Chapter 10 Reflecting of Your Future Life

b' Contemplating What Will Occur in Your Future Life: The Happiness or Suffering of the Two Types of Beings

You must take a rebirth; this can be only in one of two general states: a lower migration(a bad rebirth) or in a higher migration (a good rebirth). You do not choose; your destination is determined by your life's karma. Karmic causality, a subtle topic, is grasped only by buddhas. We summarise it into six life types: three lower realms (from non-virtuous karma) and three higher realms (from virtuous karma). Severe non-virtuous karma leads to life in the hells; intermediate non-virtuous karma leads to life among hungry ghosts; weak non-virtuous karma leads to life as an animal.

In this chapter, we consider rebirth into the lower realms.

Those realms are not far away – they are no further than your next breath. Lamas often say, "We have one foot in this life and the other foot is at the edge of hell." It is difficult to obtain a human body, when you have it, the causes for bad migrations should be eliminated with diligence. Why spend time thinking about the lower realms? The more you concentrate on suffering. The more you will want to avoid it. This fear will be your teacher.

This fear motivates starting Dharma practice, Concern about future suffering inspires learning the causes for lower rebirths. Understanding suffering from non-virtuous actions leads to efforts to avoid creating such karma. When tempted to commit harmful actions, you try to stop yourself. If done in the past, you apply antidotes to render karma inoperative. Preventing entry into suffering realms is through virtuous karma practice. Good karma weakens or eradicates seeds of negative karma. You may not be able to totally eliminate the potential of your past negative karma. But powerful positive actions will cause good results to occur first giving you time for virtuous practices. Eventually, you may destroy the negative karmic seeds so they never fruit.

Śāntideva said without suffering, there is no renunciation.

> Furthermore, the good qualities of suffering are that
> Aversion to it eliminates haughtiness,
> It gives rise to compassion for those in samsara,
> And it makes you shun evil and enjoy virtue

Serious concern about future suffering counters mental afflictions of pride and haughtiness. We usually harbour puffed-up feeling about ourselves; thinking everything is perfect and there is no need to change or practice. Fear of the next life disrupts this arrogance. Aversion to suffering clearing the conceited pride that obstructs sincere practice.

Contemplating the misery of the lower realms will develop love and compassion.

Don't think only about good things, as can breed pride. Reflect on causality and future suffering. Worrying about the distant future makes you conscientious and careful aware of the danger, as one single negative action can become very powerful.

Important. Meditation does not mean just sitting for an hour or two without thinking. The real work is fighting against the mental afflictions of desire, anger, pride, selfishness and ignorance.

When meditating you should ask yourself What is going on in my mind? Will this help prevent bad karma? Am I doing this seriously or is it just to show off? If you think about all your actions in this light, your life will proceed in a more meaningful way.

When you fear the bad karma, you are generating, you take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and sangha, following exactly their guidance and observing their actions. This crucial meditation on the suffering of lower realms combines many elements. First you think about the general operation of karma and its results. Then you relate that to your life and consider what you have done and what you face after death. From your alarm, you sincerely seek refuge, develop great compassion for others and intensify your sincere Dharma practice of the path.

Remember that operation of karma is inconceivably subtle.

1' Contemplating the suffering of hell denizens

The worst pain, torture and misery are found in the eight great hot hells, where extreme heat and fire are the primary sufferings. Your karma determines your destination; no one else can force you into hell, not even a Buddha. You take yourself there. You can prevent creating the causes for such rebirths by regulating your behaviour and applying antidotes to negative causes, as advised by Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

a" Contemplating the suffering of the great hells of living beings

First Hell — Here, as well as the intense heat the sentient beings gathered here feel intense hatred and powerful urge to destroy. They attack one another incessantly. Karma for such virulent hatred is created in the hostile relations between groups of people around the world.

Black Line Hell — sentient beings are carved along black lines cut into their sensitive skins. You can get there if, out of anger, you wish to cut someone else or a sentient being up into many pieces and actually take physical action to do so.

Crushed Together Hell — beings here are crushed/pulverised between two mountains continuously in pain.

Wailing Hell — beings trapped inside a burning building.

Great Wailing Hell — as above but more intense because a double layered building.

