

Reflecting on Future Lives

Contemplating what will occur in your future life: the happiness or suffering of the 2 types of beings.

You will die soon and then be reborn into either a happy realm or a miserable realm, because there is no birthplace but amongst these 2 types. Since you are under the control of your karma, you cannot choose where you want to be born. Your virtuous / nonvirtuous karma will dictate where you are born. This being the case you should contemplate the lower realms and think about how it would be if you were born there.

Nagarjuna says to meditate on the cold and hot hells, animal realms, and ghost realms daily, and determine to stop the causes of birth there and to create the causes of happiness.

This will make you careful to avoid committing sins and seeing that virtue creates happiness you will delight in virtue.

Frightened by suffering you fervently go for refuge to the 3 jewels.

Since without suffering there is no determination to be free,
You, mind, be fixed!

-Shantideva

Contemplating the suffering of the hell denizens

Contemplating the suffering of the great hells of living beings

In each the ground and the perimeter are like the white hot iron of a smith -- there is nowhere at all you could safely put your foot. Everything is a searing hot expanse of fiery flames.

There are 8 great hells.

1. **Reviving Hell** - the first, it lies 32,000 leagues beneath us. The other 7 are situated every 4,000 leagues beneath that. As the actions which drove them there were motivated by hatred, the effect similar to the cause makes them see each other as mortal enemies and they fight. The living beings of this hell assemble and hack each other with carious weapons that appear one by one through the force of karma, until they swoon and fall to the ground Then a voice from the sky yells 'Revive!' and they rise up again and

hack each other as before and experience measureless suffering.

2. **Black Line Hell** - The hell guardians use black lines to mark the bodies of the living beings born there into quarters, eighths, and many other smaller divisions. The beings experience the pain of being split and chopped along these lines with burning saws. These beings are crushed to death screaming and weeping in unimaginable agony and terror. As the hammers are lifted they come back to life only to experience it over and over again.
3. **Crushing Hell** - The hell guardians herd the hell beings in between 2 iron mountains shaped like goat heads and then squeeze them between the mountains, causing streams of blood to gush from all of their orifices. They are also pressed between sheep-headed, horse-headed, elephant-headed, lion-headed, and tiger-headed mountains, taking the form of animals the beings have killed in the past. When they are gathered together again they are inserted into a great iron machine and pressed like sugarcane. Then they reassemble on an iron surface where great iron boulders are hurled upon them, cutting, splitting, smashing, and flattening them, again causing torrents of blood to gush forth. 200 human years are equivalent to one day in this hell, and the being in this hell live 2,000 years.
4. **Howling Hell** - Living beings who search for a home are herded into an iron house and incinerated by blazing fire and conflagration. They are roasted in these iron houses with no exit. They scream and cry feeling that they will never escape.
5. **Great Howling Hell** - similar to Howling hell, except the beings are inside 2 iron houses, one within another. Both the inner and outer doors are sealed with molten metal and the hell-beings howl in torment to think that, even if they could get past the first door, they would never be able to get past the 2nd door. 800 human years correspond to one day here. It's being have a lifespan of 8000 years.
6. **Hot Hell** - The hell-guardians throw living beings into a hot, blazing iron kettle many leagues across and boil them, deep frying them like fish in molten bronze. Their idea of happiness is the moments when they are grabbed by the workers and beaten over the head with hammers and sometimes lose consciousness and don't feel pain. Then they impale through their anuses with blazing iron skewers, which emerge through the crowns of their heads; blazing flames leap forward from their mouths, eyes, noses, ears, and from their pores. They are then placed either on their backs or their stomachs on a blazing hot surface where they are pounded with a blazing hot iron hammer. 1600 human years equals one day in this hell. Beings stay there 16,000 years.
7. **Extremely Hot Hells** - Guardians force iron tridents into their victims' anuses, the left and right prongs coming out of their shoulders and center prong out the crown of their head causes blazing flames to shoot from their mouths and from other orifices. Their bodies are caught in a blazing hot iron press; they are thrown head-first into a great blazing iron kettle full of boiling water, floating up and down and all around until their skin, flesh, and blood are destroyed and only their skeletal remains. The guardians then fish them out, spread them on the iron surface -- there their skin, flesh and blood regenerate -- and then throw them back into the kettle. The remaining torments are similar to those of the hot hell. This continues for half an intermediate kalpa, a period of time immeasurable in terms of human years.
8. **Unrelenting Hell** - the ground blazes for many hundreds of leagues from the east. As this blaze increases, it assumes the force of a conflagration. It then incinerates the skin, flesh, intestines, and bones

