on the coming together of many types of causes and conditions.

2.4.2. Causes Giving Rise to Sensory Objects

The six sensory objects arise due to various causes and conditions. One set of causes that give rise to the existence of the six sense objects are the five great elements. Another cause that gives rise to the six sense objects is the maturation of the collective karmic cause. There is also a resembling cause.

2.4.3. Causes Giving Rise to Sense Faculties

There are four different causes of expansion that give rise to the six sense faculties. Why are they referred to as the four causes of expansion? Because by relying on these four causes, the individual is able to nurture the five sense faculties. The first cause of expansion is the consumption of appropriate food, the second is sleep, the third is cleanliness, and the fourth is meditation. From this, we can understand that the Buddha underlined the importance of taking care of ourselves by eating, sleeping and cleaning, as well as practicing meditative absorption. The four causes that develop the sense faculties should be practiced in our daily life. We should try to consume nutritious food that benefits our body, and we should try to sleep at appropriate times. This will contribute to the development of the six sense faculties.

2.5. The Benefit of Meditating upon the Elements

The Buddha said that whoever is endowed with the six elements is capable of reaching enlightenment. In this context, the six prominent elements are earth, water, fire, air, space, and consciousness. What are the space elements? They are all the spaces and gaps that can be found within an individual.

The classification of the eighteen elements is presented primarily in connection with the beings of the desire realm. When we are within the desire realm, all the elements are functioning fully. Creatures in the desire god realm do not possess the sense organs of nose and tongue. Therefore, they are not able to experience the nose and tongue consciousness and are relieved from attachment to the sensory objects of odor and taste. The gods of the formless realm are deprived of

all the rest of the eighteen elements apart from the last three, the sense faculty of the mind, the sense object of the mind and the mental consciousness.

If we are knowledgeable about the classification of the eighteen elements, we will be able to do away with the assumption of the self as the cause of action. An action is the result of causes and conditions coming together.

Meditating upon the classification of the eighteen elements is also said to act as an antidote to arrogance and pride.

The Buddha said that to grasp the meaning of the non-conventional we must depend on the conventional; to understand the ultimate truth we need to become well versed in the functioning of the conventional truth.

2.6. Questions and Answers

Question: *What is the relationship between the sense consciousness and the sense faculty?*

The relationship between the six faculties and the six consciousnesses is the relationship between cause and effect. The six faculties act as causes and the six consciousnesses act as effects.

Question: *How do the faculties work concerning dreams and things that appear before the mind when the eyes are shut? Are these not part of the mind consciousness?*

When the individual is dreaming, the five sense consciousnesses are not functioning. The dream is based on the mental consciousness. It is difficult to talk about consciousness because consciousness is not a solid object.

Question: *But you talked about the cessation of the sense consciousnesses giving rise to the mind faculty?*

The mind sense faculty is not included within the five sense faculties but still included in the list of six faculties. All the six consciousnesses are part of the mind faculty, and mind will act as a cause for the six sense consciousnesses. We talk about the six sense faculties acting as a cause and the six consciousnesses acting as a result, but sometimes the result will act as a cause. It is something like this: if one individual has a father and a son, then relative to his father he is referred to as the son, but in relation to his son he is referred to as the father. The collection of the six consciousnesses is a result, but you cannot say that they always will be a result; they can develop the mind element. When a seed is planted, we can say the death of the seed is the birth of the sprout; the death of the six consciousnesses gives birth to the mind faculty. This teaching reveals the law of interdependency that posits the validity of karma, cause, and effect. However, if we overanalyze it, such teachings can lead to a nihilistic attitude that considers everything to be non-existent. There is a Tibetan expression, "When you talk about the horse, you should not talk about the mule." When we talk about the relative truth, we should not start talking about the absolute truth.

Question: *Is it possible to grasp this on the level of cause and effect? What happens after the six sense consciousnesses give birth to the mind faculty?*

The cessation of the six consciousnesses gives rise to the mind faculty that cognizes. The mind faculty is the "knower." The subject matter is very complicated because so many consciousnesses are always taking place at the same time.

Question: *Is there a subtle form of the mind faculty?*

The mind element does not have any characteristics in terms of shape and color. There is no form, not even on the subtle level. We can summarize by saying that external phenomenal existence originates from the mind of the individual. Where does mind come from? It comes from the accumulation of karma, which again comes from accumulation of conflicting emotions.

Question: *Can you say that the solar system and the universe have their own karma?*

We can say that most things come from the accumulation of karma, but not everything. Take the small worldⁱⁱⁱ as an example. It exists because many causes and conditions have come together; the food that we eat, the masculine and feminine energy from our parents contribute to the existence of the body, as well as the consciousness from previous lives along with past karma. So we can say that this small world is a by-product that we receive in this life. The same logic applies to phenomenal existence as well.

3 The Twelve Sense Sources, the Ayatanas

The third topic is the twelve sense sources (Sanskrit: *ayatanas*). To be able to perceive the truth of suchness, the ultimate truth, it is important to comprehend and understand the functioning of conventional phenomena. Studying the subject of the twelve sense sources enables the individual meditator to counteract the notion of self as the enjoyer of experience.

The presentation of the twelve sense sources is not done to make things more difficult; it is an alternative representation of the eighteen elements. The first ten sense sources correspond to the five sense faculties and the five sense objects. The last two sense sources are the mind source and the mental object source. The mind source represents the seven consciousness elements. The mental object source represents the element of mental objects that contains the mental formations.

The Buddha used the three different presentations of the five aggregates, the eighteen elements, and the twelve sense sources, because different individuals are suited to varying degrees of detail. I am not going to elaborate on the presentation of the sense sources since these can be found within the eighteen elements.

4 Dependent Origination

The twelve links of dependent origination establish the view of the teaching of the Buddha. Saying that the view of Buddhism is dependent origination is the same as saying that the view of Buddhism is emptiness. The law of the twelve interdependent links makes it possible to claim that the view of Buddhism is emptiness.

Why is it called dependent origination? Because nothing can stand on its own without depending on other causes and conditions. All phenomenal experience and existence is a byproduct of things that depend on each other.

In conventional reality, all phenomena are subject to change and impermanence. This means that the true nature of any phenomenal existence is emptiness. If we understand the teaching on emptiness, it will be much easier for us to understand the unenlightened state of samsara and the enlightened state of nirvana. Some people think that if they understand the teaching of emptiness, then samsara will cease to function because its ultimate nature is emptiness. However, such a conclusion does not correspond with a correct understanding of the teaching of emptiness.

Somebody who has not realized the meaning of emptiness is unenlightened. Someone who has realized the meaning of emptiness directly is enlightened. This is the motivation for studying the fourth topic of dependent origination.

All external and internal phenomenal existence has the nature of dependent origination. Take for example a seed that gives rise to a sprout. The sprout will develop further into a plant through different stages and eventually wither. There is a connection between the cause and the effect. Also, the five great elements of earth, water, fire, air, and space, including the element of time act as causes that give rise to certain phenomenal existence on the external level. All these six great elements are contained in any given external object. An ordinary cup contains these six great elements. The cup contains the element of earth because the function of the element of earth is to stabilize. The element of water is also contained in the cup, but we are not able to perceive it. The water has a cohesive function that allows the cup to retain its form. The element of fire is also present in the cup. Similarly, the element of wind is contained in the cup, because the cup can be moved from one place to another. The external space element and the internal space element are

inherent in the cup; when they function together it is possible to place certain objects on certain things. The element of time is also included. Previously the cup did not exist, but at a certain point it came into existence. From a subtle perspective, the continuity of the cup ceases at every moment, and facilitates the unfolding of the subsequent moment. In this way, the six great elements make the external phenomena come into existence.

Also, internal phenomenal existence arises due to many causes and conditions. The primary cause of all internal phenomenal experiences is ignorance. Therefore, the ignorance that posits the existence of the self of the person is the first link of the twelve interdependent links. For example, if we have a sore on our hand and the cause of the sore is healed, then the sore will disappear. However, if the sore is only treated symptomatically, the sore will not be perfectly healed. In the same way, if we are going to recover from the pain and misery of the unenlightened existence of samsara, we have to heal the basic wound at its root; the ignorance that clings to the idea of a personal self.

The same ignorance that grasps onto the self of the person also seizes onto the sensing of others. Because of this, the individual develops attachment to self and aversion toward others. The mental continuum of such an individual consists of three basic emotions: the emotion of ignorance, the emotion of attachment, and the emotion of aggression.

4.1 The Twelve Interdependent Links

The Buddha said that all phenomenal experience and existence comes about from specific causes. By the expression "all phenomenal experiences" we mean the unenlightened state of samsara and the enlightened phenomenal experiences of nirvana. So, the Buddha did not only talk about the evolution of samsaric existence, but he also spoke about the development of nirvanic existence by relying on The Fourth Noble Truth. The Fourth Noble Truth of the path shows how to realize the Third Noble Truth, the truth of the cessation of conceptuality. This is the same as attaining nirvana.

The Buddha's teaching on the twelve interdependent links is a teaching on the first set of the two truths, the truth of suffering and the reality of the origin of suffering. It is essential for us to recognize the cause of unenlightened, samsaric existence. The cause of samsaric existence is the fundamental ignorance that is the first of the twelve interdependent links.

The twelve interdependent links are most easily understood as completed in three lifetimes. The link of ignorance, karmic formation and the establishment of consciousness are associated with the preceding life. From the fourth link, name and form, which signify the five skandhas, the link of the sense organs, the link of contact, feeling, craving, grasping and existence are traversed in the present life. The last two links, birth, and old age and death are completed in future life. It is also possible to present the twelve links as completed in one or two lifetimes.

4.1.1 Ignorance

Ignorance should not only be understood as a lack of knowledge. Not recognizing some individual or object is not regarded as ignorance in this context. Ignorance is the opposite of primordial awareness. With primordial awareness we can see the genuine reality, but ignorance prevents us from doing this.

Primordial wisdom is twofold; the wisdom that realizes the selflessness of the person, and the wisdom that realizes the selflessness of the phenomena. Correspondingly, there exists a twofold ignorance. Which ignorance should we identify with the first of the interdependent links? This is the ignorance that is incapable of realizing the selflessness of the person. In order to abandon samsaric existence, it is enough to understand the selflessness of the person.

For example, we can mistake a rope for a snake, but when we can realize that the rope is not a snake, this very realization releases the misconception of the snake. It is not absolutely necessary to destroy the rope in order to destroy the misconception of the rope as a snake. In the same way, it is

not necessary to realize the inherent non-existence of the five physical aggregates. It is enough to understand the emptiness of the self.

