

8 Types of Suffering

The 4 noble truths were put in order for the following reason.

First you have to realize that you are suffering, so you study and contemplate the truth of suffering. Once you have realized you are suffering you will want to find the cause of suffering so that you can be free of it. Once you find the cause (karma and the afflictions), you analyze whether you can eliminate these causes. When you do, you have found the truth of cessation. Then you see the path and what needs to be done to eliminate these to attain cessation.

The general types of suffering can be presented in 3 sets:

1. Contemplating the 8 types of suffering
2. Contemplating the 6 types of suffering
3. Contemplating the 3 types of suffering

Contemplating the 8 Types of Suffering

My Lord, be disenchanted with cyclic existence, which is the source of many sufferings: not getting what you want, death, disease, old age, and the others.

Nagarjuna – Friendly Letter

It is very important to approach these trainings with a clear understanding of how you are going to meditate on these points. You should remember the sufferings discussed in small scope as well, and incorporate what is relevant here.

When doing analytic meditation on these points you should maintain a stable concentrated mind and not let it run to other topics. Like how Shantideva says whatever practice is done with a distracted mind brings no benefit.

Here is goes into and give quotes how all virtuous qualities of all 3 types of beings are the result of both single pointed concentration and highest insight.

You have to have both of these, but you don't need to fully accomplish them before making progress on the path. It is sufficient if your mind has reached a level that is close to and similar to these.

As long as you have a high degree of both undistracted focus and analytical wisdom, you can achieve good results on the path.

1. The Suffering of Birth

5 points to consider:

1. Birth is suffering because there is pain at the time of birth itself.

In the 4 types of birth, the birth process itself is painful...

2. Birth is suffering because it possesses the negative tendencies

This means that when you take a rebirth in cyclic existence, you already possess the causes and conditions for suffering in the form of karma and afflictions.

This refers to the potential you carry with you, even at the moment of birth, to experience undesirable circumstances. Because you possess these, you have no control over your future experiences. You are completely at the mercy of karma and afflictions - negative tendencies - that are with you even when you are born. Though you desire happiness and don't want suffering, you have no power to bring about this because you possess these tendencies.

When you are born possessing these impurities of the negative tendencies your aspiration to achieve happiness by means of virtuous actions will meet with all kinds of hindrances. **These difficulties are the result of the very condition in which you were born.** You cannot do whatever you wish because you do not have full control over yourself. **You are under the power of your previous karma and afflictions, and you are limited by the environment into which you were born.**

All of the produced phenomena of the external inanimate world -- including the earth and the infinite world systems - as well as the inner world of sentient beings - their bodies and their minds - are all outgrowth of karma and afflictions. They are all compatible with and driven by the negative tendencies. You have created your own experience by your own previous karma, and now that world of experience channels your behavior and sets limits on what you can do in this life. In this sense, your control of yourself is quite limited.

Your options are limited by these negative tendencies.

Once you understand this, you realize birth is suffering because it possesses the negative tendencies.

3. Birth is suffering because it is the source of suffering

By taking birth in these 3 realms of cyclic existence under the power of karma and afflictions, you undergo such sufferings as aging, sickness, and death. Birth in this world is the very basis or source of these miserable experiences. If you attain emancipation and thereby cut off this cycle, then these various types of sufferings will not happen. But as long as you are born by karma and afflictions in this world, such suffering will be the result.

4. Birth is suffering because it is the source of obscuring afflictions

Birth is not only the source of suffering, it is also the source of the cause of suffering.

You are born into this world with sense faculties that make contact with objects that you find attractive, unattractive, or neutral, which gives rise to desire, aversion, or ignorance -- the 3 poisons which are the main roots of samsaric suffering. Then karmic actions happen which produce the seeds for future birth and suffering.

Birth is the *result* of afflictions, but then once you are born into this body, birth becomes the *source* of even more afflictions. **It is these afflictions that make you suffer, it is the real enemy.**

Once you investigate this process by means of meditation, you discover what is actually happening. You see how birth is itself the source of afflictions in this life.

5. Birth is suffering because it is an undesired separation.

It is the very nature of taking birth in cyclic existence that eventually you have to separate from that life. In general beings want to cling onto the life that they have, they don't want to die. **But, the inevitable end of all birth is death, separation from all the things that you love and desire in this life.**

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From the ordinary obscured perspective you may look around and they wow this is great! I am surrounded by so many beautiful things! Until you look into your situation with analysis you don't see anything wrong. This is why you have to practice the meditation on the true nature of samsaric rebirth: to see how it is conditioned by suffering; to recognize its many defects from the point of view of its causes, its effects, and its nature.