Hot Hell — being deep fried in a vast cauldron. (Throwing a live lobster into a boiling pot.) also impaled with long, hot metal rods.

Very Hot Hell — as above with skewers replaced by tridents. Boiled in vats until flesh is cooked away - repeatedly. May result from cooking other creatures and enjoying eating their burnt flesh.

Unrelenting Hell — No pause in extreme pain - burning goes on ceaselessly for years. Getting here needs actions that do the greatest harm to others - killing your father, mother or arhat or intentionally harming Buddha.

Experience in these hells can last hundreds of millions of years - until all that negative karma has been exhausted.

b" Contemplating the suffering of the surrounding hells

The surrounding hells are subsidiary, lighter hells that around the eight great hells. There are different ways to be born in the surrounding hells. Some are born directly into the surrounding hells, but many come here from one of the eight great hells when they have not yet used up all their serious negative karma. The four surrounding hells are: Burning Ash Pit, Putrid Corpse Swamp, Road of Razors and River with No Ford. The surrounding hells are like suburbs; you escape to suburbia from the big city of the great hells. The lifespan in these hells is indefinite. It varies according to the karma of each being. However, until the non-virtuous karma that cast you into one of these states is completely exhausted you have to stay there and experience the suffering.

Even after the terrible suffering in the great and surrounding hells, your karma may be so strong that you will need to continue to suffer from residual karma when reborn as an animal or human.

The causes for such a rebirth are cooking other beings while they are still alive. Harming others is a real cause for ending up in one of these hells. Therefore, your main concern should be keeping away from actions that harm other beings. That itself is a great Dharma practice; its great benefit is that it will keep you away from these suffering states. Even if you cannot attain the spiritual development of a higher path, maintaining pure actions closes the door to these lower realms.

c" Contemplating the suffering of the cold hells

The cold hells are like high ice covered mountains. There is no source of light. The air is dark, icy and almost frozen and the water is just on the edge of freezing. A strong, sharp wind blows constantly.

Blisters or Goose Bumps - develop cold blisters. **Bursting Blisters** - cold is greater and blisters begin to rupture and become infested. The beings wail and cry as their body and mind are taken over by agony. **Chattering Teeth Hell**, **A-choo! Hell**, **Moaning Hell** - extremely cold, **Split Hell** - bodies split open from the intense cold and turn blue, **Split like a Lotus** - split into many pieces, colour is a deep shade of red.

The hell denizens experienced this type of pain because of similar actions they had done to injure others in the past. For example, they may have thrown others out into the cold. When beings die, they often exhibit signs the opposite of where they are going. Just before death, they may feel extremely cold and ask for a blanket or to be warmed. They are heading for hot. Or they may feel extremely hot and demand to be cooled down. They are heading for cold. In both cases, this last desire is not the main or the only cause that leads them to the hells. The main course was some previous powerful non-virtue. But this particular attachment to warm or cold is the contributing cause that leads them directly to a hot or cold hell. One cause is given below

A nihilist's future life will be

In a pitch black land where frigid winds rise,
Causing such pain that the bones shatter.
Who having concern for himself would want to go there?

Nihilists so confident that there is no karmic causation that they disregard the consequences of their actions. Pain in the cold hells is tremendous, but it is less severe than the suffering in the hot hells. However, the time that beings may spend in the cold hells can be much longer than the hot hells.

d" Contemplating the suffering of the occasional hells

A periodic experience that is experienced in these occasional hells arises from taking vows, but only keeping ethical conduct during certain times of the day. For example, a butcher, who had taken a vow not to kill any living being, only kept that vow at night, because during the day he continued with his occupation. These occasional hells can take extremely diverse forms in many locations.

It is very easy to create the courses for rebirth in the occasional hells. You should not sit here feeling satisfied and oblivious to this danger. Think about how many actions you have done in the past that could be the cause of such an experience. How many causes for the occasional hells are you creating every day as a result of your behaviour and interaction with others? In addition, you may already possess the potential for such a rebirth from karma you accumulated in past lives.

The level of pain we confront in a human life is tiny compare to the pain of hell; there really is no comparison.