For example, the *arhats*, belonging to the *shravakayana*, did not realize the emptiness of the phenomena. They understood the selflessness of the person without realizing the selflessness of the phenomena. This enabled them to transcend the conditioned existence of samsara. Therefore, the root of the cyclic existence of samsara can be traced back to the fundamental ignorance of the emptiness of the self of the person. It is therefore essential to recognize that the root of all the mistakenness, of all the emotional complications, is the fundamental ignorance that grasps onto the existence of the self of the person. Someone who would like to attain liberation from the cyclic existence of samsara and attain the state of complete liberation, Buddhahood, should view this fundamental ignorance along with its entourage of emotional complications as something that is not worth pursuing.

4.1.2 Karmic Formations

The Buddha said in the sutras that “because of this, that has occurred.” What he meant was that because of ignorance, karmic formations have occurred. Karmic formation should be understood as action. Karmic formations include virtuous karma, non-virtuous karma, and neutral karma. What do we mean by neutral karma? It is karma that cannot be changed. Actions as neutral karma act as a cause for rebirth in the higher realms, which are the Formless and Form God Realms. Other causes and conditions cannot destroy the karma of such actions, and therefore the individual has to experience these realms.

The second link, karmic formations, comes about because of the first link, ignorance. Ignorance gives rise to attachment, aversion, and neutrality, and these emotional complications give rise to the karmic formations of the second link. Initially, because of ignorance, we grasp onto the reality of the self of the person. Grasping onto the existence of the self of the person establishes the self of others. We develop attachment to our self, our families, and our friends, anyone we see as belonging to "our side." Those who do not belong to "our side" we categorize as "the others." In the worst case, the category of “the others” becomes enemies. On these bases, aversion and dislike arise. It is because of the splitting of the reality into the duality of the I and others that desirous attachment, aversion, and other emotional complications take root. In this way, we end up accumulating correspondingly virtuous, non-virtuous, and neutral karma. Within the category of others, there will also be individuals we look upon as neutral. For these sentient beings, we might develop a sense of indifference, not being concerned about them.

This is how the karmic formations evolve from the fundamental ignorance of the first link. We might think that it is necessary to have another link inserted between the first and the second link, a link of disturbing emotions. In some sense this is true, but the reason the Buddha did not do this was that if we just overcome ignorance, we will also be able to overcome the emotional complications that are caused by the ignorance.

4.1.3 Consciousness

During the evolution of the second link, the individual accumulates non-virtuous, virtuous and neutral karma. Positive karma causes the mind of the individual to experience the three higher realms. These realms are also included within the conditioned existence of samsara. Negative karma causes the mind of the individual to experience the three lower realms.

There is a projecting consciousness, and there is a projected consciousness. Ignorance causes karma, and the karmic energy that is stored in the consciousness is termed projecting consciousness. If this energy is not exhausted, it will stay dormant in the mindstream of the individual. Then, when the right causes and conditions come together, perhaps lifetimes later, the individual will have to experience the corresponding result. This is the projected consciousness. The projecting consciousness acts as the cause that gives rise to the projected consciousness as a result. Because of

this, there is a continuum of consciousness from one lifetime to the next. Karma acts as fuel for propelling the consciousness from one lifetime to the next.

4.1.4 Name and Form

At the moment of conception, the stream of the consciousness of the individual from the past life enters the mother's womb, together with the substances from the father and mother, and consciousness evolves into the fourth link, name and form. This starts the new life. Then, gradually the different stages of name and form develop.

"Name and form" is a technical term. "Form" refers to the first aggregate. "Name" refers to the rest of the aggregates; feeling, perception, formation, and consciousness. "Name" signifies the psychological and unobstructed character of these aggregates. "Form" bears the physical entity. Remember, here we are talking about form as a newly conceived child in the womb of the mother. This form is not distinct and one cannot detect any human features.

4.1.5 The Six Sense Organs

Next is the fifth link of the six sense organs that start to develop as the fetus is growing. The evolution of the six sense organs evolves simultaneously with the six sense faculties.

4.1.6 Contact

Next is the sixth link of contact. Contact means meeting or touching. What kind of meeting takes place during the sixth link? It is the meeting of the six sense organs as a causal factor, the six sense objects, and the six sense consciousnesses.

4.1.7 Feeling

The seventh link of feeling evolves from contact. A feeling is defined as an individual experience. Depending on whether there has been contact with a pleasant or unpleasant object, the corresponding feeling will be pleasant or unpleasant. Neutral feelings are also produced in the same way.

4.1.8 Craving

The eighth link of craving evolves from feeling. We develop craving for pleasant feelings, which again creates aversion toward unpleasant feelings. Aversion toward unpleasant is seen as craving for not experiencing unpleasant feelings. Beings of the form and formless god realms develop craving toward neutral feelings.

4.1.9 Grasping

The ninth link of grasping comes from having developed craving for pleasant and neutral feelings and aversion toward unpleasant feelings. The individual will grasp at certain activities in order to experience pleasant feelings and avoid unpleasant feelings. This also applies to neutral feelings. There are four kinds of grasping: grasping at desirable objects, grasping at wrong views, grasping at forms of discipline or rituals, as well as grasping at a belief in the self. Grasping can develop toward all kinds of sensory objects, including form, sound, smell, and touch. The second form of grasping is grasping at wrong views. Any fanatic or unbalanced view that has fallen into the extremes of eternalism or nihilism is a wrong view. Grasping at rituals and disciplines is to claim that one's own form of rituals and disciplines is superior to other traditions. Grasping at a belief in the self means that the individual believes that there exists something called a self and cultivates craving for this self.

4.1.10 Existence

The tenth link of existence comes about because of grasping and craving. The Tibetan word for existence signifies possibility. At this point rebirth is possible. The tenth link should be understood as the accumulation of strong karma that acts as the primary cause for future rebirth.

4.1.11 Birth, Old Age, and Death

Existence makes rebirth possible. Birth is the eleventh link. Birth causes old age and death, the twelfth link. The reason that the twelfth link contains both old age and death is that one can die without growing old, death can occur at any time.

4.2 Further Analysis of the Chain of Dependent Origination

Analyzing the twelve links further we discover that certain links belong to the category of emotional afflictions and certain links are associated with karmic formations that are generated on the basis of emotional complications. We shall look at how certain links are associated with the noble truth of suffering.

4.2.1 The Influencing Powers

The first, eighth and ninth links, ignorance, craving, and grasping, are associated with afflicted emotions. The second and tenth links, karmic formations and existence, are associated with the karma produced from afflicted emotions. All together, these links belong to the category of the second noble truth of the source of suffering.

The remaining seven links are associated with the first noble truth of suffering. These are the third to the seventh links, as well as the eleventh and twelfth link; consciousness, name and form, the six perceptions, contact, feeling, birth and old age and death.

These three groups of the links, the links associated with the afflicted emotions, the links associated with karma, and the links associated with suffering are referred to as the three influencing powers. We do not have freedom from influence by these powers. They are called the influencing power of emotional complications, the influencing power of karmic actions, and the influencing power of suffering. Gripped by the influence of emotional complication, suffering and karma, we become victims of these powers.

4.2.2 The Characteristics of the Law of Dependent Origination

All external and internal phenomenal evolution is based on the law of dependent origination. The evolution of external and internal phenomenal existence proceeds from one moment to the next with five unique characteristics. The first characteristic of the law of dependent origination is the absence of eternalism. The second characteristic is that it does not fall into nihilism because the very cessation of the preceding moment facilitates the arising of the subsequent moment. The third characteristic is non-transferability; the transition from the preceding moment to the next is not by way of transference. There is no solid entity that is transferred as a cause into the new territory of the result. The fourth characteristic is that by relying on a small cause one can obtain a tremendously great result. This should primarily be understood with regard to the evolution of external phenomena. The fifth characteristic is termed resemblance of the cause and result. This means that you will reap results according to the causes you have accumulated.

4.2.3 Attaining Enlightenment by Reverse Contemplation on the Twelve Links

The forward order of the twelve links describes the evolution of the unenlightened state of samsara, as explained by the noble truth of suffering and the noble truth of the source of the suffering. Contemplation on the twelve links in reverse order facilitates the evolution of the enlightened state. Meditation on the reverse order is termed the twelve links of genuine truth. In brief, the twelve links of genuine truth can be summed up by the third and fourth noble truth; the

noble truth of cessation, nirvana, and the noble truth of the path that leads to the cessation of suffering.

The second set of the Four Noble Truths reveals how to develop an enlightened state. The fourth noble truth shows the path that leads to the cessation of suffering by ceasing the links associated with emotional complications and development of karma we discussed above. This is the nature of the noble truth of the path.

To simplify, there are certain links that are associated with emotional complications. By relying on the noble truth of the path, we can exhaust the five links associated with karmic and emotional complications. This gives rise to the noble truth of cessation. What has ceased upon attaining the noble truth of cessation? The rest of the seven links of dependent origination stop at this point.

4.2.4 The Benefits of Meditation on the Twelve Links

This has been a brief presentation of the twelve links of dependent origination. If we were to expound on it, the subject matter would become very complicated. Because of this, the Buddha suggested to meditate on the twelve links of interdependent origination as an antidote for ignorance.

If we study, contemplate and meditate on the nature of the evolution of samsara, we will be able to discover many things that we have not seen before. If we become knowledgeable in the field of the twelve links of dependent origination, it will counteract the naïve assumption of a self as the sole creator of everything.

4.3 Questions and Answers

Question: How is it possible to grasp neutral feelings?

It is also possible to grasp at neutral objects. One example of such an object is the meditation that acts as a cause for rebirth in the higher god realms. The nature of such meditation is neutral. It is possible to develop grasping toward such meditation.

Question: Is the projective consciousness the same as fundamental consciousness, the alaya?

There is no contradiction in calling it fundamental consciousness. But to be precise, the presentation of the twelve interdependent links does not talk about fundamental consciousness. Consciousness should be understood as the fertile ground in which the seed of the karmic energies is imprinted. The second link is the link of karmic formations. The consciousness transports the energy of the karma. This presentation of the twelve links of interdependence is based on the highest Madhyamika view. Lower views, such as the Cittamatra School, talk primarily about fundamental consciousness.

Question: Where is the invisible world?

The tenth link, the link of existence or possibility that is acquired by the accumulation of powerful karma, is the cause of reincarnation, the eleventh link. The mind of the individual goes through the phases of the Bardo in the time between the tenth and the eleventh link.

Question: Are all links present at the same time?