of the living beings, penetrating all the way to their marrow. The beings entire bodies are engulfed in flames as if they were wicks of butter lamps. The same thing occurs from the other three directions. When the fires combine from all 4 directions, they combine and beings experience uninterrupted suffering. Apart from the cries of distress there is no longer any indication of a physical body. You know them to be living beings only by the piteous wails they emit. On other occasions they are placed into blazing iron embers in an iron winnowing basket, and the basket is shaken violently. On other occasions they are forced to climb up great iron mountains, then fall from them onto an iron surface. On other occasions their tongues are pulled out of their mouths and stretched out with a hundred iron pegs, like ox hides until they have no wrinkles or ridges. At other times they are laid out on their backs on iron surfaces and their mouths are pried open with iron tongs, while blazing lumps of iron and boiling copper are forced in until their mouths, esophagi, and intestines are burned and the residue flows out below. The other torments are like those of the extremely hot hell. Lifespan here is a whole immediate kalpa. There could be no worse torment anywhere. It is the hell where those who have committed the 5 crimes of immediate retribution, and practioners of the mantrayana who develop adverse views regarding the vajra master, are reborn. No other actions have the power to cause rebirth here.

This is only a rough description, but there are many other sufferings aswell. This is how they are explained in the level of yogic deeds.

The duration of these is described in the Friendly Letter

Even though you experience
Such horrible sufferings for a billion years,
You do not die
Until the nonvirtue is spent.

-Nagarjuna

Thus, you must experience these sufferings until the force your karma is exhausted.

50 human years
Is a single day for the lower deities
Of the desire realm;
This is doubled for the higher deities

The life span of the desire realm deities is equal to a day
In the 6 hells, the reviving hell and so forth, in sequence
Thus their life spans
Are similar to those of the desire realm deities.

The life span in the extremely Hot Hell is half of an intermediate eon.
In the unrelenting hell, it is an intermediate eon.

Contemplating the suffering of the adjoining hells

Each of the 8 hot hells has 4 walls and 4 doors and is encircled by an iron fence, which has 4 doors. At each of these doors there are 4 additional hells for living beings:

1. **The Pit of Embers** - contains embers in which the denizens sink up to their knees. When beings emerge from the unrelenting torment they see what looks to be a shady trench in the distance, so they go to it and jump in. When these beings go there in search of a home, they step into it, and their skin, flesh, and blood are completely destroyed, only to regenerate when they lift their feet again.
2. **The Swamp of Putrid Corpses or the Swamp of Excrement that Stinks Like a Corpse** - A swamp of excrement that stinks like a corpse, into which living beings seeking a home attempt to cross but fall sinking in over their shoulders. The swamp is inhabited by 'sharp-beaked worms' which pierce the skin, flesh, intestines, and bones, boring down to the marrow. They go to this thinking there is water because they are so thirsty.
3. **The Path of Razors and Such** - Where beings seeking a home walk a path filled with razor teeth. With each step, the teeth lacerate their skin, flesh, and blood, but each time they lift their feet, their bodies regenerate. Nearby is the **Sword Leafed Forest**. When beings rest there in the shade, swords fall from the trees, piercing and splitting their limbs, fingers, and toes. When they swoon they are attacked by mongrel dogs who carry them off by the scruff of their necks and eat them. Nearby is **Forest of Iron Silk-cotton Trees**. Being seeking a home come and climb these trees which are covered with thorns that point downwards on the way up and upwards on the way down so that the thorns split and pierce the beings limbs, fingers, and toes. Iron beaked crows sit on their shoulders and heads and pluck out and eat their eyeballs. Since all these places subject their inhabitants to harm by means of weapons, they should be counted as one adjoined hell.
4. **The River With No Ford** - The River with no Ford is filled with boiling water. Living beings seeking a home fall into it and are tossed about and cooked as if they were peas thrown into a pot of water over a great blazing fire. On both banks of this river sit beings armed with clubs, hooks, and nets who keep the tormented from escaping, or drag them out with the hooks and nets and lay them on their back on the great blazing ground demanding to know what they want. When they reply "We do not understand at all and cannot see, but we are hungry and thirsty," they are fed blazing lumps of iron and boiling copper.

The life spans of living beings in the adjoining hells and occasional hells are not fixed, but they must suffer in

these places for a long time until the power of their karma for experiencing these sufferings is exhausted.

Absorb all the pain and details of these 8 hells and 16 neighboring hells. Withdrawing to a quiet place close your eyes and image that you are really living in the infernal realms. When you feel as much pain and terror as you would if you were really there you should think:

I feel such intense terror and suffering when I just imagine all that pain, even though I am not actually there. There are countless beings living in those realms right now, and all of them have been my parents in past lives. There is no knowing whether my parents, loved ones and friends of this life will not be reborn there once they die. Rebirth in those realms is caused primarily by actions arising from hatred, and I myself have accumulated incalculable number of such actions in this present life as well as all my past lives. I can be certain I will be born in those hells sooner or later.

At present I have a human life complete with all freedoms and advantages. I have met an authentic spiritual teacher and received the profound instructions which offer the possibility of attaining the level of a Buddha. So I must do my best to practice the methods that will save me from ever having to be born in those lower realms again

Over and over reflect on the sufferings of hells. Confess your past misdeeds with intense remorse and make the unshakeable resolve that even at the risk of your life, you will never again commit acts that lead to rebirth in the lower hell realms. With intense compassion for the beings that are there now, pray that they all be freed from there this very instant. Put the teachings into practice, complete with the methods for the beginning, main part, and conclusion.

