

JOURNEY

INTO

BUDDHAHOOD

Also by Tempa Dukte Lama

The Intimate Mind:

Illuminating Emotion and Transformation

Inexhaustible Miracles:

The Ten Perfections on the Path of Compassionate Beings

JOURNEY

INTO

BUDDHAHOOD



The Five Paths

and

Ten Stages

of

Compassionate Beings

Tempa Dukte Lama

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This book is dedicated to

His Holiness the 33rd Menri Trizin Rinpoche

and to

His Eminence Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche

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Foreword

The complete liberation of unsurpassable Buddhahood is attained by following the five gradual paths and ten successive stages of a compassionate being. Therefore it is of great importance that we know and understand the profound teaching of the Five Paths and Ten Stages and its meaning in detail.

According to the Path of Renunciation it is impossible to attain complete awakening without following the gradual Five Paths and the Ten Stages. To follow the Paths and Stages, one must first know and understand the fivefold Path of Cyclic Existence, the path of the five poisons, as an obstacle to following the Paths and Stages. Besides, one has to put effort into cultivating a skillful means for renouncing the Path of Cyclic Existence. Because of the five afflictive poisons and the resulting karmic actions, all beings of the six realms go through continuous birth and transmigration from one realm to another. Thus, beings are bound within cyclic existence.

To enable one to know how the fivefold Path of Cyclic Existence or the five poisons can be renounced, this path is explained in detail within the teachings on the Paths and Stages. One has to follow the

Five Paths and Ten Stages as its antidote in order to renounce the Path of Cyclic Existence.

The teachings of the Five Paths and Ten Stages explain in great depths how one can cultivate the realization of this path within one's mind stream. Having realized the Five Paths and Ten Successive Stages, one gradually proceeds toward attaining complete Buddhahood. After describing how to cultivate the Path of Liberation, the teachings explain the ultimate fruition of the Paths and Stages in detail. This fruition is a complete awakening or the attainment of the three bodies of the Awakened One.

In this present book, *Journey into Buddhahood*, Tempa Lama Rinpoche has explained in great depth the teaching of the Five Paths and Ten Stages based on the *Sa Lam* books by rDro mGon bLo Dros rGyal mTshan and by other ancient great Bön lineage masters. Particularly, Tempa Lama has explained the teaching of the Paths and Stages and their application to everyday life in a way which is simple and easy to understand.

This book is the first time that the Bön teachings on the Paths and Stages of compassionate beings are available in English or any other Western language. At this time people in the West take a deep interest in the practice and teachings of Bön and Buddhism. For those people, this book is like the rain coming at the right time and place. This book will be of great benefit to all those aspiring beings. I rejoice and am grateful to Tempa Lama Rinpoche for writing this detailed book on the Paths and Stages of compassionate beings in English.

*His Eminence Menri Lupon
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Menri Monastery, India
26th January, 2013*

JOURNEY

INTO

BUDDHAHOOD

Introduction

Tonpa Shenrab Miwo, the Awakened One, said that the Journey into Buddhahood begins with the path. Path means practice. The basis of our experience is the mind. The essence of practice is to understand that our mind is responsible for both suffering and freedom. Whether we experience happiness or suffering depends upon the way we think. This recognition motivates us to look for a path that not only offers temporary respite from suffering, but also enables us to completely free ourselves and all beings.

The Bön teachings offer three paths through which we carry the Journey into Buddhahood: the Path of Renunciation or *mDo*, the Path of Transformation or *sNgags*, and the Path of Self-Liberation or *Sems*. All three paths share the same objective, to attain ultimate liberation. Ultimate liberation means that the repetitive nature of suffering, the cyclic continuum of existence, is exhausted.

The practice and teachings in this book are based on the Path of Renunciation. The Path of Renunciation is comprised of three essential aspects: the base, path, and the fruit. The base has two aspects, relative truth and absolute truth. The absolute truth is the true nature of reality, which is that all phenomena lack inherent

existence. All entities, whether they are characterized by suffering or by freedom from suffering, arise from this base. They abide in it, and they dissolve into it. This empty nature of all entities, which is the absolute truth, is the fundamental base of the Path of Renunciation. Yet, the absolute truth is incomplete without the relative truth. These two aspects of the base are inseparable; they are like the two wings of a bird.

The relative truth is how things appear to us. It is that which arises, abides, and dissolves. The phenomena that appear to us are like the clouds that arise in, abide in, and dissolve into empty space. The relative truth is characterized by the Four Noble Truths. The First Noble Truth is the truth of suffering. This is the fruition of cyclic existence. On the Path of Renunciation we first need to recognize and understand suffering. The second step is to understand and accept the cause of suffering. Suffering arises from delusion together with unwholesome actions. This recognition is the Second Noble Truth. The Journey into Buddhahood begins with the understanding of suffering and its causes. Therefore this book begins with an explanation of the Path of Cyclic Existence and how it arises.

Through this understanding of suffering we enter the Path of Liberation called *Thar Lam*. This is the topic of the second chapter. ‘Thar’ means to be free and ‘Lam’ means path that leads to freedom. This path is a bridge toward the attainment of complete awakening. Freedom from suffering is the Third Noble Truth. The Path that leads to freedom from suffering is the Fourth Noble Truth.