The twelve links represent the relationship between cause and effect. When you plant a seed, and it sprouts into a plant, the plant will give rise to leaves, fruits, and flowers. It evolves through several stages. Similarly, ignorance, karmic formations and consciousness act as causes that give rise to later stages. These later stages again act as causes for still later stages of development. Moreover, these will again serve as causes for other results. It is essential to understand that even if we said that ignorance is the root of samsara, it is not associated only with the beginning of samsara.

Question: My understanding may be wrong, but I think we always are in this lifetime. The twelve links are always there. However, if one talks about the three lifetimes, we are always present in steps

four to ten. It is more like a didactic method, a method for understanding. It is not like we don't experience birth, old age and death only in future lifetimes. Of course, we experience this in this lifetime as well.

Yes, this is precisely what I mean. This is a good way of understanding it — the twelve links of interdependence act as cause and result. Their relationship is cause and effect. One cannot see both cause and effect in one single instant. The cause is associated with one instant, followed by the result in the next instant. For example, by depending on ignorance and the karmic formations of the individual's past life, present existence evolves, because of ignorance of the present life, future life evolves.

Question: Do karmic actions take two lifetimes to ripen?

Primarily the link of ignorance, the link of karmic formations, and the link of consciousness are completed in the preceding life. Links four to ten, from name and form up to existence, are said to be completed in this lifetime. The links of birth, old age, and death are completed in the next life. Now, there are two aspects of consciousness: projecting and projected consciousness. Projecting consciousness occurs in the past life, the projected consciousness occurs in the present life. This is how the twelve links are completed in the cycle of three lifetimes.

If you perform certain actions, for example the act of killing, the actual act requires a certain amount of time. This is the duration of the killing. The twelve interdependent links can also be understood to be completed within the duration of the killing, but this is not a valid presentation of the twelve links, and in this case each link is defined differently. For example, let's say an individual is involved in killing an animal. The link of ignorance, in this case, is defined as ignorance of what is to be cultivated and what is to be abandoned, what is positive and what is negative.

Question: Where can we stop the cycle of birth and rebirth? Where is the weakest link to cut the chain?

It depends on whether you want to stop the wheel of interdependent origination or if you want to turn the wheel of interdependent origination. If you want to stop, you have to stop the link of ignorance, the first link. However, this generates much fear in the mind of the individual because by stopping the link of ignorance the "I" will be lost. The sense of self will be lost. This generates fear.

Question: Are the samsaric formations referred to in twelve links the same as the formations referred to in the skandhas?

Even though the same term is used in the context of the five skandhas as in the presentation of the twelve links, their meaning is totally different. In the context of the five skandhas, karmic formations refer to all kinds of mental events and factors that form or accumulate karma. In the context of the twelve links, karmic formations are the actual karma.

Question: You said that the self is not the cause of action. Does this mean that we are not responsible for our actions?

When we manage to counteract the assumption that it is the self that causes the action, we will not become irresponsible. The reason for this is that when we are able to see other individuals that are victims of grasping onto the self, our view of emptiness will be embraced by loving-kindness and compassion. Not only will we feel responsible for ourselves, but we will also want to take on the responsibility for other living beings because we can see their suffering.

This teaching is given to reveal the non-existence of the cause. During the time of the Buddha, non-Buddhist philosophical systems posited what was known as a Supreme Self, an Almighty Power, and to refute this philosophical viewpoint the Buddha came up with the teaching of selflessness, of the emptiness of self. There are two kinds of belief in a self. The first is the spontaneous belief in a self and the second is the imputed belief in a self. Every being possess the spontaneous belief in a self, but ancient Indian non-Buddhist philosophical systems posed an imputed belief in the existence

of a supreme self. They believed in a cosmic self, pervading the cosmos, and that our self is a part of that cosmic self. This is a fabrication of philosophical ideas.

Question: *Who is the creator of karma if there is no self?*

If you realize the emptiness of self, then there is neither a creator of karma nor some self that experiences the karma. However, if you fail to recognize the emptiness of self, then that self will be both the creator and experiencer of karma. For example, I exist conventionally. If "I" ask somebody to bring a certain cup, the person might know of this cup and bring it. However, the label "cup" is not the cup; it is simply a label for the actual cup. There is a difference between the label and the cup itself. For when we analyze the label, we cannot find the existence of the cup.

As long as we are clinging onto the notion of a self, we will create karma and have to experience the consequences of this. However, as soon we directly realize the emptiness of the self, there will neither be a performer nor an experiencer of the consequences of the karma.

Question: *So, if you realize the emptiness of self, then you will not create non-virtuous actions, because you know that there is no self. However, if you do virtuous things, you also create karma. Shouldn't we create positive karma?*

Is it absolutely necessary to believe in the self in order to create positive karma? We have to make a distinction between fundamental consciousness and fundamental awareness. Fundamental consciousness is associated with the unenlightened state of mind. With realization, fundamental consciousness is transformed into fundamental awareness. When an enlightened person performs positive actions, these do not come from the fundamental consciousness, but instead from the fundamental awareness. So, the virtuous karma is not produced by the self.

Respondent: *And because there is no self that performs these actions, there is no karma. Is that the logic?*

Yes, that is the logic. Super logic!

Question: *But should we not be attached to the ones we love?*

You need to distinguish between attachment and love or affection. Sometimes we mix these and think that attachment is something good, something needed, but attachment is not needed to benefit yourself or others. Genuine love is needed. Attachment is something bad.

Question: *Many people do things they think are good because they can't see the consequences of their own actions. However, if you look at the consequences, their actions are not good. Their intention has not been negative, but because of ignorance, negative consequences follow. Can you comment?*

This is why the Buddha said that one should not fall into the extreme of altruism. One should unify love and compassion with wisdom. Your example indicates that the person has good motivation, but does not have the wisdom to see what benefits himself and others.

5 The Correct and the Incorrect

The fifth topic in the Gateway to Knowledge is "the correct and the incorrect." What do we mean by the correct and the incorrect? First, we will talk about the term correct. In Tibetan, this term signifies possibility or opportunity. The Tibetan term for incorrect signifies impossibility. If we perform virtuous karma, this leads to happiness. This is the correct. If we accumulate unwholesome, negative karma, this makes it impossible for us to experience happiness. This is incorrect.

All fields of worldly knowledge are actually about knowing what is correct and what is incorrect so that we can engage in the correct and stop doing the incorrect. In Tibet there exist many different fields of knowledge, but in this context, we talk primarily of inner science. By "inner science" we mean the teaching of the Buddha.

If we possess a correct view, then we are able to attain liberation. On the contrary, if we maintain an incorrect view that does not correspond with reality, it will be impossible to attain enlightenment. There are basically two incorrect views, the false view of nihilism and the wrong view of eternalism. If we cling to the wrong view of eternalism, it is not possible to attain liberation.

What do we mean by a correct view? A correct view is the balanced view of the Middle Way that falls into neither the extremity of nihilism nor eternalism. This view enables the individual to attain liberation and enlightenment.

Some ancient Indian, non-Buddhist philosophical traditions possessed a mistaken view of nihilism and eternalism. For example, the Tirtikas had an eternalistic view. They believed that an agent, a permanent cosmic Supreme Self was the creator of the universe. They thought that this eternal cosmic self was the creator of both the world and the human beings within it. They believed that if you pleased this cosmic eternal self by offering and worship, you would be drawn to the realm of this cosmic self. This view is refuted by Buddhism.

Jaintempa^{iv} was another ancient non-Buddhist view that was nihilistic. This non-Buddhist school fell into the view of nihilism because they claimed the non-existence of past and future lives. They also claimed that the sun rose in the east in a natural way devoid of causes and condition. They claimed that the downward movement of the water of the river occurred naturally without causes and conditions. They claimed that roundness is not created by anybody or any causes and conditions, but is so naturally or randomly. They made the same claims regarding the sharpness of the thorn and the beautiful feathers of the peacock. In this way, they came up with many examples to validate their viewpoint.

It is crucial to reflect, contemplate and enquire into the eternalistic and nihilistic views. By penetrating these, we will not develop any sense of trust in these extreme views.

5.1 Traditional Buddhist Schools of Ancient India

In ancient India there were four philosophical schools of Buddhism. It is essential for us to grasp the philosophical viewpoints of these four different Indian Buddhist traditions. These schools are called Vaibhasika, Svatantrika, Cittamatra and the Madhyamaka. All these systems tried to establish the genuine reality in terms of the two truths, the relative and the ultimate truth.

The Vaibhasika claimed that all gross phenomenal existences within the perceived world as well as what exists within the perceiving mind is the relative truth. This relative truth was defined in terms of the smallest particle that cannot be divided and regarded as the ultimate truth of the perceived world. Similarly, concerning the perceiving mind, the Vaibhasikas dissected the consciousness until they found what is known as the partless instant of consciousness. The discovery of the twofold particles of the perceived world and the perceiving mind was the ultimate truth of the Vaibhasikas.

The followers of this school of thought were able to establish the emptiness of the gross elements of the perceived world and the perceiving mind. But they were not able to establish the emptiness of the partless particle and the partless instant because they regarded these as the ultimate truth.

They did not believe in the usage of the term self-awareness; that consciousness is capable of being aware of itself. They believed that there are no hindering factors between the individual consciousness and the phenomenal objects perceived by the consciousness; that the consciousness grasps the object without any hindrances.

The Vaibhasikas did not believe in the collection of the eight consciousnesses, but classified consciousness as having six parts. This school also claimed that non-composite phenomena, phenomena that are neither physical nor mental, were substantial. As a remark, there are many phenomena that are neither physical nor mental, for example, the power of the life force.

They believed that their own view had its own unique characteristic, with a unique position, and so held onto claims and viewpoints.

The Svatantrikas claimed that all things that can perform a function belonged to the ultimate truth, and that all things that cannot perform a function belonged to the relative truth.

The third school was the Mind Only school, or Cittamatra. They claimed that consciousness was the ultimate truth and that the phenomenal external experiences that are reflected or projected by the mind are the relative truth.

The Middle Way School established the true reality through the two truths of the relative and the absolute truth. The ultimate truth is emptiness, the relative truth are all appearances.

The Vaibhasika and Svatantrika managed to establish the emptiness of the gross phenomena, but they did not confirm the emptiness of the partless particle. Therefore, there was still an object to grasp on to.

The Mind Only school of Cittamatra managed to establish the emptiness of the external, perceived phenomena but did not realize the emptiness of the perceiving mind, because they believed that the mind was the ultimate truth.

