

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.

4. 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 unhappiness

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.

5. The Suffering of Encountering the Unpleasant

5 points:

1. By merely encountering your enemies, you suffer and are made unhappy'

Once you have decided someone is your enemy, all you have to do is meet him on the street, or see him across the room, and immediately you feel angry and disturbed

2. You fear that you will be punished by them

When you have enemies you are always fearful of what they might do to you. You always feel that you must be on guard against actions their actions and schemes. This causes great anxiety and stress and can make life quite difficult at times.

3. You fear that they will spread malicious rumours about you.

They may be talking about your back, etc. With this kind of malicious gossip going on, you never know what people are thinking about you.

4. You dread dying

Of course the most unpleasant thing you have to meet is death itself. You may not worry about it when you are young, but as you get older, the prospect of death can become a real source of anguish. Especially if you have not used your life meaningfully by preparing for death. If you have wasted your life, having created all sorts of nonvirtuous karmic potentials, then you will really have something to dread.

5. You fear that, because of non-Dharmic actions, you are destined for a lower rebirth.

All nonvirtuous actions are contrary to Dharma teachings. If you know you have committed many such actions, you will certainly worry about your next rebirth. Knowing you are likely to go to a miserable realm, your suffering will actually begin in this life, because you will be possessed by fear, sorrow, and regret.

6. The Suffering of Separating from the Pleasant

This point is illustrated by 5 manifestations of the pain of being separating from cherished friends and relatives

1. When you are separated from loved ones, grief arises in your mind

The day will eventually come when you have to leave your loved ones forever, and when that time arrives you will be overwhelmed by grief.

2. When you are separated from loved ones, you mourn audibly

Often these feelings of loss are so powerful that people express their grief with sobbing, wailing, screaming, and other verbal expressions of sorrow.

3. When you are separated from your loved ones, it causes you to harm your own body

beating your breast .. tearing out your hair .. some even take their own lives

4. When you recall the qualities of the departed, you yearn for them and feel depressed

You have such fond and treasured memories of the person you have lost, but now you realize that you will never see him or her again. Now the memories themselves become a source of sorrow.

5. You are no longer enjoy those you have lost

If your loved ones were present, you could enjoy their company and all the pleasure that it brought you. But now they are gone and you can never access those feelings again.

In short, you will have to separate from every single thing that brings you happiness and pleasure in this world. That is the nature of your condition. You can do nothing to prevent that separation and you have no control over when it will happen. You are under the control of karma and the afflictions, and that itself is great suffering. You should meditate on these 5 points until they are integrated with your mind

7. The Suffering of Not Getting What You Want

In the course of our lifetime we have so many desires and often they just end in disappointment. Often we work really hard to achieve something we really want -- job, marriage, etc -- but we fail to achieve that goal despite our efforts. **These are examples of the suffering of not getting what you want.**

The way to meditate on these to to think about the things you desire but do not obtain -- wealth, fame, honor, love, and so forth.

When you have a strong desire for an object but fail to obtain it, you experience the same type of suffering we spoke about in the previous section.

ex:

- farms who work to grow crops, but nothing grows
- business people who spend many hour trying to build a business, but they end up going bankrupt

You should add examples from your own experience, using your own intelligence and insight.

The point of these meditation is to convince your own mind of the truth of the suffering nature of samsaric experience. To plant that insight into your mental continuum, it is very useful to relate these ideas to your own experience, because that is what will make it real for you.

7. The Suffering of the Appropriating Aggregates

The Buddha said, "In sum, the five appropriating aggregates are suffering."

Here we concentrate on the meaning of that statement. In what way are the 5 aggregates the very nature of suffering?

First it is useful to understand why call these "appropriating aggregates"

Appropriating has the sense of 'taking' or 'grasping' - it means to grasp - out of attachment to things of the present, and out of desire for things of the future - not wanting to lose those things, wanting them to remain forever. It is in this sense that the 5 aggregates are appropriating or grasping.

This is a case of 'applying the name of the cause to the result.' the term 'appropriating' carries the sense of attachment and desire, which are the cause and name is given to the aggregates which are the result. Think of the term 'wood fire'.. 'fire' is the result, and it arises from 'wood', the cause.. the name of the cause is given to the result and we call it 'wood fire'

The combination of these 5 aggregates makes up our mind-body continuum.

The cause of these 5 aggregates is previous attachment and desire, which created karma, which brought this combination of aggregates into being. Therefore the name of the cause, appropriating attachment and desire, is given to the result, the 5 aggregate.

Because of the cyclic nature of samsara, we can also look at this as the name of the result given to the cause. We have taken these 5 aggregates and in this life we are constantly creating attachment and desire, and that name is given to the cause which is the 5 aggregates. An example of this is an apple tree - 'a tree that produces an apple'. The tree is the cause, but the name of the result, apples, is given to the cause and we call it an apple tree.

Why did the Buddha say that the nature of these 5 appropriating aggregates is suffering? They are suffering in 5 ways:

1. They are vessels of future suffering.

What do these 5 aggregates accomplish? The present aggregates bring future suffering; they are a vessel linking the current mind-body continuum to future misery. By creating karma out of attachment and desire, they construct future unhappiness, and perpetuate suffering into future lives. In other words, by merely taking these aggregates in this life you insure future suffering.

2. The five appropriating aggregates are vessels of suffering that already exists

As you know, there is plenty of suffering that already exists in this life. It is due to the fact that you have taken this samsaric body that you are subject to sickness, aging, separating from things you want, meeting the things you don't want, and death.