In order to actualize this path, we need to have faith and we need to cultivate the mind of awakening. The mind of awakening is the vast motivation to free ourselves and all beings from suffering.

In addition we need to rely on a teacher who has knowledge of the Path of Liberation and will guide us through giving practice instructions, transmission, and empowerment of the practice. Through the help of the teacher we will gain the threefold wisdom. The first is wisdom based on hearing the teachings. Through contemplating on what we have heard, we gain the wisdom of contemplation. Finally, as we meditate on what we have contemplated, we gain the wisdom of meditation.

The threefold wisdom of hearing, contemplation, and meditation falls into two categories based on the individual view and practice. The first is the wisdom that realizes the selflessness of the self. This is the view and practice of the Lower Vehicle of the Path of Renunciation. The second is the wisdom that cognizes the lack of inherent existence of the self and all phenomena. This is the view and practice of the Greater Vehicle of the Path of Renunciation. Followers of the Lower Vehicle are devoted to liberating themselves, while followers of the Greater Vehicle include all beings into the field of their practice. They practice not only to liberate themselves, but to benefit all beings. This is called the Path of Compassionate Beings. If we want to liberate all beings, we need to have a vast open mind and heart and great skill, both in benefitting ourselves and in benefitting others.

Chapters three through seven explain the view, practice, and realization of the Path of Compassionate Beings. This Path consists of five paths: the Path of Accumulation, the Path of Application, the Path of Seeing, the Path of Meditation, and the Path of No More Learning or Buddhahood. The practices underlying these Five Paths are called the Thirty-Seven Aspects of Enlightenment.

On the Path of Accumulation, the aspiring compassionate being practices the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the Four Endeavors, and the Four Absorptions. On the Path of Application, the aspiring compassionate being practices the Five Faculties and the Five Powers. On the Path of Seeing, the compassionate being practices the Seven Limbs of Enlightenment. On the Path of Meditation, the compassionate being practices the Noble Eightfold Path.

The teachings in this book draw upon four different sources. The first source is *Sa Lam** by rDro mGon bLo Dros rGyal mTshan, the eighth abbot of Yeru Wensaker Monastery (1198–1263). The second source is *Sa Lam* by mNyam Med She Rab rGyal mTshan, the first abbot of sMan Ri Monastery (1356–1415). The third source is *Theg Chen Sa Lam* by rGyal Tshab Rin Chen rGyal mTshan who became the second abbot of sMan Ri in 1415. The fourth source is *Phar Phyin* Volume I & II by Kun mKhyen Nyima bsTan 'dZin, the 23rd abbot of sMan Ri (1813–1862).

My sincere hope is that the reader will gain more insight into the Bön teachings and in particular into the view, practice, conduct, and meditation of the Path of Renunciation. My aspiration in writing this book is that it may be of benefit to all beings who aspire to undertake the Journey into Buddhahood.

* *Sa* means ground or stage and *Lam* means path. Hence, *Sa Lam* is the [Five] Paths and [Ten] Stages of Compassionate Beings.

The
Path
of
Cyclic Existence

The Bön teachings are a means to shed light onto our suffering, its causes, and how to free ourselves from it. Sometimes when we are in the midst of suffering, we do not know the state of our being. We may not even know we are suffering. Thus, we continue to follow the same path that has led us into distress. Without recognizing this, we strengthen the causes of the suffering we experience. Within this continuum, freedom from suffering may seem impossible to attain. We do not have trust and faith in the possibility to be free from it because our conditioning is so strong, so vivid, that we find it is very difficult to separate from it. This is what we call the cyclic continuum of suffering. This chapter explains the twofold cause of cyclic existence. The primary cause is the two delusions of affliction and intellect. The perpetuating cause is our actions.

The seeds of both cyclic existence and freedom from cyclic existence lie in the mind stream of each individual. When either seed comes into contact with favorable conditions, it manifests into our experience. We experience cyclic existence when we are controlled by the delusions of affliction and intellect. When these two delusions come together with the secondary condition of unwholesome

actions, the Path of Cyclic Existence comes into being. The karmic consequences of our actions ripen through existence in the different realms of the cyclic continuum. As long as we are on the Path of Cyclic Existence, we suffer because we grasp at the duality of the self and phenomena.

As aspirant compassionate beings, our practice is to free ourselves from the delusions of affliction and intellect and from unwholesome actions. The first objective of our practice is to free ourselves and all other beings from cyclic existence. The second objective is to cultivate the wholesome qualities that will lead us to Buddhahood.

The Delusion of Affliction

The delusion of affliction consists of the five poisons and the five afflictive views. The five poisons are ignorance, desire-attachment, anger, pride, and jealousy. These five poison our innate joy and the path leading to liberation and peace. They are also called the five non-views. Unwholesome actions of body, speech, and mind result when the five poisons merge with our body, mind, bodily heat or energy, breath, and blood.

The characteristic of the delusion of affliction is the instantaneous grasping at the self as real. It is an affliction because it impairs the stream of our consciousness, thus causing us endless suffering. It is called delusion because it is the result of grasping at the self and its inherent existence. When the delusion of affliction merges with the mind, the recognition of the true nature of the self and phenomena is obscured. Then we are no longer able to perceive phenomena purely.