Contemplating the Sufferings of the Cold Hells.

In all these hells, the environment is entirely composed of snow mountains, glaciers, and perpetually enveloped in blizzards. The beings there are all completely naked and tormented by the cold.

Each of the 8 great hells of living beings is 10,000 leagues wide and the 8 great cold hells lie outside of these.

1. **Blistering Hell** - The first cold hell. 32,000 leagues below the earth. The other 7 are situated every 2,000 leagues beneath that. Here the hell beings are blasted by a great wind that shrivels and then raises blisters all over their body.
2. **Popping Blisters Hell** - Similar to the above, except that the blisters pop as the body shrivels.
3. **Chattering Teeth** - The cold makes the teeth chatter
4. **Weeping** - The weeping never ends
5. **Moaning** -- Their voices are cracked and long groans escape from their lips.
6. **Splitting Water Lily Hell** - The denizens are blasted by a great wind which causes them to turn blue and split into 5 or 6 pieces.
7. **Splitting-like-a-Lotus Hell** - the beings turn from blue to red and split into 10 or more pieces

8. **Great Splitting-like-a-Lotus Hell** - The beings skin becomes very red and splits into 100 or more pieces. Worms penetrate the the cracked flesh and devour it with their metal beaks.

The Garland of Birth Stories says that these hell beings dwell in darkness.

An incomparable wind pierces your bones;
Your body shakes and freezes; you bend over and shrivel.
Hundreds of blisters rise and pop.
Creatures born from them eat and claw you; fat, lymph, and marrow ooze out.

Exhausted, teeth-clenched, all hair standing on end,
You are tormented by wounds in your eyes, ears, and gullet.
Mind and body are stupefied by pain.
You dwell in the cold hell and emit a pitiful wail.

-Nagarjuna - Friendly Letter

Understand that the life span of living beings born in the cold hells is 1 1/2 times as long as that of living beings born in the corresponding great hells of living beings.

Levels of Yogic Deeds

Imagine filling a vessel full of sesame seeds and throwing one out every 100 years until it is empty. This vessel becomes emptied much sooner than the complete life span of the living beings born in the blistering hell. 20 Life spans of the Blistering Hell make up a single life span in the Popping hell

20 Life spans of the splitting like a lotus equal one life of the great splitting like a lotus.

-Vasubandhu

Contemplating the suffering of the occasional hells

The occasional hells adjoin the hot hells and cold hells, and the Levels of Yogic Deeds say that they exist in the human regions as well.

The 16 hells for living beings are created by the force of the karma of all living beings. The occasional hells are created by the individual karma of 1, 2, or many living beings and therefore are of many different types. They have no fixed location since they exist in rivers, mountains, wastelands, below the earth, and other places as well.

-Vasubandhu

Thus, the conditions for being born in any of these hells are very easy to create, and every single day you acquire more of them. Since you have already accumulated innumerable causes in your past, your complacency is inappropriate. Therefore, after reflecting on these hells, be frightened -- nothing separates you from them after the mere cessation of your breath.

Having created the karma for hell,
Why are you complacent like this?

-Shantideva

Sinners who hear the boundless sufferings in the hells--
Separated from them only until the more termination of their breathing --
Are not completely terrified,
Have hearts as hard as diamonds.

If you are frightened by seeing paintings of hell,
By hearing of it, recalling it,
Reading about it and by representations of it,
What needs to mention experiencing the fierce actuality of it.

-Nagarjuna - A Friendly Letter

Among the sufferings of cyclic existence, those of the miserable realms are the most difficult to endure. **Among these, the sufferings of the hells are most unbearable, for the pain of being continually pierced by 300 sharp spears for a full day is nothing compared to even the mildest of the hells suffering.** Among these, the Unrelenting Hell is by the greatest.

Just as among all kinds of happiness
The cessation of craving is the king of happiness
So among all kinds of suffering
The suffering of the unrelenting Hell is most fierce.

-Nagarjuna - A Friendly Letter

Know that the sole cause of such suffering is your physical, verbal, and mental wrongdoing. Strive with whatever human skill you have not to be defiled by even the slightest wrong doing.

The seed of these non-virtuous results
Are you physical, verbal, and mental wrongdoing.
Strive with whatever skill you possess
Not to have even a bit of it!

-Nagarjuna

These 8 hot hells, 8 cold hells, adjoining hells, and ephemeral hells are called the 18 hells. **MEMORIZE THESE**

Carefully study these hells number, length of time spent there, the cause of being born there, and meditate with compassion on the other beings being born in them. Strive to ensure that no one, neither yourself or anyone else is ever reborn in any of those realms.

If you are content to just listen and know this intellectually without making it a living experience, you will just become one of those obdurate and arrogant practitioners criticized by sublime beings and condemned by the wise.

Whether or not you have practiced the teachings you have received is one thing, but not to know at least the words and terms involved is truly shameful.