The Middle Way School managed to establish the emptiness of the perceived phenomenal world as well as the emptiness of the perceiving mind. Therefore, there remained no internal or external object that they could cling to.

All the non-Buddhist schools of ancient India can be categorized as believing in the eternalistic or the nihilistic view. All Buddhist schools of philosophy can be categorized into these four major classifications.

In this manner Lama Mipham explains about the schools of ancient Indian Buddhist thought and philosophical systems in *The Gateway to Knowledge*. What is important, however, is to know what is correct and what is incorrect. In other words, what we should do and what we should not do.

5.2 Questions and Answers

Question: Is the view of the Tirtikas the same as Christianity?

I was not referring to the view of Christianity; I was simply referring to the view of an ancient Indian non-Buddhist philosophy. During the time of the Buddha, there were many philosophical confrontations in terms of debate and argument between Buddhist and non-Buddhist philosophers in order to establish the genuine reality. In the fifth topic of *The Gate of Knowledge*, Lama Mipham talks about the correct and the incorrect, and explains the non-Buddhist view and various philosophical views found within Buddhism.

Question: *The text talks about the seven dependencies, and the fifth is dependency of control, which says that it is not possible to take possession of the precious view and the seven precious possessions in the physical body of a woman. What does this mean?*

I did not talk about this subject although it belongs to the subject of the correct and the incorrect. The text says that one is not able to attain the spiritual realization of arhathood with a female body. This statement is from the perspective of the Hinayana. This is different from the perspective of Mahayana and Vajrayana, which claim that arhathood is not the ultimate realization. Also, the text says that one is not able to attain the state of a universal monarch with a female body. Again, this statement is from a Hinayana perspective that emphasizes the body, instead of the mind as in the case of Mahayana and Vajrayana. I did not talk about this because I thought it would confuse you. You will also discover in some texts belonging to Hinayana how to avert the development of desirous attachment to the opposite sex, usually, a woman, because the Buddha disciples were primarily men. The teachings suggest viewing the woman's body as something conditioned, as something impure to prevent the practitioner developing an obsessive desirous

attachment. But the Buddha also said that if the practitioner was a woman, she would have to do the opposite, viewing the men's physical existence as something impure in order to suppress her desirous attachment.

Question: *Is desirous attachment something we should suppress?*

Meditation on the impurity or the shortcomings of the opposite partner enables the individual meditator to temporarily subdue the disturbing emotions of desirous attachment. We use the word suppress because the pacification is just temporary, it can recur at any moment. To be able to cut the very root of the desirous attachment from developing onto an object, we need to realize the emptiness of the self.

The followers of the tradition of the Hinayana tried to suppress the emotional complexes, but according to the Mahayana tradition, one does not suppress these emotions, one simply lets them go where they want to go. One acts indifferently toward the emotional complications. This is a different approach. Can one of you list all the five skandhas for me?

Respondent: *Form, feeling, perception, formation, and consciousness.*

Where is the self?

Respondent: *Nowhere*

Then where is it?

Respondent: *It is a mental formation.*

Then who constructed the mental formations? Are the rest of the five skandhas also constructed by the mind in the same way as the concept of the self? Who made the mind?

If the "I" is the creator of the mind, then that supreme self must be eternal. The energy of the mind is released by the accumulation of karma that is based on emotional complications. Karma acts as fuel for the mind. If you reflect upon and contemplate how samsara evolves on the basis of karma and emotional complications, you will be able to attain a deep certainty about the evolution of samsara. You will then want to renounce samsara, and instead develop an aspiration toward attaining the opposite, the state of nirvana, enlightenment.

Question: *Earlier you referred to nirvana and enlightenment. But are nirvana and enlightenment the same thing?*

Actually, the term nirvana is a very general term. It is used to describe enlightenment according to the different *yanas*. When we refer to enlightenment, or Buddhahood, this is a specific term that refers to the full enlightenment that neither abides in the peace of nirvana nor in the pain of samsara. This is the definition. So, there is a difference.

6 The Faculties, Indriyas

So far, we have gone through five topics: the five physical aggregates, the eighteen elements, the twelve sense sources, the twelve links of dependent origination, and the correct and the incorrect. We will now discuss the sixth topic of the 22 faculties (Sanskrit: *indriyas*). The term *indriya*, which in English means faculty or power, should be understood as having power or influence over something. For example, an individual has power over his or her belongings.

Generally, we grasp onto the self. We think that there is some kind of self that possesses the physical and mental aggregates. If we become well versed in the classification of the 22 faculties, we will be able to counteract this naïve belief in a self that possesses control.

The first is the eye faculty that has the power to grasp visual objects. The second is the ear faculty that has the power to grasp sounds. The third is the nose faculty that has the power to grasp smell. The fourth is the tongue faculty that has power to grasp taste. The fifth is the body faculty that has power to grasp texture. The five sense faculties have the power to grasp their five corresponding objects of the present, but they are unable to grasp sense objects of the past or future.

The eye faculty and the ear faculty are capable of sensing their respective sense objects without touching them, and it does not matter whether the sense objects transcend the size of these sense faculties. Even if the sense object is very small or very large, these sense faculties are able to sense them. The other three sense faculties have to meet their corresponding sense object directly, and the sense objects have to match the size of the sense organ. If they are too big or too small, the sense faculties are not able to sense them. The sense faculties are not capable of grasping onto the sense objects by themselves; this is done by the following faculty, the faculty of the mind.

The faculty of the mind has the nature of consciousness. The mind consists of the conceptual mind faculty and the non-conceptual mind faculty. It acts as a basis for its corresponding sense objects, the phenomena. The relationship between these two is that which support and that which is supported. The mind faculty is formless and immaterial, and therefore capable of producing a limitless range of phenomena in terms of size, color, and shape.

The seventh faculty is the life force faculty. The life force faculty performs two primary functions; it enables the individual to remain within the society and share human characteristics with others, and it allows us to sustain our life as long as we live.

The eighth and ninth faculties are the male and female faculties. The male and female faculties create the distinction between man and woman. The male and the female gender faculty have the power of creating conception, and the potential to experience a sexual orgasm.

Death can occur in three ways: because the life force has run out, because the stock of merit has been completely exhausted, or because the karmic actions have been completely exhausted. Death that occurs because the life force or the stock of merit has run out can be postponed. But death that happens because of karma cannot be prevented. To lengthen our lives, we can do long life practice, based on long life deities. Receiving empowerment on long life deities can lengthen the life force that is about to cease. To postpone death that occurs because of running out of merit we can practice giving to those in need and make offerings to highly evolved spiritual beings. This type of practice also includes other elements such as abstaining from harming other sentient beings. This enables us to accumulate merit, which again lengthens our lifespan. There is also the practice of the giving of fearlessness. But the cause of death that occurs because of karma is impossible to stop; it is like a forceful river of water. At this moment, even if the Buddha of long life appeared in front of you, he would be helpless to increase your lifespan.

The tenth faculty is suffering, the eleventh faculty is pleasure, the twelfth faculty is mental pleasure, the thirteenth faculty is mental pain, and the fourteenth faculty is neutral sensation. These faculties are associated with feeling. The faculty of suffering and the faculty of pleasure are strictly associated with feelings of the body. These five faculties belong to the category of mental events. They have the power to make the individual experience the consequences of karmic maturation.

Next are five faculties associated with enlightenment. They are faith, effort, recollection, concentration, and wisdom. These faculties empower the individual to acquire all necessary qualities needed on the path to enlightenment.

The 20th faculty is the will to know the unknown. This faculty comes about when the individual attains the path of seeing. This brings insight into the unknown. The mind of a practitioner who has reached the path of seeing is also endowed with the presence of other positive faculties of playful mind, pleasure, joyful mind, indifference, and mindfulness. Thus altogether nine faculties are present within the mind of the individual who has arrived at the path of seeing. These nine faculties empower the individual to see things that he or she has not seen before, gaining insight into the unknown reality.

The 21st faculty is termed "that which is unknown." The difference between this faculty and the former lies between the path of seeing and the path of meditation. At the path of seeing, the individual develops insight into the unknown reality. This insight is further stabilized when one moves to the path of meditation. Earlier glimpses into genuine reality are now further familiarized through meditation and this leads to the final faculty of omniscience. The presence of the nine faculties on the path of no more training empowers the individual to attain omniscience.

Seven of the faculties are physical. These are the five sense faculties and the male and female faculty. The others are non-physical. One faculty, the mind faculty, is immaterial and has the nature of consciousness. Ten faculties are mental factors; these are the five faculties of purification, faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom, and the five faculties of misery, pleasure, joyful mind, unhappy mind, and indifferent mind. The faculty of life force is categorized as a formation that is neither because it belongs neither to matter nor mind.

There also exist other classifications; which faculties are defiled and which are undefiled, which are virtuous and which are non-virtuous, and which has a neutral nature.

6.1 Questions and Answers

Question: *Is it possible to reach the state of omniscience without being enlightened?*

No. One becomes enlightened when one reaches the path of no more learning. Actually, attaining omniscience is the same as being enlightened.

Question: *The faculties numbered 10 to 14 were mental events without being mind. Can you explain?*

You have to make a distinction between mental events and mind. The difference between mind and mental events is the difference between the ruler and his attendants. The mind is the ruler, the mental events are the attendants.

Question: *How is the ruler in control?*

The primary mind represents the king in our example. The mental events represent the ministers and entourage. If something goes wrong with the king, this will also affect the subjects. If the principle mind is positive it is possible to transform the rest of the mental events, but if the primary mind has become negative, then all the mental events will also be negative. This is why the primary mind is illustrated as the king. The primary mind is the six sense consciousnesses. The mental events are the 51 mental events.

7 Time

The seventh topic is the analysis of time. When we analyze time, we not only discover past, present, and future but also that time is not intrinsically existent. It cannot exist by itself but is created from external references.

What do we mean by the past? When phenomenal experience has ceased to exist, we term this the past. When phenomenal experience is enduring, we term this the present. When phenomena have not yet unfolded, we term this the future. In this way, we can understand the past, present, and future. We can also show this with by another illustration. When cause and effect have subsided, this is referred to as the past. When the cause has enacted, but the effect has not yet arisen, this is termed the present. The future is defined as the cause being present without being enacted, and the result not yet arisen.

The first Buddhist philosophical school, the Vaibhasika, claimed that the past, present, and future existed substantially. Other schools, the Svatantrika, the Mind-Only School, and the Middle Way School, stated that time is merely a conceptual construction.