The happiness and pleasure that we have now is mixed with desire and attachment. Because our enjoyment is indirectly produced from mental afflictions it is not the highest form of happiness. The best conceivable, everlasting bliss occurs when you have eliminated the metal afflictions. Thus the king of happiness is the attainment of arhatship or buddhahood. Similarly, among all the types of suffering, the Unrelenting Hell's ceaseless suffering is the absolute worst.

Only your own physical, verbal and mental negative actions can cause such suffering; there is no external cause for this to extreme pain. Because the actions of body and speech are all created by mind, you should make every effort to strengthen and steady it – by the practice of purifying your mind. You must make every effort with all of your skill to practice not committing even a speck of a negative action.

2' Contemplating the suffering of animals

Animals inhabit the same space as humans and gods. This is quite different from the hells, which are beyond our ability to perceive. Some of these animals experience, great misery, discomfort and deprivation. In terms of their suffering

Those born in the animal world are slaughtered,
Bound, beaten and suffer in numerous ways.
Those who lack the virtues that lead to peace
Devour each other in inexhaustible misery.

Some will be killed for pearls, some for bones,
Some for meat, or their hide.
Helpless, others are kicked, beaten, whipped,
Or stabbed with hooks and forced to work.

The first type of misery is that animals are exploited for their bodies and labour. Animals are commonly taken as the chattels of humans and gods. In general, they are seen as existing purely to fulfil their owners needs. We can easily see how animals are mistreated; they die because humans want products, such as pearls, meat and leather. Their bodies are used to produce food and fibre, their eggs are taken away, their milk is drained, their hair is shorn and they are sorted for food. Even wild animals are pursued and killed by hunters. But it is not just human to do this. Animals constantly eat each other; the bigger one eat the smaller ones and small ones such as ants and birds eat the larger ones.

Many humans think they have the right to kill all and any animal.

Animals lack of a virtues that lead to the perfect peace of Nirvana. They cannot practice any kind of religious path.

3' Contemplating the suffering of hungry ghosts

Those whose minds are dominated by avarice, greed and desire will be born as hungry ghosts. These beings suffer terribly from hunger and thirst.

a" Hungry ghosts who have external obstacles for obtaining food and drink

Hungry ghosts without obstacles cannot find anything to eat or drink. Many kinds of obstacles prevent them for getting to or consuming food or drink. Hunger and thirst are their main form of suffering.

b" Hungry ghosts who have internal obstacles for obtaining food and drink

Can find food but physical blocks in their throat of mouth prevent ability to eat or drink. Or they cannot get enough to fill their huge stomachs.

c" Hungry ghosts who have obstacles within the food and drink

For some, anything they eat or drink ignites inside their stomachs. Some can eat or drink only filth. Some cut off and eat their own flesh.

> Hungry ghosts can never alleviate the continual misery
> Caused by desires that remain unfulfilled.
> They endure the most terrible pain brought on
> By hunger, thirst, cold, heat, exhaustion and fear.

They have a karma in common with subtle differences. In general, hungry ghosts' experiences are the result of making another creature suffer from hunger and thirst.

Conclusion

The first purpose of this discussion is to recognise that such experiences are possible. Would you be able to tolerate such extremes of hot and cold for thousands of years? Though we may talk about how great our suffering is, by comparison, it is very small. So, if you think you could hardly bear the sufferings you have now, how would you handle it if you found yourself in one of these places?

The main purpose of these teachings is to reveal the causes of such experiences and how to free ourselves from them. You can understand the behaviours leading to this suffering and those preventing it; also the effects of these virtuous and non-virtuous actions. This meditation on what can happen to you after death causes a deep-seated fear which should become firmly established in your mind and lead you to seek protection from a strong refuge. This motivates strong, effective practice that will completely transforming your mind.

Use your **learning to avoid suffering rebirths**. Since it is the **ripening of your own powerful negative karma that causes this great suffering**, no one other than yourself can send you to the three lower realms. Therefore, your practice and your own deeds become your protector. If your mind is free from hatred and you never perform any kind of negative action, there is no way to fall into those realms of suffering. Therefore learn, reflect and meditate to perceive reality accurately.

If you believe suffering in other realms doesn't concern you, it's a bad sign. You will not realise what terrible danger you are in until your breathing stops and you'll find yourself facing great pain and misery. There'll be nothing you can do. It will be far too late. You should meditate until you sincerely fear the lower realms. You will not change if you do not seriously meditate, or meditate only for a short time. You must frequently contemplate on this possible outcome.