The first poison, ignorance or lack of discernment, is the belief that there is a separately and independently existing self. As long as we are within cyclic existence, this belief is constant: there is always a subtle mental process of thinking about the self that results in a subtle attachment to the sense of “I.” Due to this attachment, we are unable to see that the self is an illusion. In this way, we solidify ignorance. From this solidified sense of self, pride arises as we begin to think that this “I” is superior to others. This ignorance or lack of discernment is the root of all afflictive emotions and afflictive views. It feeds both the delusion of affliction and the delusion of intellect.

Each of the five poisons has a physical contribution to its manifestation. This is called interdependent co-arising of affliction. In the case of lack of discernment, its physical contributor is the body. When lack of discernment merges with the body, it afflicts the aggregate of form through our actions. This causes us to engage in unwholesome actions of the body such as killing, stealing, or sexual misconduct.

The second poison, desire-attachment, is the mind grasping an experience of the senses, a concept, a state of mind, or an object. Grasping obscures our capacity to see, acknowledge, and accept the underlying truth of impermanence. This opens the door to pain and suffering and makes us vulnerable to fear, insecurity, anger, and jealousy. When desire-attachment merges with our bodily heat or energy, it defiles the aggregate of perception. When perception is defiled with desire-attachment, this gives rise to stinginess and the mind of greed and poverty. Stinginess is a subtle form of sadness characterized by attachment. It hinders us from rejoicing in acts of generosity of the self and others. The mind of poverty is a form of desire-

attachment that hinders us from engaging in generous acts of giving. It also causes us to discourage others from engaging in generosity.

The third poison, anger or hatred, is grasping an object, person, or situation with aversion. When anger merges with the mind consciousness, it defiles the aggregate of consciousness. This causes us to engage in unwholesome actions of the mind such as ill intention, harmful thoughts, and wrong views. When we hold on to anger, it perpetuates. It will affect how we perceive the situation or person that is making us angry. When our mind is controlled by anger, we are no longer able to perceive the situation purely as it is. Then we lose control of our actions and may physically harm others or ourselves.

The fourth poison, pride, is subconscious insecurity. This means that we are intoxicated with ourselves and unable to acknowledge and appreciate the nurturing qualities of others. When pride merges with our breath, it defiles the aggregate of mental formations. Mental formations are mental factors such as thoughts and emotions that are concurrent with the mind. When the mental formations are defiled, this gives rise to unwholesome actions of speech such as lying, slandering, using harsh language, and gossiping.

The fifth poison, jealousy, is a subtle, internal form of anger caused by attachment. Its characteristic is the inability to appreciate the good qualities, achievements, or possessions that others have. When jealousy merges with the blood, it defiles the aggregate of feeling. When the aggregate of feeling is defiled, this gives rise to criticism, malice, and contempt.

The five poisons further branch out into twenty near delusions or unwholesome mental factors. The first five mental fac-

tors arise from ignorance. These are denial, lack of faith, laziness, forgetfulness, and carelessness. The first factor, denial, forces or encourages us to hide unwholesome qualities that bring suffering into our life and the lives of others. When we hide unwholesome qualities, we support and strengthen them. Thus, we lose the possibility of eliminating them. The second mental factor, lack of faith, prevents us from believing in that which is worthy of respect and practice. Lack of faith obscures our wholesome aspiration and belief in transformation.

The third mental factor arising from ignorance, laziness, means being attached to temporary pleasure. When we are under the influence of laziness, we are not motivated to act virtuously to benefit ourselves and others. We lack diligence and initiative aspiration. The fourth factor is forgetfulness. Forgetfulness means that we do not remember both wholesome qualities and their benefits and unwholesome habits and their effects on our life. Hence, we let ourselves be carried away by habitual conditioning or by desire-attachment to sensual objects. The fifth mental factor arising from ignorance, carelessness, means that we lack discriminative wisdom. When we lack discriminative wisdom, we are not fully aware of the karmic actions that we engage in.

The next four unwholesome mental factors arise from anger. These are hatred, malice, rage, and harmful intent. Hatred is the increased state of anger. It means that we want to cause immediate harm to others or ourselves. Malice is the thought of harming others or taking revenge. It arises when we are unable to let go of the harm done by another and hold on to the thought of seeking revenge. The third factor, rage, arises when anger becomes unbear-

able. Rage affects our speech and intention and forces us to use harsh language. The fourth factor arising from anger is harmful intent. Harmful intent means that we lack compassion and kindness and instead seek to harm others.

The next four unwholesome mental factors arise from desire-attachment. These are greed or stinginess, pride, agitation, and inattentiveness. Greed is an act of intense clinging to form, feeling, and mental formations. We not only cling to these aggregates in a given moment, but we want them to last forever. The next factor, pride, is the act of being intoxicated with oneself. It is the ultimate attachment to the sense of "I." The third factor, agitation, is a constant distraction toward objects of desire. It means that we are unable to allow the mind to rest on a wholesome state. By not allowing the mind to rest in itself, we obstruct the calm and tranquil state of mind. The fourth factor, inattentiveness, is a subtle form of attachment characterized by lack of awareness. It is a subconscious distraction toward sensual objects.

The final seven unwholesome mental factors arise from the combination of two or more poisons. These are jealousy, pretension, dishonesty, shamelessness, selfishness, dullness, and distraction. Jealousy arises from the combination of anger and desire-attachment. Pretension or deceit arises from ignorance coming together with desire-attachment. This means we that we pretend to have qualities that we do not have. Dishonesty arises from the same combination. It means that we hide our faults and are defensive. When we are dishonest, we experience no regret; rather we feel arrogant and self-important. We constantly find fault with others.