The shortest period of time is referred to as the indivisible time unit. In this minute moment there is no distinction between the past, present and future. One hundred and twenty such indivisible instants are called one moment. One moment is defined as two pulse beats of a healthy person. Sixty moments are one minute. Thirty minutes are one period and thirty periods is 24 hours. This particular view belongs to the general sutra presentation of the Buddha and is agreed upon by all Buddhist schools. We can also define time from the movement of the sun, the seasons and the moon.

Enlightened beings realize the equality between the ultimately smallest instant of time and very long time spans. Because of this, they are capable of developing altruistic motivation in the beginning, undergo training in the middle, and experience enlightenment at the end. They are able to demonstrate enlightened activity within one such smallest instant because the shortest and the longest moment of time have become equal.

Because the ultimately smallest unit of time cannot be divided, it is called partless. Similarly, with regard to the mind, we have the indivisible partless consciousness. Time can then be defined with reference to these. Since these are indivisible, it follows that time is empty.

Analysis of subtle forms requires a delicate time system, but grosser forms of external phenomenal require larger units of time. Buddhism explains that the phases of the formation, endurance, destruction, and the following emptiness of the universe take 80 eons to complete. Eighty eons make one great eon. This is the largest time unit in Buddhism. Right now we are in the enduring phase of the universe. It has not yet entered the phase of destruction. But other universes may go through different phases than ours, perhaps being in the phase of emptiness or creation.

7.1 Questions and Answers

Question: *Do you know that the internal clock of a computer operates thousands of times quicker than the ultimately smallest instant?*

I do not have much knowledge of the time aspect with regard to computers, and I do not know the speed of the computer. Since I do not know the speed of the computer, I cannot compare this to the smallest unit of time that the Buddha talked about.

Respondent: *But I know the speed of the computer.*

That is very good. We can talk about it. When I snap my fingers, there pass 60 smallest units of time. How is this compared to the speed of the computer?

Respondent: *Maybe one thousand.*

Then the computer seems to be faster. But you can trace back as much as you can, but you will always reach a point where there is no past, present, and future.

Person: *I think quantum physics describes the same kind of experience – when the past, present, and future breaks up.*

Are you referring to the atom?

Respondent: *There are smaller particles than that, and when they split, it is not possible to say what happens in what order so to speak.*

This is actually what the Buddha said 2500 years ago. At the ultimately smallest unit of time, the cause and effect relationship fall apart because you cannot separate the past, present, and future. When scientists observe such phenomena, time seems to be lost. In other words, when the notion of the past, present, and future is lost, this is what is referred to by the Buddha as the smallest indivisible unit of time. Because the boundaries of time disappear, this leads to the discovery of emptiness.

Question: *There were two different ways to explain the past and the future. Can you elaborate?*

Time is non-substantial, but in order to posit the existence of time, we have to create substantial examples, for example like the seed and the sprout. When the seed and the sprout both have ceased, this cessation is regarded as a past moment. When the cause, seed, has given rise to the result, sprout, this is regarded as the present moment. When the cause is present but the necessary conditions to obtain the result are lacking, this is termed the future. When we analyze time we usually talk about cause and effect, but time can also be analyzed from other perspectives. If we are going to examine time from a broader perspective, then cessation is regarded as the past moment, the birth is regarded as the present moment, and the unborn is viewed as the future moment.

8 The Four Noble Truths

We shall now discuss the eighth topic in The Gateway to Knowledge that concerns the Four Noble Truths. By becoming knowledgeable in the analysis of the presentation of the Four Noble Truths, we will be able to overcome our naïve assumption that the self is something defiled that is being purified on the spiritual path.

The Buddha gave three important sermons; we say that he turned the wheels of Dharma three times. The teaching of the Four Noble Truths belongs to the first teaching the Buddha gave to the five noble disciples. The first noble truth is suffering. The second noble truth is the source of suffering. The third noble truth is the cessation of suffering. The fourth noble truth is the path that leads to the cessation.

It is essential for us to recognize suffering to abandon the source of suffering, the second noble truth. To do this, we need to actualize the third noble truth, the noble truth of cessation. Cessation is done by relying on the fourth noble truth as the path.

As an analogy, to overcome physical illness, it is essential to recognize the nature of the disease and find its cause. Having seen the cause of the disease, we should proceed to remove it. We should strive toward the goal of attaining physical and mental well being, free from illnesses. After having set the goal, one should rely on the actual medicine that will cure the disease. The fourth noble truth is the medicine. The first noble truth is the nature of the disease. The second noble truth is the cause of the disease. The third noble truth is the goal of well being.

8.1 The Noble Truth of Suffering

The noble truth of suffering concerns the world as a container, containing sentient beings. The world is referred to as an impure world system that acts as a support. By “world” we mean the external environment like mountains, hills, and everything else. The Buddha said that the evolution of the external world system began from complete emptiness. In the beginning, there was nothing apart from emptiness, just space. Space somehow facilitated the attraction of wind energy, creating the *mandala* of wind. From this, the *mandala* of the water element was created. The element of water possesses a lot of potentials, and when the water element was then churned by the wind element, in the same way as butter is churned from milk, this gave rise to solid phenomenal existences. Gradually, the external world system evolved, and the external universe as a container was formed. After this, the evolution of sentient beings took place.

The Buddha also talked about the evolution of the four major and minor continents. In the center is Mount Meru surrounded by seven mountains, again surrounded by seven oceans. Further out, lay the salty sea surrounded by a ring of outermost mountains. The Buddha explained this in different ways; according to the Abhidharma, the sutra tradition of the world formation, and the tantric tradition on the world formation. The various presentations were given according to the audience. He also talked about the pure world and the impure world, depending on whether the mind of the listener was pure or not.

The color of the snow on the mountain is white, but a person who suffers from a particular disease will see it as yellow. The Buddha said that if different beings of the six different realms were to look at the water in a glass, they would perceive this water in different ways. Creatures of the hell realm would perceive the water as something very hot. Creatures of the hungry ghost realm would see the glass of water as disgusting liquids such as puss and blood. Animals may perceive the water as their habitat. Human beings can regard water as something that quenches thirst. The *asuras* of the semi-god realm perceive water as a manifestation of weapons. Beings belonging to the god realm see water as nectar. Beings with the most perfect perspective will perceive the f^v. As another example of the sutra teachings, the Buddha talks about a specific animal that perceives the element of fire as something that cleanses the body. You can find fish that dwell in cold water, and you can find fish that dwell in warm water. One cannot say that the water is absolutely warm or absolutely cold. The objective reality of the water is relative. In this way the root text talks in great length about how the world was formed.

The sentient beings who are the inhabitants of the world system are the beings of the six realms. There are six types of creatures in the six realms: gods, half-gods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts and hell beings. There are also sentient beings that do not belong to the six categories of sentient beings; the sentient beings that experience the *Bardo* (Tibetan: "in between"), the interval between death and future rebirth. The species that dwell in the *Bardo* possess only four aggregates. They do not possess a gross physical aggregate, but instead a subtle form. The sentient beings that are trapped in the *Bardo* possess five sense organs; they can smell, and they are able to go through solid material. Nothing can stop them, apart from the womb of the mother. The *Bardo*-being possesses miraculous powers that come from karma. On average, the time to remain in the *Bardo* is 49 days. The dwelling place and companions of the *Bardo* is changing and uncertain.

The noble truth of suffering encompasses the external world as a container and the inner world of sentient beings belonging to the six realms as well as the *Bardo*-beings. To understand the true nature of suffering, we need to recognize the four characteristics of suffering: impermanence, pain, emptiness and emptiness of self. If we know these four unique characteristics of suffering, we are able to understand the true nature of suffering.

8.2 The Noble Truth of the Source of Suffering

The second noble truth reveals the source of suffering. When we talk about the source of suffering, we understand it to mean ignorance with the accompanying emotional complications and karma.

8.2.1 Karma

Generally, we create karma through the door of the body, the door of the speech and the door of the mind. Karma created through these three doors has different degrees of strength.

We can accumulate karma in four different ways. The first one is "karmic results that are experienced in this very life." The next is "karmic consequences that will be experienced in the next life." The third is "experiencing the consequences of karma in later lives." The fourth is "the uncertainty of experiencing karmic consequences."

There are two forms of karma; "propelling karma" and "completion karma." Take for example birth in the human realm. The cause of birth in the human realm is due to propelling virtuous karma of past life, but the suffering that many individuals experience is because of unwholesome completion karma. Sentient beings can also be born in the lower realms due to the accumulation of propelling karma in their past life. Nevertheless, these beings, such as animals, may also possess what is known as virtuous completion karma. For example, some animals have very good owners and are treated very well. There can also be the case of virtuous propelling karma together with virtuous completion karma, as for example a sentient being born human and experiencing happiness and joy. There is also non-virtuous propelling karma and non-virtuous completion karma, as for example beings in the hungry ghost realm and hell realm.

8.2.2 Virtuous and Non-Virtuous Acts

Within the working of karma, there are the ten virtuous acts and ten non-virtuous acts. I assume this to be a familiar topic^{vi} So, we will not discuss these.

8.2.3 Emotions

Next are the emotions along with the emotional complications. These are the six root emotions and the twenty subsidiary emotional complexities. The noble truth of the origin of suffering constitutes the karmic and emotional patterns. This is something we should try to give up. This means giving up ignorance.

8.3 The Noble Truth of Cessation

The noble truth of cessation is twofold. The first is "one sided nirvanic peace." The second is "the nirvanic state that neither abides in the extreme of peace or pain." The last one is enlightenment.

One-sided nirvanic peace is also twofold; nirvana without remainder and nirvana with remainder. If the practitioner has removed the origin of suffering, but still possesses a physical body, this is called nirvana with remainder. Moggallana, one of the disciples of the Buddha, who was well known for his miraculous power, is a prime example of the attainment of nirvana with remainder; even if the sentient beings of the whole world were to oppose him, they would not be able to defeat him. But eventually he was killed by a non-Buddhist Tirtika. This happened because of the maturation of specific karmic effects from the past.

8.4 The Noble Truth of the Path

The noble truth of the path is something we should practice. The noble truth of the path consists of five spiritual paths. These are the path of accumulation, the path of linking, the path of seeing, the path of meditation, and the path of no more meditation.

The path of accumulation should be understood as accumulation of merit and wisdom. If we have been able to complete this accumulation, we will be able to link to the path of seeing through the second path, the path of linking.