As long as you cycle in the five realms of Samsara, driven by the increasing force of metal afflictions, you will continue to travel up and down. You will go round and round like a water wheel until you extinguish those afflictions. But if you persevere in your effort to stop non-virtuous karma and build the virtuous path that goes higher and higher, you can prevent such miserable rebirths.

Although it is not very comfortable to dwell on your likely misery, pain and suffering, this method leads you to act in a way to attain happiness and freedom and has been found to lead to attaining your high spiritual goal. Focus on the many degrees of misery in Samsara is the motivation drives progress on the spiritual path. Your fear makes you cautious; you become aware of the causes you are creating and constantly guard against making a mistake. With your mind watchful, your physical and verbal activity will go in the proper direction. Laziness will get you nowhere.

Meditating on suffering is praised by all the buddhas as the **root cause for accomplishing the path to enlightenment**; it counteracts laziness and produces the great effort necessary to move your mind towards liberation. This is why everywhere in the Buddhist teachings, you find frequent and detailed discussions about the pain and misery of samsara. There are no instructions superior to this. The very first thing that Buddha taught was that Samsara is full of suffering. This is why, when he taught the noble truths, the Buddha presented the truth of the *cause* of suffering after the truth of *suffering*. The truth of *cessation* and the truth of the *path* flow logically from there. Fear of the suffering of Samsara is the way for someone to enter the spiritual path.

That is why beginners—the persons of Small Spiritual Scope—are primarily concerned about the suffering that may occur right after this life. They worry about being born in a lower destiny. They practice the Dharma in order to stop the causes of lower rebirths and to produce the causes of higher rebirths. This may be a temporary goal, but it is better than merely seeking pleasure in this life. Those of intermediate spiritual capacity go further: they see the whole of samsara as undesirable. The object of their practice is total freedom from samsara. You need to develop the motivations of the small and intermediate spiritual practitioner gradually, step by step,

The **measure** of reaching this level is being worried all the time, day and night, about being born in a lower rebirth and at the same time always desiring, deep in your mind, that your next life will be in a higher realm. When you have that constant attitude you have entered the spiritual path. Otherwise you are nowhere. Until this attitude rises spontaneously and constantly you need to do these meditations again and again. Receiving the Dharma teachings but not practicing is like getting effective medicine from a good doctor and then throwing it away. You should take the doctor's prescription and seriously follow the spiritual guidance you receive. From strong, constant effort good things will arise.

Avoid the ten non-virtuous actions (see footnote page 45)

First, you have to ask yourself "did I do any of these things in the past? Am I still doing any of these things at present?" If you find that at any time you created those causes, then you have to accept that you will be born in the hells or lower realms. If you are born with such pain and misery, what will you do? You should think about all this until your hair stand on end from fear. What lies in store for you. Think about this until it hurts. You should meditate this way until your fear and so palpable you feel it is physically unbearable. You want to produce as much fear as you can. Forget the senseless little things. Ordinary anxiety leads to lower births, misery and pain. By stoking up this fear, it will lead you to spiritual paths and higher happiness. If you have a strong and constant fear of this type, you will always be aware of what you are doing. You will intercept, negative thoughts and attitudes and maintain positive attitudes and action. Every benefit can be achieved on the basis of this special kind of fear.

Right, now you have the opportunity to achieve everything you want. You have the ability to purify previously accumulated negative karma. You have the self-awareness and self-control to reduce and eventually completely stop committing negative actions.

You have to do this now while you have the capacity before it is too late.

> If I do not perform virtuous activity
> Even when I have the good fortune to do so,
> What will I be able to do when I am confused
> By the suffering of the bad migrations?

Your real and only protection comes through engaging in virtual actions and abandoning negative actions. You cannot do that in lower realms.

The only real protector is the Dharma—the practice of virtuous activity. That will help. Therefore Śāntideva said that from now on he will take refuge in the buddhas. Of course, this does not imply that the buddhas provide protection and you don't have to do anything yourself. Taking refuge in the buddhas means seriously undertaking to do what they advise. It means listening to their advice the way a sick man takes the counsel of a good doctor.