These meditations remind you that you are born into suffering and the causes of suffering, the negative tendencies.

When you meditate on these faults of taking birth in cyclic existence, the decision will finally arise to get out of samsara, to bring an end to what has been, up to now, an endless round of rebirth. Then you will begin to work towards that and engage in the real yogic work, the inner spiritual work, that leads to liberation.

Here he goes into descriptions of the pain of being in the womb and then the actual birth itself using quotations.

When you are meditating on these 8 types of suffering it is especially important to focus on this - the suffering of birth - and the last one - the suffering of the appropriating aggregates.

The way to meditate on this is to connect the descriptions to your own birth -- not some birth over there. You should imagine these terrifying experiences happening to you in the past and how they will happen to you in the future until you attain liberation from samsaric rebirth.

Even if you are born into the highest best human rebirth, it will start with this miserable birth. **You meditate by imagining how it will feel.** You should practice this over and over.

2. The Suffering of Aging

Once you are born into your new life, you develop through the various stages of growth. You begin in childhood with a new body and mind, like a fresh lotus flower. You enjoy the strength, vigor, and adaptability of youth, and you don't want to lose any of the shining energetic qualities that you have at that time. But, you have no control over such things and that youthful vigor quickly passes. **With every moment you are aging, losing the brightness of youth, and getting closer to the aches and pains and losses of old age.**

5 ways of thinking about this process of aging:

1. The excellent body deteriorates

When you are young your body feels fresh and looks beautiful. People may admire your body, but when you get older, and a little older... one day you might find that people just call you *the old man*. You look in the mirror, you have gotten ugly, your back is bent, your hair is white, you have wrinkles.

As you age, the fresh, flexible, youthful vitality of your body is gradually destroyed. **You become ugly and undesirable.** You have no way to control this process; it happens as the result of actions of karma. Even

though you desperately want to remain attractive, the opposite happens. **That itself is suffering.** You don't want to get old, sick, weak, and die... but it definitely will happen, and there is nothing you can do to stop it.

2. Strength and vigor deteriorate

Aging brings with it a loss of physical strength, as well as the deterioration of the mental and physical faculties. Old men and women who have lost the strength in their muscles can't sit and stand gracefully. When you walk you teeter and stumble so it looks like you are going to fall down. Speech also deteriorates and eventually your words become unintelligible.

~ Milarepa quote to old lady

Although you often see old people in this condition, it never occurs to you "Soon I will be like this, What will it be like when this happens?". When you see what life is like for an old person, you should meditate that the same thing is coming for yourself. While you have the mental and physical ability you should realize that soon you will lose it.

Once you realize that you will decide:

Right now, while I have the opportunity, I am going to make preparations for the future, because once old age gets ahold of me, I will not be able to do anything.

This kind of resolve, based on analytical reason, is the purpose of meditation. Otherwise, what is the point of thinking about such things? It would just make you miserable.. but when you meditate on these sufferings by applying them to yourself and your own condition -- when you see that they are coming to you -- that brings good results; that is the purpose.

3. The Sense Faculties Deteriorate

Every day, all the time, the sense faculties are degenerating. Gradually you do not see or hear as well as you used to. Mentally, the mind begins to forget. Slowly these capacities weaken and disappear. You learn some new name or fact, but soon can't remember it. Even things you used to know well, you can't remember anymore. Little by little, all the physical and mental faculties deteriorate and some are totally lost.

4. The Ability to Enjoy Sense Objects Deteriorates

Sense objects like food no longer bring the pleasure like they once did. Hunger wanes, the ability to taste fades. You can no longer see beautiful pictures or scenery clearly... etc

5. The Suffering of the Diminishment of Life

This is the misery of realizing that most of your life has diminished and now you are approaching death. The arc of your life, like the setting sun, is slipping below the western horizon, and soon you will pass into darkness. Seeing this produces great sorrow and regret.

These miseries of aging are not far from yourself, they are yourself. It's always there working its changing without you noticing it. Think about how you would react if it happened all of a sudden. You went to bed a 15 year old and woke up 60 years old. It happens slowly and sneakily.

Therefore while this sneaky thing is coming, and while you still have the mental and physical energy, you should use your time to make preparations.