The primary practice on the path of accumulation is the practice of fourfold mindfulness. This is mindfulness of body, mindfulness of feelings, mindfulness of mind, and mindfulness of phenomena. The path of accumulation has a threefold subdivision; the greater path of accumulation, the middling path of accumulation, and the smaller path of accumulation. The fourfold mindfulness is practiced during the smaller path of accumulation. I am not going to elaborate on these classifications; it suffices to know that they exist. During the middling path of accumulation one practices the fourfold perfect abandonment. During the greater path of accumulation one practices the four miraculous feet^{vii}.

8.4.1 The Path of Linking

The path of linking joins the path of accumulation with the path of seeing. The primary practice of the path of linking is *shamatha* and *vipashyana* meditation. These practices are supported by faith, effort, and mindfulness, three of the five faculties associated with purification and enlightenment we discussed earlier.

8.4.2 The Path of Seeing

At the path of seeing, the individual gains insight into the ultimate truth. Someone who has arrived at the path of seeing starts traversing the ten *bodhisattva* levels. The first level is the ground of utter joyfulness which is another name for the path of seeing.

8.4.3 The Path of Meditation

The fourth spiritual path is the path of meditation. The path of meditation should be understood as familiarization. We have to familiarize ourselves repeatedly through meditation; otherwise, our understanding will fade.

8.4.4 The Path of No More Meditation

The last path is the path of no more meditation. The name signifies that the wisdom that realizes the ultimate truth has become non-dualistic. There is no gap between the wisdom that realizes the ultimate truth and the ultimate truth as an object. There is nothing more to learn. This is good news.

The four noble truths should be practiced as follows: the noble truth of suffering should be recognized, the noble truth of the origin of suffering should be abandoned, the noble truth of cessation should be actualized, and the noble truth of the path should be pursued.

8.5 Questions and Answers

Question: *What are the four miraculous spiritual feet?*

“Feet” should be understood as a cause. There are four causes that facilitate the attainment of miraculous power. It is a metaphorical expression. It is not non-smelly feet. (*Laughter.*)

Question: *In the sixth topic, where you talked about death and cessation of life force, you referred to three types of deaths. What was the third one, to do with karmic action? Can you elaborate on this?*

We have accumulated karmic energy over many past lives; this propelled us to be born as human beings. When the force of that karmic energy is used up, we have to leave the human realm. It is like shooting an arrow up into space; when there is no energy left to drive the arrow further up, it will fall down.

Question: *We see things around us and we become aware of them. This takes some time, and when we actually perceive our surroundings they will already be in the past. Therefore, we can never experience the present. How does this relate to this analysis?*

When we talk from the perspective of the relative truth, we should not sneak in the perspective of the ultimate truth. From the perspective of the ultimate truth, time does not exist. In the relative truth, time does exist. We have to establish the law of time either on the relative or the ultimate level. The birth that happens in one instant is termed the present moment. This birth is followed by death in the next instant. This is termed future. This is a mental construction fabricated by the mind. Everything is mental constructions, constructed labels of the mind. Those who know me, know me as Khenpo Sangpo, but those who do not know me, cannot tell that I am Khenpo Sangpo, they will only know me by my general character of a human being. The law of interdependence is inconceivable. If you place a cup of hot water in front of you, you will refer to it as hot water. But if you place a small amount of tea in it, you will not see to it as water, but as tea. This is the power of dependent origination. Also, water is not something that is unchangeable. When the season of the winter comes about due to the law of dependent origination, the water freezes to ice and is solidified due to the water meeting certain causes and conditions. The water in a cup cannot break your head when poured out, but frozen water can. Also, in general, different species perceive phenomena with different perspectives.

Question: *Is it like in the absolute we see things as they really are, but in the relative we see things as we experience it?*

On the ultimate level, we realize the ultimate truth. On the relative level, we interact conventionally with other people of society. When somebody who has recognized the ultimate truth interacts with people, his or her interaction will be tremendously beneficial for others.

9 The Vehicles of Spiritual Paths

The ninth topic deals with the classification of different vehicles (Sanskrit: *yana*). The meaning of the Sanskrit word *yana* should be understood as something able to carry. By relying on the spiritual path, we are able to lift ourselves up from pain and suffering to experience happiness and peace.

While we remain within the conditioned existence of Samsara, the emotional patterns of desirous attachment are said to be comparable with the agitated ocean. On such an ocean a small boat can easily be lost. If our being is overpowered by the disturbed pattern of desirous attachment, our lives will be upturned.

A mind influenced by the presence of the emotional pattern of aggression is comparable to residing in the intense heat of the fire. Such an individual is not able to experience peace and joy because the fire is constantly burning from without and within.

Pride and arrogance are comparable to a mountain top; its sharp peaks cannot retain the soothing rain. Similarly, a mind afflicted with the emotion of arrogance cannot keep worldly and spiritual qualities.

The emotional pattern of ignorance is comparable to dense darkness. If somebody tries to walk in the middle of the night, the individual will most likely deviate from the right path.

If we want to transcend the limitation of emotional complexes, we should study and meditate upon the classification of the different spiritual paths. No effort is needed to create more emotional complexities and stay in samsara, it will happen by itself. But to achieve the qualities of nirvana requires diligence and effort. For example, it does not require any effort to remain seated on the ground. But to be seated in mid-space requires a lot of effort. It is worth investing energy in terms of effort and diligence to achieve the spiritual goal of liberating ourselves from being imprisoned in the cyclic existence of samsara and attaining the final state of nirvana.

9.1 The Yana of Humans and Gods

Generally, five *yanas* are presented. The first *yana* is the *yana* of humans and gods. The first *yana* prevents us from sinking into the three lower realms, and we are propelled to be born as human beings or gods. The practice of the first *yana* constitutes gaining ascertainment in the genuine conventional view by abandoning the ten unskillful non-virtuous actions, and instead practice the ten virtuous actions. The genuine conventional view was taught by one of the early kings of Tibet. He outlined the rules of ten non-skillful actions to be avoided, and how to practice the opposite of these.

The practice of this *yana* also leads to enlightenment. The decisive factor is motivation. If you wish to attain full enlightenment and practice the ten skillful actions with this aspiration, then the virtuous acts will become a cause for attaining full enlightenment. If you pursue the practice of ten virtuous actions and avoid the ten non-virtuous actions in order to be reborn as a human being or being of the god realm, then this is what will happen.

9.2 The Yana of Brahma

The *yana* of Brahma is the first realm of the seventeen form god realms. We have to distinguish between the god realms of the first and the second *yana*; the first *yana* referred to the desirous god realm, the second *yana* refers to the form god realm. By practicing the four immeasurable thoughts the individual is capable of birth in the first realm of the form god realm. The four immeasurable thoughts are immeasurable love, immeasurable compassion, immeasurable rejoicing, and immeasurable equanimity. The first and second *yanas* are referred to as worldly *yanas* because these *yanas* are able to transcend the limitations of the cyclic existence of samsara.

9.3 The Shravaka-yaana

Third is the *yana* of the listener, the *shravaka-yana*. The *shravaka*-student will initially approach a spiritual master, who is either fully or partly enlightened, and listen to discourses on the Four Noble Truths. They then try to internalize the meaning of the truths to attain the one-sided nirvana, liberation for oneself alone.

The initial part of the practice is to undertake one of the individual vows of liberation. The practitioners of *shravaka-yana* claim that whomsoever practices this *yana* will be an *aria*, a noble being. They understand a noble person as someone who has developed a tremendous sense of satisfaction and lessened desire.

The practitioners distance themselves from physical and mental busyness and pursue the spiritual path of listening, contemplation, and meditation. They primarily meditate on the selflessness of the individual. They also pursue other spiritual training based on their understanding that all conditional existence has the characteristic of suffering, impermanence, selflessness, and emptiness. They strive to cut the root of misconceptions of holding onto the reality of the self of the

person. Thus, they are able to establish the emptiness of the self, and this is their goal. The vehicle of the *shravaka-yana* is capable of freeing the individual practitioner, not only from lower realms but from all the six conditioned realms of samsara.

9.4 The Yana of the Pratyekabuddha

The next *yana* is the *yana* of the *pratyekabuddha*, the solitary Buddha. These practitioners do not depend on instruction from a spiritual master. They contemplate and meditate on the twelve links of dependent origination in the forward and reverse order. By such spiritual endeavor, they are able to attain realization as a solitary Buddha. This is called *arhathood*.

The view of the *pratyekabuddha yana* is higher than the view of the *shravakayana*. The view of the *shravakayana* is the selflessness of the person. The *pratyekabuddha* has a full realization of the selflessness of the individual, but only a partial understanding of the emptiness of phenomena. One could say that only 50 percent of the selflessness of the phenomena has been realized as they do not recognize the emptiness of the perceiving mind.

The follower of the *pratyekabuddha yana* develops a profound certainty about their view, the view of emptiness of the self and the emptiness of half of the phenomena. They deepen their realization by repeating their spiritual practice and ultimately attain the state of the solitary Buddha, or *arhathood*.

9.5 The Yana of the Bodhisattva

By relying on the spiritual practice of the *bodhisattva-yana*, the individual practitioner is freed from the extreme pain of samsara as well as from the ultimate peace of nirvana. This is full enlightenment.

The practice of the *bodhisattva-yana* is based on taking the *bodhisattva* vow. The view is the realization of the emptiness of the self of the person as well as the emptiness of the phenomena. They practice the six transcendental virtuous actions, the six *paramitas*, which are generosity, ethics, patience, diligence, meditation, and wisdom. The result is perfect enlightenment.

9.5.1 Generosity

The first *paramita* is the transcendental virtue of generosity. But all forms of giving are not regarded as a transcendental virtue. Transcendental virtue should be understood concerning Buddhahood; all forms of giving and sharing that directly act as a cause for the individual to attain Buddhahood are transcendental giving. These are forms of giving that are embraced by the element of wisdom and cannot be impure or limited.

Impure acts of giving include impure receivers and impure objects that are given. Giving impure goods will seldom benefit either oneself or others. Giving somebody weapons or poison will not contribute toward peace for anyone. An impure receiver could be an individual or an organization. If you give a gift to an organization that directly or indirectly inflicts pain on sentient beings, such an organization is an impure receiver. Within this category of impure receivers, we can also include individuals who are addicted to drugs. They may buy more drugs and become more addicted as a result of being given these drugs. It is the same with alcoholics; if you give them money, they will end up drinking more.

It is therefore essential to employ transcendental wisdom in order to attain a decisive understanding of the practice of transcendental giving. Whom should we give to, and whom should we not give to? Will the giving provide temporary or long-lasting benefit, or not give any benefit at all? After applying the element of wisdom, we should pursue the practice of giving.