Shamelessness, selfishness, dullness, and distraction arise from

the coming together of all three poisons, ignorance, desire-attachment, and anger. Shamelessness means that we are not motivated to avoid unwholesome actions. This factor supports all root and secondary delusions. Selfishness is a lack of gratitude and consideration of others' values. Dullness is the combination of a lack of focus, laziness, and wanting to act unrestrained. The final factor, distraction, means that we are mentally agitated and unable to focus on any virtuous object.

We have learned that the first component of the delusion of affliction is the five poisons. The second component is the five afflictive views. View refers to a belief or a particular way of seeing and understanding reality. Afflicted view means that we misinterpret reality based on not knowing, knowing wrong, or doubt. Not knowing, knowing wrong, and doubt are the major hindrances that need to be renounced as we follow the Journey into Buddhahood.

The first afflictive view is the view of the transitory collections or belief in the existence of a self. Transitory collections are compounded phenomena. When we hold this view, we grasp at the self or the five aggregates of form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness as real. We are not able to recognize them as transitory collections that lack existence of their own. Because of this wrong view, we grasp at each aggregate as having a real and substantial self-nature.

The second afflictive view is extreme view: rigid or inflexible thinking. This means that we hold one view and are not able to see any other perspective. When we hold onto extreme view, we fall into the two extremes of eternalism and nihilism. Eternalism means thinking that we or the phenomena we encounter last forever. If we

believe this, we will be unable to recognize the impermanence and dependent-arising of our body, feelings, the state of our mind, and all phenomena. When we are unable to let go of the strong sense of I, my, and mine, this grasping gives birth to the view of eternalism. When we attach to this sense of self, everything is turned toward the extreme of self-centeredness and it becomes our belief. Once we hold on to this belief, it becomes a mistaken view that causes us to think that our way is best and does not allow us to consider any other way.

Nihilism, on the other hand, means that we do not believe in cause and effect and in the continuation of life beyond the death of our physical body. Without understanding the law of cause and effect we cannot understand the impermanence of our lives, the impermanence of suffering, and the lack of inherent existence of all phenomena. This is why nihilism can never free us from suffering. Nihilism and eternalism represent the essence of wrong path because they do not allow us to see that any suffering we experience is impermanent, that it has causes, and that we can liberate ourselves by renouncing these causes.

The third afflictive view is mistaken view, which means that we grasp at selfless entities—such as our body, feelings, and mind—as if they have a self. Based on this mistaken view, we grasp at impermanence as permanence and suffering as pleasure.

The fourth afflictive view is holding on to a wrong view as superior. When we have gained knowledge on the path, we may develop a feeling of pride. This is an obstacle to the Journey into Buddhahood. When we see a particular view as superior, we are not able to accept and appreciate any other view. This also means

that we try to force others to share a particular view, even if this means leading them into unwholesome actions of body, speech, and mind.

When we are suffering from the fifth afflictive view, we hold on to unwholesome actions of body, speech, and mind as wholesome. For example, we may believe that a form of sacrifice or sexual misconduct is a wholesome path or that being cruel to ourselves is a way to liberation. Due to this wrong view, we may be unable to recognize the Path of Liberation as a true path. We can become victims of such a mistaken view when our suffering is so big that it consumes us. Then we may feel that hurting ourselves can release that suffering. However, hurting ourselves can never free us or others from suffering.

Ignorance and the first three afflictive views—grasping at transitory collections as real, extreme view, and mistaken view—result in the delusion of affliction. What causes us to continue following the delusion of affliction is holding on to the wrong view as superior. Based on these afflictive views we begin to engage in obsessive behavior. This is the third step in the arising of the delusion of affliction. Obsessive behavior forces us to continue on this path and further strengthens our attachment to afflictive views. The fourth step is the pride that results from attachment to our view and identification with it. These four steps bind us with the delusion of affliction and strengthen it. First, we are attracted to something. When we begin to feel that it is good, it gradually becomes a habit. Finally, it becomes a power that denies us freedom of choice. As a result of this conditioning, pride, jealousy, and anger arise.

This delusion is called the delusion of affliction because our

stream of consciousness is afflicted. Its function is to attract and feed further affliction by taking us further into darkness and delusion, thus closing the door to any possible thought of liberation. The further we move away from our pure nature, the more deeply we move into delusion. As aspiring compassionate beings, we need to form the aspiration to break through this pattern. We need to overcome our ignorance in order to wake up. If we want to liberate ourselves and others from the cyclic continuum of suffering, we need to renounce ignorance and the other poisons. We need to renounce the mental factors, afflictions, and actions that are based on these poisons, one by one. When we clear the causes of unwholesome actions, our suffering will disappear by itself the way smoke disappears when we extinguish a fire.

The Delusion of Intellect

The delusion of intellect is the obstruction to omniscience. This is also called cognitive obscuration. The characteristic of the delusion of intellect is the twofold grasping at phenomena and the self as real and substantial. To free ourselves from this delusion, we need to understand how we grasp at phenomena and the self as real and substantial. We grasp at phenomena as real and substantial by viewing them as either pure or impure. We grasp at the self in two ways, through conceptual grasping at the self as substantial entity, and through grasping on the imputed self.