The misery of death is frightful, but it is brief. But how frightful is old age!

Geshe Chekawa

Aging goes on and on progressively getting worse, and in that sense, it is actually worse than death itself.

It is a good thing that aging takes place little by little. If it happened all at once, we could hardly bear it.

Kamapa

3. The Suffering of Sickness

There are five ways to contemplate the suffering of sickness.

1. Sickness Changes the Nature of the Body

The suffering of sickness is easy to understand because it is so common.

Your body becomes weak and you usually lose weight. Your skin becomes dry and loses its luster. The body can become completely transformed by disease, so that you can hardly recognize the person you used to know.

2. Pain and despair increase and are present most of the time

Once you slip into the pain of disease, the mind soon follows and falls into unhappiness, depression, and despair. The mind and body effect each other in many ways.

3. There is no desire for attractive objects

When you are sick, you lose your interest in the things that you usually enjoy; food, drink, and companionship all lose their appeal. Often the things you once enjoyed become object of aversion and even nausea. Even when you still want them, you are told you can't do this and eat this because it will make your condition worse. Even when you don't have restrictions imposed from the outside, you physically lose the ability to do the things that you would like to do.

4. You are forced to make use of undesirable objects, although you don't like to do so.

When you are sick you have to take all kinds of medicines and eat things you don't want to eat. You are forced to take them by your family or doctor.

You are subject to many uncomfortable, painful, and invasive procedures. Things like chemotherapy which can make you feel worse than the disease.. injections.. ivs.. Cut open with sharp blades and sewn back together with

needles, and your recovery will be long and painful. You don't usually think about these things, but this is what happens when you become ill.

5. You will be separated from this life

The ultimate result of sickness is that you will have to separate from this life. All of the harsh treatments may help for some time. You may live a few more months or years. In the end if you do not die from other causes, sickness will cause you to separate from this life. When that time comes, and you see that you are not going to recover from this illness, that there is no hope, that now you are going to have to die -- your inner mental anguish will increase.

3. The Suffering of Death

5 points

1. You are separated from objects that are attractive and wonderful

At the time of death, you of course have to separate from everything. All the things you valued during your life must be left behind; all the wealth you have accumulated, all the land, clothes, food, and things you have enjoyed. Even if you owned all the wealth in the universe, you have to leave it behind when you die. During your life you spent so much effort to accumulate that wealth... you thought it would bring you some type of special pleasure, some degree of safety, and many other benefits. But at the time of death it is of no use at all. That itself is a miserable truth to face.

Leaving all I must depart alone.
But through not having understood this
I committed various kinds of evil
For the sake of my friends and foes.

Shantideva

2. You are separated from many close relatives

Though you may have many loving relatives who nurse you and stand by you in the last days, none of them can travel with you when you die. Your spouse, your children.. as much as they love you and want to help you, there is nothing they can do. You die alone, and alone you go to your next life.

3. You are separated from many close companions

You will leave behind not only relatives, but also your friends, students, teachers, and co-workers, all of the people you enjoyed spending time with while you were alive. Even if every sentient being were your friend, at the time of death you would have to leave them.

4. You are separated from an attractive and wonderful body

At the time of death you not only have to leave behind external things, but also your own body. The body that you had in the mother womb.. the body that has been with you every moment of this life -- has to be left behind.

5. At the time of death you experience terrible pain and happiness

At the time of death you go through so many powerful experiences. Your family and friends gather around you crying and trying to help you, but there is nothing they can do to help you. You feel them slipping away. Everything familiar is slipping away. Now you are facing the unknown. A future that is completely black and uncertain. *Where will I go? Am I going to hell? Am I headed to painful horrors in my next life?*

Physically and mentally you are deteriorating. Perhaps you wish to do a little virtuous practice to prepare yourself for what lies ahead, but it is too late. Everything is completely too late.

When seized by the messengers of death,
What benefit will friends and relatives afford?
My merit alone shall protect me then,
But upon that I have never relied.

Shantideva

You should meditate on these points over and over again until you produce a genuine and heartfelt sense of sorrow and disenchantment with the worldly concerns that have occupied you up till now. When that happens, hold onto that feeling and use it to propel your practice. Continue to do these practices until you have generated the genuine spontaneous thought of renunciation.

When you meditate on these points, you should not think that they are just fantastic tales, but analyze your situation until you realize that the fundamental process that is being described here is real life and death.