The supreme element of wisdom is to embrace the act of giving with non-referential wisdom. The act of giving without references becomes ultimately transcendental. The view of non-reference is referred to as the three spheres; the emptiness of the existence of a separate giver, the emptiness of the receiver, and the emptiness of the act of giving. This ensures that there will not be boundaries

between oneself and others. If the practice of giving is not embraced by non-referential wisdom it can be contaminated by the presence of other emotional complications. This might cause you to regret your act of giving at a later stage or practice the act of giving with jealousy or competitiveness. But when the act of giving is embraced by non-referential wisdom there is no possibility of such pollution.

The paramita of generosity has three divisions: the gift of material objects, the gift of protection and fearlessness, and the gift of Dharma. The gift of material objects is giving things that will be helpful for the receivers and includes all kinds of material things. The gift of protection from fear includes the practice of releasing sentient beings that are going to be killed and protection of endangered wildlife. This also includes protection from fear of losing one's material possessions, or fear of being separated from happiness. The gift of Dharma is regarded as a supreme gift because it is a gift of truth. It is not possible to give the truth of Dharma if one has developed a fanatical attachment to one's spiritual tradition. Also, converting or brainwashing other people is not regarded as the genuine act of giving Dharma. If one is motivated by fame, prestige, or wealth, such sharing of Dharma does not belong to transcendental giving.

9.5.2 Moral Ethics

The next topic is the transcendental *paramita* of moral ethics. The Tibetan term for moral ethics means "in the manner that noble beings act." The *paramita* of moral ethics becomes transcendental if it is blessed by non-referential wisdom. Not all forms of moral ethics are necessarily transcendental in nature.

Genuinely generous conduct should be based on the practice of transcendental wisdom. If it is lacking, we will not be able to distinguish between proper and improper behavior. Some individuals claim that they are doing good, but in reality, their doing is not only not beneficial but just the opposite. This is lack of transcendental wisdom.

There are different forms of the *paramita* of moral ethics: the moral ethics aimed at individual liberation, the moral ethics practiced by the *bodhisattva*, and the moral ethics undertaken by *tantric* practitioners. There are also other ways to classify the *paramita* of moral ethics; the moral ethics of gathering virtue, and the moral ethics of benefiting others.

The practice of moral ethics is one of the most important disciplines because this practice creates the very foundation for other practices. The Buddha said that if one lacks the practice of moral ethics, one will not be able to accomplish even one's own benefit much less accomplishing benefit for other sentient beings.

9.5.3 Patience

Next is the transcendental virtue of patience. The Buddha said that there is no greater ascetic practice than the practice of transcendental patience. Not all forms of patience necessarily belong to the category of the transcendental virtue of patience.

If one has developed aggression toward someone else, and then examines this aggression with transcendental wisdom, this is transcendental patience, because one observes the non-separation between oneself as the developer of aggression and the object of aggression.

One can also practice transcendental patience while attending to spiritual discourses. If a spiritual lecture is very long one may experience physical discomforts such as hunger and thirst or mental pain. Practicing patience in this circumstance is a transcendental virtue.

When we pursue the spiritual path, we will come across many major and minor obstacles. If we are able to overcome these by practicing the transcendental virtue of patience, these obstacles will be transformed into causes that will lead us to enlightenment.

One should not follow a spiritual path merely because of tradition, like, "This is my tradition; therefore, I have to adopt such and such practices." Such spiritual practice will lack the necessary trust and faith as well as lacking investigation and analysis. Merely maintaining a tradition is a

tremendous struggle. But if the pursuit of the spiritual path is based on investigation and analysis, one will develop a profound sense of trust and intimacy, and be able to practice without a struggle.

The following story illustrates the transcendental virtue of patience that disregards pain. Long ago in Tibet, there was a man who was meditating on the slope of a hill outside Lhasa. Someone went to see him and asked him what he was doing. The man answered, "I am meditating on patience." The visitor said, "I am delighted that you are practicing the transcendental virtue of patience," and made an offering to express his gratitude. After a while the newcomer departed and went to circumambulate a holy mountain, and the practitioner continued his practice of patience. After completing one circumambulation, the visitor came back to the practitioner and gave him a hard blow with his fist. This caused the so called meditator to become extremely agitated. When the visitor saw the angry reaction of the meditator he said: "You could practice patience when I made an offering to you, but it seems you cannot practice patience when I strike you." It is not possible to practice patience without an object of patience. In other words, there must be some form of adverse circumstances before we can practice patience.

There is also the patience that does not fear emptiness. The Buddha himself said that the teaching on emptiness is very risky. If someone views emptiness and grasps it in a wrong way because they lack the necessary intelligence, they will experience a tremendous loss. If the teaching on emptiness is misunderstood, there is a real possibility of falling into the extreme view of nihilism and losing trust in the law of cause and effect. Someone who correctly understands the Buddha's teaching on emptiness develops trust in the law of cause and effect. In fact, trust in the law of cause and effect is evidence that the individual has properly understood the teaching of emptiness.

Many individuals fear the teaching of emptiness because they think that this will diminish their sense of self. We can reduce this fear by practicing the paramita of patience.

9.5.4 Effort

The fourth paramita is enthusiastic effort. But not all enthusiastic efforts are necessarily transcendental virtues. Some people are naturally diligent when performing negative actions, but a negative effort is not a transcendental diligence.

The transcendental virtue of effort delights in pursuing the spiritual path. However, only when this effort embraces non-referential wisdom will the act of effort become transcendental.

There are different types of transcendental effort. The armor-like effort protects the practitioner from the opposing forces on the spiritual path and helps the practitioner to develop the courage to defeat these obstacles even if the task is tremendous.

The second type of transcendental effort is that of respect and application. When the individual practitioner has undertaken a spiritual task, this is essential for developing a sense of respect for what they are doing.

The third type of transcendental effort is the continued application, which is the repeated effort that is applied to all spiritual tasks the individual has undertaken and includes the continual practice of all *paramitas*.

9.5.5 Meditation

Next is the fifth *paramita* of the transcendental virtue of meditation. The Tibetan term for meditation means stabilized mind. Just as a tree will be stable and can bear flowers and fruits if the roots are spread out in proportion to the tree itself, so one who is involved in the transcendental virtue of meditation is able to create a balanced mind that can serve as a foundation for all kinds of spiritual qualities. Meditation is essential to attain Buddhahood.

Again, there are different types of meditation. The first is meditative concentration that is employed by ordinary beings; we are all able to meditate on tranquility by doing *samatha* meditation. Then there is the meditation called clear discerning meditation, an understanding of the

ultimate truth. There is also a type of concentrative meditation that is called the meditation that delights the *Tathagatas*. This is the practice of illusion-like meditation and indestructible meditation.

9.5.6 Wisdom

Next is the transcendental virtue of wisdom, the sixth and final *paramita*. The practice of the *paramita* of wisdom should permeate the rest of the five *paramitas*. If the preceding five *paramitas* are accompanied by the *paramita* of wisdom, this transcendental and virtuous practice will enable the individual to attain Buddhahood.

The other *paramitas* are like small streams and the *paramita* of wisdom is like a large river. The small streams are not able to reach the ocean by themselves but with the help of the large river they can. Similarly, if the other *paramitas* are mixed with the *paramita* of wisdom, the spiritual energy will flow to attain Buddhahood.

9.6 Questions and Answers

Question: *Can you explain how the two terms for wisdom, *sherab* and *yeshe*, are different?*

The word *sherab* in Tibetan is usually translated into English as knowledge. “She” means knowledge, “rab” means tremendous. The term *yeshe* is usually translated as primordial wisdom, “ye” means primordial, “she” again means knowledge. In the final analysis both knowledge and primordial wisdom will reach the same goal. The difference lies in how we define the terms. *Sherab* can be understood as supreme knowledge, but supreme knowledge can be found on many levels, for example, the supreme knowing of hearing and listening, or the supreme wisdom that comes through contemplation and meditation. In a way, the wisdom that comes only from listening is less supreme compared to the wisdom that comes from meditation. Primordial wisdom is only enjoyed by fully enlightened beings. Supreme wisdom is enjoyed by people who are not enlightened.

Question: *So the sixth paramita is *sherab*?*

Yes.

10 The Composite and Non-Composite

The tenth and final topic of The Gateway to Knowledge is the topic of composite and non-composite phenomena. Now everything is quite easy because we understand the preceding topics, so we do not need to exert a lot of effort. But it might also be possible that this final topic will serve as a foundation for additional topics.

10.1 Composite Phenomena

Composite phenomena are named thus because their arising depends on various causes and conditions.

The existence of the phenomenal external reality depends on many causes and conditions. There is no self as a separate entity, or whatever label you give it, for example, a supreme self, that causes the production of external existence.

Sentient beings possess the aggregates of body and mind. The physical existence of the body is created from the energy of the *karma* of the consciousness of past life together with the essential substances from the mother and father. The food we consume makes us grow a physical body. The manifestation of consciousness is said to be dependent on many causes and conditions. The preceding moment of consciousness creates the continuity into the subsequent moment of consciousness. In a wider perspective, the consciousness of the past life creates a momentum that ensures the continuation of consciousness into the future life. The teaching of the Buddha clearly states that the existence of body and mind, the physical and the non-physical, cannot be dependent on just one cause. It is important to bear in mind that they are the result of a multitude of causes and conditions.

We should not think that the ripened karmic energy of body and mind is totally virtuous or totally non-virtuous. We should describe it as neutral. It is categorized as neutral is because it both positive and negative karma can be created on the basis of the present body and mind. If the thoroughly ripened karma of our body and mind were either negative or positive, it would be impossible to change, and we would have to continue doing good or bad actions. But, since the present body and mind can be directed toward creating good or bad karma, one cannot say that thoroughly ripened karma is solely positive or negative.

A cause can either be positive or negative, having the potential to give rise to happiness or suffering. The natural consequence of practicing virtue is physical well-being. The practice of generosity leads to more profound wealth, like spiritual wealth and merit. Pure discipline acts as a cause for rebirth in the human or god realm.

On the contrary, the result of stinginess and greed is poverty. The criterion for poverty here is not material wealth but whether one has a profound sense of inner contentment or not. A person who is extremely rich can at the same time feel very poor.

The Buddha said that miserliness and greediness lead to the experience of the hungry ghost realm. The beings of the hungry ghost realm experience hunger, thirst, and poverty, even while surrounded by lots of food, drink, and material possessions, because they are not capable of utilizing this for themselves or others. They are impoverished despite being surrounded by wealth. Being born as a human being with a greedy mind can amount to being born in the hungry ghost realm because our mind is possessed by the quality of the hungry ghost realm. But even if our minds are captivated by miserliness, we will not necessarily be reborn in the hungry ghost realm

The opposite of patience is aggression and hatred. If someone is angry or full of hate, his or her physical manifestation will be transformed by these emotions. The emotion of anger is ugly, and the body becomes ugly by imitating the ugliness of the state of the mind.