When we grasp at phenomena as pure or impure, we obscure the realization of the selflessness of phenomena. When we enter the Path of Compassionate Beings, our understanding of the true nature

of reality is conceptual. It is only when we enter the Path of Seeing that we gain a direct understanding of the nature of reality and are able to clearly distinguish between wholesome and unwholesome actions. This can give rise to pride in our capacity to identify what is wholesome and what is unwholesome. When pride arises, we become subject to grasping at pure phenomena as pure and defiled phenomena as defiled. This grasping reinforces the sense of duality that prevents us from recognizing the true nature of reality. The moment we grasp at a phenomenon as pure or impure, we perceive it as substantial and real. This distorted perception obstructs the path to omniscience. We also tend to grasp onto the motivation of wanting to become a compassionate being. When we hold on to the concept of becoming a compassionate being, we establish the concept of truly existing entities.

The third type of grasping, which we discussed in the section on the delusion of affliction, is conceptual grasping at the self as substantial, real, and truly existing. The fourth type of grasping is the conceptual grasping at the imputed entity and the imputed self in particular. When we see any object, such as a cup, we label it cup. We then interact with the cup under the identification of our labeling. This limits our ability to recognize the true nature of the cup. Due to labeling we are not able to recognize that the cup is empty. This does not mean that there is not a manifested entity that we can experience as a cup. However, this cup arises interdependently with many other things. When we label phenomena in this way as being different from the self, we create an imputed sense of a self. We then grasp at this imputed sense of a self as truly existing.

We create a lot of suffering in our lives due to conceptual grasp-

ing onto the perceived reality of objects through labeling. For example, we hold on to the concept that we will not get old. However, it is impossible not to age. We have to let go of the concept of being permanently young. We cannot hold on to what is impermanent as permanent. In a similar way, we have to let go of grasping at the path, including grasping onto the wrong path as wrong. We have to disintegrate the conditioning that gives rise to this conceptual grasping.

Karmic Actions

The two delusions together with the secondary condition of unwholesome actions are the root causes of the cyclic continuum of suffering. Hence, to liberate the self and other beings we have to be aware of every action of our body, speech, and mind. When we are aware, we are able to recognize whether our intention and our actions are influenced by the two delusions. Once we recognize the presence of the two delusions, we use skillful antidotes to overcome them.

The most unwholesome actions are the five grave actions of immediate retribution. These are taking the life of our mother or father, killing a compassionate being, harming an Awakened One, and causing a division in the community of practitioners. These actions cause the one who committed them to move on to a lower realm immediately after death without going through an intermediate stage. The four unwholesome actions that are almost as grave are killing a follower of the Path of Liberation; causing a monk or nun to break his or her vows; destroying a temple, church, or other holy place; and stealing the sustenance of the community of practitioners.

The next most serious unwholesome actions are the ten unwholesome actions. These are the three unwholesome actions of the body, four unwholesome actions of speech, and three unwholesome actions of the mind. Every time we engage in these actions, the karmic traces of our action and intention are imprinted into our base consciousness,* and the traces of previous similar actions are strengthened. Unwholesome actions then become an addictive need, and we begin to be governed by that need. As aspirant compassionate beings we have to become aware of the nature of our actions. We have to become aware of the mental factors that encourage us to engage in unwholesome actions.

The three unwholesome actions of the body are killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. We have to look very closely at how we may engage in these actions. We may not take the life of other beings, but we might encourage or support others who are taking life. Under the obscuration of anger or desire-attachment, we may support acts of killing beyond taking someone's life physically. We may take the life of our feelings and the strength of our innate potential through judgment. We may kill our potential of acceptance through jealousy. We may take away the life of someone's trust. We may take away the life of someone's relationship or the great gift of friendship through anger. We may engage in stealing by an action of taking something that will cause suffering in another's life. We may engage in sexual misconduct by not respecting the feelings of our partner under the obscuration of ignorance and desire-attachment.

The four unwholesome actions of speech are telling lies, slan-

* The base consciousness holds the karmic traces that we have accumulated throughout the course of existence. Karmic traces are the imprints of past actions of body, speech, and mind.

dering, using harsh language, and gossiping. If our words are based on affliction, they will bring suffering into our life and the lives of others. Our words can destroy another's confidence or peace of mind. They can produce fear in others. They can create a wall of misunderstanding between friends or within our community. We may gain temporary benefit through lying, but this will never give us lasting joy and peace of mind.

Slandering, gossiping, and divisive speech are the verbal manifestation of jealousy, insecurity, and self-centeredness. We gossip because we feel insecure or jealous. When we gossip, we may not realize the causes of our actions. We may begin to like gossiping and make it our habit without knowing its causes and its effects in another's life. We have to understand the suffering caused by our words to other beings. We have to recognize the intention that prompts us to engage in unwholesome speech. Under the control of afflictions we may be unable to recognize another's situation and our own impaired state of mind.