3. The are vessels of the suffering of pain

Having taken this body, you are subject to all the mental and physical ills, discomforts, disappointment, and pain, that we commonly call "suffering" in this world. The most obvious form of suffering is called the "suffering of pain" or "suffering of suffering". This mind-body continuum made up of this combination of aggregates, is the vessel for all these miseries. This and the next 2 types of suffering will be elaborated upon later when we explain "the three types of suffering"

4. The are vessels of the suffering of change

The suffering of change means that all samsaric pleasure transforms into some form of suffering. Happiness switches into misery. Everything changes. **It is the nature of these 5 aggregates that when some happiness or pleasure arises, it cannot be sustained or increased indefinitely, but inevitably changes into dissatisfaction and suffering.**

The 5 aggregates are vessels of the suffering of pain and the suffering of change because of this inseparable connection with negative tendencies of karma and afflictions. The negative tendencies make the body-mind continuum like an open wound, always sensitive to contact and ready to create pain. The negative tendencies are like the seed or potential, always present, for every experience to turn into suffering.

Although at the moment you may feel good and everything is pleasant, that happiness can easily turn into displeasure or pain at any moment. **The conditions for that are always here, because your aggregates are not pure. They are contaminated by the negative tendencies, loaded with the potential for pain.**

When you are contemplating these points you need to realize this isn't just some philosophy, but this is actually what is happening. But you hide and ignore it, because you are the disciple of ignorance.

Ignorance tells you that there is this huge "I", which is the most important thing. It tells you to make this "I" feel happy. Ignorance tells you that this "I" will last forever, and if you can make it happy, that happiness will last forever. And you follow this advice. You use your discriminating wisdom to try to fashion stable happiness out of samsaric objects and conditions. The whole point of these meditations is to redirect your wisdom, to enable you to see things as they truly are, not the way you fantasize them to be.

5. The are vessels of the suffering of being conditioned

As soon as they are born, the 5 appropriating aggregates have the nature of this suffering of conditionality, because anything that is conditioned by karma and afflictions has this nature. Sometimes this is called **pervasive**

suffering. It is the suffering nature that pervades all conditioned existence because this existence is completely under the power of karma and the afflictions.

When you realize the truth of suffering by means of the union of calm abiding and special insight, you vividly realize how this whole samsaric situation is pervaded by this subtle nature of suffering. Until then even though you are meditating on this as the way things are, it will not be completely believable.

Its like how kids see fire and poison as attractive objects, but they actually hurt them. Its the same.

In the end you must realize this most subtle level of pervasive suffering. **That the whole of cyclic existence is conditioned by karma and afflictions and is therefore in the nature of suffering.**

The whole of cyclic existence is in the nature of suffering because it is conditioned by karma and the afflictions.

It is this deep inescapable suffering nature of *everything* within cyclic existence that inspires the thought of renunciation. **If you have not yet felt this attitude of disenchantment that comes from seeing the faults of this whole situation, then a genuine, uncontrived thought of renunciation will not arise.**

Therefore this meditation is of the utmost importance. **Realizing the fundamental faults of cyclic existence, its conditionality, and therefore its nature of suffering, is a prerequisite for engaging in either the hinayana path of achieving emancipation for yourself, or the mahayana path of great compassion for all living beings**

If you haven't produced this sincere thought of renunciation -- wanting freedom from cyclic existence for yourself -- there will be no way to produce bodhichitta - which wishes for freedom from samsara for all living beings.

Therefore, whatever path you plan to engage in, it is essential to produce the thought of renunciation. To do this you need to rely on scriptures and authoritative commentaries by masters who evidence a pure understanding of the Buddha's intent. **You need to study those scriptures, and then when you find some understanding, you need to meditate on that, using analytical meditation, over a long period of time.**

This means you proceed topic by topic, contemplating each one until you are able to fully convince the mind, to draw the mind in that direction. You use everything at your disposal, inferential knowledge, scriptural, experiential. You put everything together and then concentrate, focus on that. If you practice that way, beginning with an educated understanding, then applying meditation that is able to change your ordinary perception, you will finally reach and unshakeable realization.

This presentation of the divisions of suffering comes from Asanga.

Wherever we are born among the six types of beings, suffering will arise, such as sickness and death. When there is a cause of sickness, there will be sickness. When the cause of death appears, we will die. These do not arise as some sort of unsuitable or accidental events; it is the very character or nature of cyclic existence. As long as we abide within cyclic existence, there is no escaping it. If we are disgusted by this, we must eliminate birth. For that, we must eliminate its cause.

Geshe Potowa

What he is saying here is that there is nothing strange about the arising of misery in the world in which we live. It is not something that is not supposed to happen. When we have bodies whose nature it is to be prone to being sick -- it is not too surprising that we get sick. Aging, sickness, and death happen because there are causes for them to happen. This is the nature of cyclic existence; this is what defines samsara.

The nature of fire is to burn. If you don't want to get burned you need to get away from fire. As long as you remain within cyclic existence, there is no way to escape these suffering outcomes. If you don't like it, the only thing you can do is to get out of the whole situation. The only way to do that is to end birth in cyclic existence, and to do that you must eliminate its cause. What is the cause? Karma and the afflictions. They must be eliminated from the root, and you do that by applying the antidotes as they are explained here in the steps of the path to enlightenment.