We should reflect on how virtuous actions cause happiness, joy and peace, and how non-virtuous actions cause pain and misery.

10.1.1 The Six Categories of Causes

The Buddha explained that causes can be classified into six categories. The first category is termed acting causes. This is a general category that consists of all kinds of phenomenal experiences and existences other than resultant experiences. There are two subclasses of acting causes; effective acting causes and ineffective acting causes. Effective acting causes have the potential to support phenomenal experience. Ineffective acting causes cannot support resultant phenomenal existence, and therefore cannot harm phenomenal existence.

The second category is the co-emergent causes. The co-emergent causes are established in the present moment. Co-emergent causes should be understood as the support and the supported. In order words, co-emergent causes depend on two things. For example, as long as conceptual thought is inherent in our minds, a non-conceptual capacity must also be inherent. They depend on each other. If something exists then the opposite also exists. Other examples of causes in this category are male and female, perceived objects and the perceiving mind, and day and night. In fact, all polarities are included in this category. The ancient example of the texts is two angular roof beams that support each other; take one away, and the other will also fall.

The third category is similar causes. The capacity of human beings to reproduce is an example of this. Generally, it should be understood as results that share similar qualities with their causes.

Before, Tibetans were prohibited by the communists from practicing the Dharma. Despite this, one could encounter many people who would do regular prayers, and therefore the authorities had appointed spies to report people who did spiritual practice. At that time, there was a practitioner who was reading a Dharma text when suddenly a spy burst into his house. Immediately, the practitioner hid the book behind his back. Not knowing what to say, the spy uttered, "Do you have children?" "Of course, I have children," the man said. The spy then said, "Are these children both boys and girls?" "Yes, they are both boys and girls, did you think they would be puppies and kittens?"

Not knowing what to say, the spy left. The man's utterance is an example of the category of similar causes.

The fourth category of causes is the resembling causes. The difference between the third and the fourth category is that a similar cause pertains to the objective phenomena and the perceiving mind.

The fifth category is the all-pervasive causes. All-pervasive causes should be understood as conflicting emotions. As long as we remain unenlightened sentient beings our minds are filled with conflicting emotions. They can burst into our mindstream at any moment and crush us. Conflicting emotions are very good at deceiving us and will not allow us to have a good rest, but drag us in all directions, until we are completely exhausted. If we want to be angry, we should not be angry toward the objective reality such as enemies or adverse circumstances, we should be angry at the presence of the emotional patterns themselves. It is good to do away with hatred, but we should focus on the emotion itself, not on the external objectivity that induces the anger.

The sixth category of causes is the fully matured causes. A fully matured cause is a positive, negative or neutral resultant phenomenal experience caused by, respectively, positive, negative or neutral actions performed in the immediate past or past life.

Enlightened beings have said that all conditioned phenomena come into existence based on these six types of causes; it is not possible to find other forms of causes.

10.2 Non-Composite Phenomena

Non-composite phenomena are not brought about by any other phenomena or by the meeting of causes and conditions. When an individual practitioner is able to do away with emotional complications by utilizing the wisdom of discrimination, then this wisdom state of absence of emotional complications is a non-composite phenomenon known as "cessation by discrimination."

The second type of non-composite phenomenon, "cessation without using discriminating wisdom," should be understood as cessation of non-existence. For example, to realize the non-existence of the horn on the horse's head, one does not need to develop discriminating wisdom.

The third non-composite phenomenon is space. Space facilitates the unfolding, endurance, and exhaustion of phenomena. We cannot differentiate space in general, other than for example, to compare the space inside a cup with the space inside a vase.

The fourth non-composite phenomenon is suchness. Suchness should be understood as the true reality of all phenomena. This is emptiness. From the perspective of the nature of suchness itself, there is no difference, but we can classify phenomenal objects that act as a support for the genuine reality. Take for example a cup. The cup is the relative truth. The ultimate truth of the cup is emptiness of the cup. The cup acts as a support for the ultimate reality. We cannot talk about different classes of the emptiness of the cup, but we can talk about different types of cups. The Buddha differentiated between contaminated and uncontaminated suchness. As long as we remain unenlightened, our enlightened Buddha-nature is temporarily obscured by emotional complications. The genuine reality of the nature of mind that is temporarily obscured is referred to as contaminated suchness. The liberated and stainless mind of an enlightened being is uncontaminated suchness.

10.2.1 Advice on Meditation on Emptiness

Beginners should primarily meditate on non-affirming emptiness. Why? Because the problem for most people is that they grasp onto the solidity of reality. To lessen this conceptual clinging it is suggested to meditate on emptiness. Then gradually, one should familiarize oneself with the meditation practice that is referred to as "meditation on non-existence." Meditation on non-existence is not the ultimate meditation but is devised to counteract fixation on emptiness that we may develop in the first meditation. Having gone through the second stage of meditation, we can proceed toward the meditation that is known as "meditation on simplicity that is free from all kinds of mental constructs."

The Buddha himself stated that the purpose of the first stage of meditation is to lead the meditator to experience the meditation of simplicity free from all mental constructs. If the Buddha were to reveal the meditation on simplicity directly, his audience would have been shocked. So the Buddha skillfully created the stages of meditation that lead to the meditation on simplicity.

Once upon a time, a turtle that lived in the ocean befriended a turtle that lived in a well, and the ocean turtle would often come to visit the turtle in the well. One day, the turtle of the well asked the turtle of the ocean "How big is your well? Is it one third of my well?" "Oh, you can not compare your well with my ocean," the ocean turtle answered. Then the turtle in the well said, "Then it must be two-thirds of my well!" The ocean turtle gave the same answer. Shocked, the turtle in the well asked, "Then it must be the same size as my well!" "It is beyond comparison," the ocean turtle answered. The turtle in the well retorted "It is inconceivable, one cannot conceive of a bigger well than mine." Then, to remove the delusion of the turtle in the well, the ocean turtle invited him to visit the ocean. It seems like the ocean turtle was a little bit stupid taking the turtle from the well directly to the ocean, but anyway, when the turtle from the well got to see the huge ocean, this gave him a massive shock that caused his mind to explode, and he died.

The Buddha or the teacher skillfully guides the student to meditate on non-affirming emptiness, which then acts as a stepping stone for meditation on the simplicity free from conceptual elaboration. If the ocean turtle had been more skillful and intelligent, he would not have led the turtle from the well directly to the ocean, but perhaps to some small pond at first, then a bigger lake, and so on, until finally reaching the sea.

Because the Buddha was a very skillful and compassionate teacher, he first taught the Four Noble Truths to explain existence. He did not talk about emptiness, but emphasized cause and effect. During the second sermon, the second turning of the wheel of Dharma, the Buddha talked about the emptiness of phenomenal existence. The teaching associated with the second turning of the wheel of dharma is called The Yana of Non-Characteristics. This constitutes many volumes of texts that are categorized according to length. The shortest is the well known Heart Sutra. The smallest volume contains 8000 verses. The next contains 20,000 verses. All these teachings are about emptiness, of non-existence. The final sermon is labeled "The turning of the wheel of Dharma that clearly differentiates things." Here the Buddha clearly defined existence and non-existence. In the third turning of the wheel of Dharma, he gave the ten teachings that reveal the presence of the Buddha-nature, thus preparing his followers for tantric practice.

If we become well versed in this final topic, we will be able to overcome the naïve view that the self was once bound, but has now been set free.

10.3 Questions and Answers

Question: Can you explain how conflicting emotions evolve?

Take the emotional complication of hatred as an example. Anger arises because of three causes. The initial cause of anger is an inherent habitual tendency from the past life. The second cause of anger is encountering adverse circumstances, for example, an enemy. The third cause is inappropriate thinking. This is precisely why one should seek an appropriate environment to cultivate tranquility meditation; by distancing oneself from adverse circumstances, meditation will be easy for the practitioner. This is connected with the second cause. To overcome the first cause of inherent habitual tendency, we need to be persistent in meditation. The third cause, inappropriate mental thought, is like grasping onto the reality of permanence when in fact the reality of phenomena is impermanent. It is like gripping onto the reality of the existence of a self when in reality existence is selfless. If all these three causes are present, anger will be experienced by the individual. If one of the causes is lacking, the emotion of anger will not be experienced.

Question: I would like to know about how many vows one must observe in tantrayana.

The follower of the tantrayana has to observe one hundred thousand million samayas. (*Laughter.*) Since the number is so huge, it is almost impossible to go through the list. Generally, the tantric *samayas* talk about the root *samaya* and the secondary *samayas*. Tantric teaching believes that the teacher is the root of all spiritual accomplishment. Therefore, you should strive toward taking good care of the lama. (*Laughter.*)

Respondent: Do you have any complaints? (*Laughter.*)

The subsidiary commitments are associated with the fellow *Varjayana sangha*. If we transgress the root samaya, it is almost impossible to amend. But if the commitment toward the fellow practitioners is broken, it is amendable. But maybe it is better to say that samaya that is transgressed between practitioners cannot be amended as well. Otherwise, you might think that a transgression can be fixed later. We can talk a great deal about *samaya* and commitment connected to *Vajrayana*, but basically, it comes down to the *samaya* that pertains to body, speech, and mind. It is to regard all shapes as the union of appearance and emptiness, all sounds as the union of sound and emptiness, and all thoughts as coming from the union of awareness and concepts. This constitutes the simplest version of tantric samaya.

11 Final Words of the Teaching

There is not much point in talking a lot, so we will now conclude the final session of this course. I would like to pray for the success of your meditation practice. May you swiftly travel the spiritual path and attain Buddhahood, may you enjoy physical and mental well-being, and experience prosperity, auspiciousness, and everything that is good. I also hope I will meet you in the future.

13 End Notes

ⁱthe Buddha of wisdom

ⁱⁱIt is also referred to as space particle. The western equivalent would be the indivisible building block of the atom

ⁱⁱⁱ of our own body

^{iv}Probably Jains

^vive elements as the five Buddha families, where the element of water correspond to the female Buddha

^{vi} The ten non-virtuous acts are: covetousness, ill-will, wrong view, killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, divisive speech, harsh words, and gossip. The ten virtuous actions are the abandonment of these.

^{vii} See section 8.5