The three unwholesome actions of the mind are ill intention, harmful thoughts, and wrong views. Ill intention is any thought arising from the five poisons. Harmful thoughts are the intention to harm others. When we allow harmful thoughts to arise, we disconnect from the true nature of the mind. Any action that we perform from that state of mind will have harmful effects. Harmful thoughts arise when we let insecurity, anger, or pride unify with wishes for ourselves and disconnect from our motivation of compassion. Every being, including ourselves, is awakened by nature. As aspirant compassionate beings we help others manifest this potential through the practice of looking at others with loving eyes. When we have this

kindness only for some beings and treat others with ill intention and without acknowledging their innate nature of kindness, this creates a condition of duality in our mind. Our practice as aspirant compassionate beings is to see the awakened potential of others in every moment without distinction.

The third unwholesome action of mind, holding on to wrong views, means that we do not fully accept the nature of reality. In particular, we do not accept the law of cause and effect and the lack of inherent existence of the self and phenomena. We can only develop and mature as compassionate beings if we understand the nature of cause and effect. This understanding makes it possible for us to decide which actions cause suffering and need to be renounced, and which actions form the causal conditions for the liberation from suffering. If we hold on to the belief of a separate self, it is not possible for us to develop true compassion and to realize the oneness of all beings. We also hold on to wrong views if we believe that there is no path to liberation. We hold on to wrong views if we feel no respect for the teachings on the Path of Liberation and for the Four Jewels that sustain this path: our teachers, the Awakened One or awakened nature of all beings, the Bön or the precious teachings of liberation, and the community of compassionate beings.

The Three Realms of Cyclic Existence

To free ourselves from cyclic existence we have to understand its nature. We have to recognize the different types of cyclic existence and their causes. This recognition helps us understand how karmic actions and the two delusions cause cyclic existence. Our objective

on the Path of Compassionate Beings is to liberate ourselves and all beings from suffering by renouncing the causes of suffering and cultivating wholesome qualities. To fully understand this objective we have to know the different realms of cyclic existence and how each is affected by suffering. Understanding this will help us develop the wish to renounce the causes of suffering. This will bring us onto the Path of Liberation.

Cyclic existence consists of three realms—the desire, form, and formless realm—and nine levels. All beings of the three realms continuously transmigrate from one life to another. This cycle is without end. It is like the wheel of the chariot. Our life, our consciousness, and our body are always changing as they go through unending transmigration.

All beings within cyclic existence are affected by some or all of the five basic afflictions of ignorance, desire-attachment, anger or hatred, jealousy, and pride. The power of these five poisons influences our perception and controls our body, feelings, and mind. The resulting unwholesome actions of body, speech, and mind are the root cause of our continued existence within the cyclic continuum of suffering.

Cyclic existence can be categorized into types based on different criteria. If we distinguish based on the reliance of existence, there are two types: internal and external cyclic existence. External cyclic existence is the external container of existence, the physical plane of the universe. Internal cyclic existence is all sentient beings. If we consider the different realms of existence, there are three types: desire, form, and formless realm. If we distinguish between different conditions of birth, there are seven types of existence within the

desire realm: the god, demi-god, human, animal, hungry ghost, and hell realm, and the intermediate state between death and birth or *Bardo*.^{*} Beings are born in the form and formless realms due to the level of their realization based on their practice of meditation.

The Desire Realm

The desire realm is the first level of cyclic existence. It consists of the hell, hungry ghost, animal, human, demi-god, and god realms. All beings within the desire realm are bound by the four streams of suffering: birth, old age, illness, and death. It is called the desire realm because beings are controlled by the five objects of desire: the objects of form, sound, smell, taste, and touch. As beings in the desire realm we become attached to these objects and affected by strong conditioning that we are often unaware of. Due to conditioning, we are distracted from our true nature with every sense perception that we have and are unable to perceive reality as it truly is.

Due to their strong karmic traces, beings within the hell, hungry ghost, and animal realms are not suited to entering the Path of Compassionate Beings. Beings are born into the hell realm due to a strong conditioning of anger and unwholesome actions that they have committed based on anger, in particular killing. The qualities of suffering experienced in the hell realm are hot and cold. In the next higher realm, the hungry ghost realm, beings suffer great torment of constant hunger and thirst. This can take four different forms. The first two are external obstacles and internal condition-

^{*} Bardo is an intermediate state, such as the state between death and rebirth, or between falling asleep and beginning to dream. According to the Tibetan traditions, there are many different kinds of Bardo states.

ing that prevent beings from eating and quenching their thirst. The other two are various obstacles related to eating and drinking. Beings in the hungry ghost realm are often depicted with a big head, a big belly, and such a thin throat that they cannot eat anything. In the animal realm we distinguish between beings who live in the water and those who live on the earth. Beings in this realm are not suited to entering the Path of Liberation because of their limited capacity to distinguish between wholesome and unwholesome actions of body, speech, and mind.

Beings in the two higher realms, the demi-god and god realms, enjoy great physical abundance of comfort, wealth, health, and companionship. However, demi-gods are afflicted by a constant nagging sense of inferiority and insufficiency compared to the boundless enjoyments of the god realm. Unable to transform this sense of discontentment, they experience painful jealousy and envy and make war on each other and on the beings in the god realm. The suffering of beings in the god realm is twofold. The first is the suffering of the fear of loss due to constant fights with the demi-god realm. The second suffering is that of falling down into lower realms. Beings in the god realm are surrounded by abundance and never lack anything. Consequently, they lose the ability to clearly see the suffering of their existence and the need for a path to liberation. Most of the beings within the god realm do not make much effort to clear their existing karmic traces. Consequently, they too cannot easily enter the Path of Compassionate Beings. The continuity of these karmic traces then becomes the cause of continued rebirth in the cyclic continuum.

The six different states of gods within the desire realm reflect

those beings' capacity to fulfill their desires and feel satisfied. In the human realm we depend on the satisfaction of our senses. The strongest desire we experience is the sexual attraction between male and female, and the coming together of the male and female in sexual union is the strongest state of enjoyment. The first and second kinds of god also experience physical union between male and female. The first kind of god is called the Four Great Kings. The second kind is called the Gods of the Heaven of Thirty-Three. The third kind of god experiences satisfaction through embracing. These are called the Gods of Non-Combat. The fourth kind of god experiences satisfaction through holding hands. These are called the Gods of Tushita Heaven. The fifth kind of god is called Emanations of Enjoyment. These gods are satisfied simply through smiling at each other. At the sixth god level, beings experience satisfaction through looking into each other's eyes. These gods are called Controlling Others' Emanations.

In the human realm there are other places besides our world where humans like us reside. Altogether there are twelve kinds of humans living on the four continents and the eight cardinals or sub-continents. Our world is considered the Southern continent among the four continents. We cannot see the human beings in the three other continents or the cardinals. We say that the Eastern continent is populated by giants, the Northern continent by beings of distorted hearing, and the Western continent by beings that raise cattle and live by the power of a wish-fulfilling cow. In addition there are the worlds of the eight cardinals.

In the human realm we have the opportunity to live with the freedoms and advantages that make it possible for us to follow a

path of practice. The conditions in this realm are most conducive to recognizing the suffering experienced in cyclic existence and to form the aspiration to free ourselves and all beings from suffering. The recognition that all phenomena within cyclic existence are affected by suffering is the First Noble Truth. This is the truth of suffering. We gain this realization through the fourfold practice of listening to the teachings, contemplating on what we have heard, and meditating on what we have understood.

The four streams of suffering that we experience are birth, old age, illness, and death. Birth is considered suffering because in order to be born we have to go through the *Bardo*, the transition from one life to the next. Most of us will experience great anguish and confusion while in the *Bardo*. We suffer because we find ourselves in an entirely unfamiliar environment, faced with frightening visions, and are no longer able to communicate in any way with our family. We also suffer because we no longer have the physical body that we were so used to, and we long for the safe refuge of a new physical existence. Once we take rebirth within our mother's womb, we again have to become used to new conditions and a new existence. We may feel confused and have to live in darkness. When we are born we have to leave the familiar warmth, comfort, and smoothness of our mother's womb behind. For most of us, the first thing we do when we are born is to cry. Then, for as long as we are on this earth, we are subject to the four great uncertainties concerning the time, place, and conditions of our death, and who will be with us when we die.

Besides the four streams of suffering, beings in the human realm experience four additional kinds of suffering: suffering of separation

from what we have and from our loved ones, suffering of meeting with what we do not want, suffering of not finding what we desire, and the suffering of the five aggregates. We suffer because of the loss that we undergo in each moment due to our attachment to the conditions that are coming to an end at that time. The suffering of the five aggregates is the suffering we experience due to our strong attachment based on the duality of acceptance and rejection with regard to the objects of the senses. For example, we want to experience beautiful forms, pleasing sounds, smells, and tastes, and soft touch, and we suffer if we do not experience these conditions.

The recognition that suffering is due to the two delusions and the resulting karmic actions is the Second Noble Truth. The recognition of the possibility of liberation is the Third Noble Truth. When we truly understand and accept that suffering arises due to causes and that it is impermanent and empty, we are opening the door to the Path of Liberation. This path is the Fourth Noble Truth.

The Form Realm

The second level of cyclic existence is the form realm. The final attainment of the desire realm and the cause of entering the form realm is meditative absorption of concentration. Beings in the form realm have a subtle body of light. They are free from attachment to the sensual objects of the desire realm, and they do not have the senses of taste and smell. However, they still experience desire for form, sound, and touch. In particular, as they become absorbed into the bliss of the subtle body, they develop attachment to this state. This attachment becomes the cause of their rebirth into one of the

lower realms. We can view the beings in these realms as states of mind or levels of realization that can be attained. However, these attainments are still within cyclic existence.

It is very important to know the different possibilities of attainment within and beyond cyclic existence. For the desire realm, there are higher states of attainment such as the form and formless realms. These can seem abstract to a being of the desire realm because our level of perception is limited. However, our aspiration is to not limit our attainment to the form and formless realms but to go beyond cyclic existence completely. In order to transcend cyclic existence, we have to transcend the desire, form, and formless realms. Therefore, we have to know the state, nature, and characteristics of each of these realms.

There are seventeen classes of beings in the form realm and four levels of progressively deeper meditative absorption of concentration. The essence of concentration is to single-pointedly focus on both the subtle and gross aspects of all entities. On the first level of concentration, the meditative absorption is neither focused and free from distraction nor continuous. On this level there are three states: the Brahma type, the Near Brahma, and the Great Brahma. This level also has five aspects: investigation, analysis, joy, bliss, and concentration. Investigation and analysis are the antidotes that have been used by beings in the desire realm to overcome the obscurations of ill intention and hostility. On the first level of concentration of the form realm, these two aspects support beings in further distancing themselves from these obscurations. Joy and bliss are the benefit that we receive when we have freed ourselves from the desire-attachment of the desire realm with the help of

investigation and analysis. The fifth aspect, concentration, is the essence of this level.

On the second level of concentration, the meditative absorption can be either intense and focused or continuous. On this level there are three states called the Little Light, the Limitless Light, and Luminous Light. This level has four aspects: internal clarity, joy, bliss, and single-pointed concentration. Internal clarity is an antidote to the practice of investigation and analysis of the first level. When we have internal clarity, we do not need to investigate or analyze. At this point, we surpass these two aspects. Joy and bliss are the experience of the meditative absorption that we gain when the mind is free from constant examination and analysis. The final aspect, single-pointed concentration, is the essence of this level.

On the third level of concentration, the meditative absorption is both continuous and focused. On this level there are three states called the Little Bliss, the Limitless Bliss, and Great Bliss. This level has five aspects: mindfulness, introspection, equanimity, bliss, and single-pointed mind. The first three, mindfulness, introspection, and equanimity are the antidote that allows us to transcend the joyful experience of the second level. Mindfulness helps us to become one with our experience. Introspection helps us to be aware of our experience. Equanimity allows us to transcend our state by leaving each thing and each experience as it is. It enables us to remain in the state of clarity and awareness without modification. The benefit that we gain at this point is bliss, the fourth of the five aspects. The state that we abide in with the help of these four aspects is the meditative absorption of this level. This is single-pointed mind, the fifth aspect of this level.

When the fourth level of concentration is reached, the body is scattered. This means that we only retain a very subtle sense of form. We are on the verge of transcending form and entering the formless realm. This state is called Cloudless. It has four aspects: pure mindfulness, pure equanimity, neutral feeling, and pure single-pointed mind. Pure mindfulness and equanimity are antidotes to attachment to the bliss of the previous level. Neutral feeling is freedom from the duality of pain and bliss. This is the realization we gain when we transcend the experience of bliss of the third level. When we gain the final aspect, pure single-pointed mind, we establish ourselves in the experience of non-dual absorption. This will ultimately become the cause for entering the first state of the formless realm, which is limitless space. On the fourth level of concentration there are eight states: the eighth state of the fourth level of concentration, Cloudless, Merit-born, Great Fruit, Not Great, Without Pain, Profound Vision, and Highest Abode. The state of Highest Abode is the final attainment before beings enter the formless realm.

The Formless Realm and The Peak of Worldly Existence

Beings in the formless realm do not have physical form. They have a purely mental body. Consequently they do not have experiences of the senses. Beings in the desire realm cannot see the mental body of beings in the formless realm. We can be born in this realm when we advance deeply on the path of meditative concentration.

Beings in the formless realm experience the four higher levels of meditative absorption: limitless space, limitless consciousness, nothingness, and neither existence nor non-existence. At the initial stage

of limitless space, we aspire to perceive all phenomena as having the nature of boundless space. Our practice at this stage is to contemplate and abide in the absorption of boundless space. This means that our experience is not limited by internal and external form. In the fruition stage of limitless space, we gain the clarity of perceiving all phenomena as boundless space. We single-pointedly abide in that realization.

The second absorption of the formless realm is limitless consciousness. At the initial stage we aspire to gain the understanding of the boundless nature of consciousness. This means that consciousness is recognized to be free from any limitation and restriction. In the fruition stage we are able to stay single-pointedly and continuously with the clarity aspect of this realization.

The third absorption of the formless realm is called nothingness. At the initial stage, we aspire to transcend the subject-object relationship. This means that there is no subject that can hold on to an object and no object to be held. At the fruition stage, we gain the clarity that there is no subject and object. We stabilize this realization and abide single-pointedly in it.

The fourth meditative absorption of the formless realm is neither existence nor non-existence. At the initial stage of this absorption, we aspire to understand both gross feeling and the associated subtle perception of feeling as non-existent. At this point, gross feelings and sensations are understood as non-existent. We are free from the way that feeling manifests to beings in the desire and form realms. However, we cannot deny the existence of a subtle perception of feeling due to subtle karmic traces. We cannot go beyond this until the fruition level of this absorption. For example, gross

pain does not exist. However, there is a subtle perception of pain. This means that there is still discrimination. This is overcome at the fruition stage where beings attain clarity of realization and abide single-pointedly in the understanding that reality is free from both existence and non-existence.

When we attain the meditative absorption of nothingness, grasping and gross desire-attachment dissolve. However, we are still subject to suffering. We are still within cyclic existence until the final moment of cyclic existence, the Peak of Worldly Existence. When we reach the Peak, we have overcome the worldly portion of the delusion of affliction and the instantaneous grasping at the self as real. At this point we no longer experience gross suffering. However, we are still affected by subtle karmic traces of the delusion of affliction, as well as by the delusion of intellect. Due to attachment to these subtle karmic traces beings remain in cyclic existence at this stage.

The Peak of Worldly Existence is the end of the formless realm. When we have passed the Peak, we can choose whether we want to return to this world or not. We are no longer driven to rebirth by our karma. Before we have reached the Peak, even if we have achieved existence in the god realm, when our life ends it is possible that our karma forces us to take rebirth in the lower realms. But once we have freed ourselves from subtle karmic traces and passed the Peak of Cyclic Existence, we have a choice.