

I'd like to address a question asked last week about self knowing consciousness.

The question was:

How, if you accept such a thing as "self knowing consciousness", as the Mind Only school has, does it lead to an illogical infinite regression?

To answer that, first we need to change the terminology. We should say, 'infinite regression of the *experiencer*'. First we need to be clear about the position of the third and fourth schools. The third school is Mind Only. The fourth and highest is the Consequentialist school. The third school believes in self knowing consciousness, whereas the proponents of the highest school rule this out. The Mind Only school proponents tell the highest school, "You have to have self knowing consciousness or else cognition will fall apart". They go on to say, "If you have a consciousness and that same mind is aware of its own consciousness of an object the second consciousness becomes the self aware consciousness". (The self aware consciousness is the one that knows it has experienced its object.)

The Consequentialists argue, "If you have two moments of consciousness, a first and a second, and you say a consciousness must have a self-knowing faculty, the question is, what realizes or knows that first moment? If the first moment knows itself, then that very first moment would become a self-knowing consciousness. It's silly to say that the first moment knows itself if one also says that the first moment is realized by the second. By the same line of reasoning, what determines the existence of the second moment of consciousness that apparently understood the first moment? What really knows the second moment? If you say that the second moment needs another second moment, how would the second second moment know of its own existence? It would need another moment to know itself. In this way it would lead to the infinite regression of the experiencer.

The above is a more or less word for word transcript. The editor interprets the above to mean: If all moments of consciousness have a self-knowing faculty why doesn't the first moment know itself? Why does it need a second moment to do so? And: if it does need a second moment to do so then surely the second moment itself needs another second moment to know itself. If this is true then each moment would need a following moment to be aware of itself and that would lead to infinite regression of experience which is illogical and silly. If this is still unclear Geshela will need to be approached again to clarify.

The second noble truth: Truth of Origin of Suffering

The week before last I talked about truth of suffering and its four attributes. Tonight I'd like to touch on the second truth. The four truths were the first teachings given by Buddha and they formed the foundation of Buddhist thought and practice. The four truths are about ordinary mundane existence and transmudane experience.

The first two truths— truth of suffering and truth of origin of suffering refer to our experience in mundane existence. They are dealt with from two perspectives; cause and effect. The effect is physical and mental stress and problems which is a truth, a fact. What gives rise to these is said to be the origin of suffering – the cause. We can talk about our present situation suffering and their causes, but it's pointless to talk about them if there are no solutions to them. The solutions are the next two truths; the truth of cessation and the means to that. They are the result – Truth of Permanent Cessation of Suffering and Truth of Path – the cause leading to permanent cessation.

Truth of suffering has three levels.

First level of suffering is *pain* –mental and physical pain that anyone who has a mind, a sentient being, we humans and even animals can all relate to. Everyone who is within the bounds of mundane existence and therefore who is not free knows this easily.

Second level of suffering is the *changing of a seemingly pleasant state into pain*. It is not as easily recognized by all. It is recognized by those who have been schooled in some tenets to see it.

The third and last level is *pervasive conditioning*. It is insidious as it is a suffering we have but we don't know that we have it. Only transcendent beings can see when they look upon our earthly life that we suffer in this way- pervasively and insidiously.

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As humans we have material comfort, but also sickness, constant aging, separation from the beloved, meeting with unpleasant situations/people etc – stress and pain which we can all relate to. These are facts of life.

Buddha says to overcome these problems we need to overcome the suffering of change of the pleasant states into pain. In order to overcome the second level and be freed from the first two we need be freed from the underlying seed of all such suffering which is the suffering of pervasive conditioning.

The third suffering pervades the life of all sentient beings. It is insidious because we don't know we have it or what it is. To learn about this we need exposure to the teachings for some time. To be free from it we need to identify the cause and then eradicate or avoid it. The underlying cause lies in the truth of origin of suffering. It is this I want to spend some time on tonight.

Buddhists say our experiences are not created by some independent, omnipotent being with control over life on earth. All our experiences arise from our own actions and underlying thoughts. Our afflicted actions and unwholesome thoughts are the origin of our suffering. Between the two it is the negative psychological traits rather than what we do which are the real truth of origin of suffering.

How do we know it is thoughts rather than actions which are our biggest problem? We can know this from an example; if you have a viable seed, if it doesn't get warmth and moisture it will never sprout. The seed will be frozen in its potency. Similarly, how ever many actions we have performed and predispositions we have created, as long as they remain away from negative emotions they will not germinate into suffering. When we are unable to free our minds of unwholesome thoughts then, prompted by negative impulses we engage in actions and our thoughts actualize the conditions of a karmic seed so it will mature into suffering.

What kind of thought is regarded as an unwholesome thought? If when it arises in our mind the initial neutral tranquility of the mind is ruffled then it is a disturbing thought/a delusion. Our mind becomes agitated and highly reactive. Unwholesome negative thoughts are negative mental factors, not main minds, but factors which are underlying currents prompting various actions. How do we know that negative mental factors agitate our mind? This can be known by comparing how we felt before desire, jealousy, anger came to mind – what was our mind like? How did we feel inside after their arisal? Is there peace and serenity or what? You can compare the two states before a negative thought has arisen and after it has subsided. You can experience which was the more peaceful. Clearly these unwholesome thoughts were not peaceful, but disruptive.

Once a negative thought of desire or whatever subsides and you look back at how you felt before it, clarity will dawn and you'll be able to objectively observe the two experiences and you'll be able to observe that the mind was at ease beforehand. Mind lost control of itself and it was agitated under the sway of negative thought. If we can know the mind loses serenity when an unwholesome thought becomes active, we can easily deduce that even when a subtle psychic impulse crops up; even though it may not be as strong as the previous one it is still disturbing for the mind. Negative impulses, unwholesome thoughts, "delusions", cause loss of peace of mind for as long as they last. Ordinary life is never far from these negative impulses. They are just waiting in a dormant state because they have not been severed at the root.

Truth of Origin of suffering. It is done under four sections:

- 1) Identifying what delusions or negative thoughts are
- 2) How they arise
- 3) Underlying causes of negativities
- 4) Drawbacks of negative thoughts

1) You can *identify* them as:

Three poisons of mind

The six root delusions/ negativities

Ten: five views and five non-views.

The three poisons are desire, hatred and ignorance. **Desire, the first poison of mind**, is an unwholesome thought which looks at a contaminated phenomenon. When mind is attached to a person or thing, it is hard to take mind off the object.

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Desire percolates into the mind, like pouring oil onto cloth and it is very hard then to separate the two. Desire penetrates into the objects it seeks unlike other negative thoughts which are just affixed onto their object like a stamp on a letter.

Desire is pervasive and has three types. Firstly there is desire for the desire realm, i.e. you develop attraction to things in the desire realm and not the form or formless realms. Secondly your desire is for things within the entire realm of mundane existence (desire, form and formless realms). Thirdly there is desire for the transitory (collection) i.e. our body and mind, especially not wanting to be separated from our afflicted aggregates. Desire is chief of all negative thoughts, a delusional idea that objects are worth pursuing. So desire really imprisons us in the cage of mundane existence. It is the worst of all negative thoughts.

If desire is our underlying problem, how can we counteract this distorted view? The first way is seeing the loathsomeness of objects of desire. For that we must meditate on how these objects of desire really are. Under the skin what is desirable? The body has many parts wrapped up in skin. If we take the skin away what is desirable about the body? This is not to undermine the value of the human body but to curb excessive attraction towards it.

This is however only a temporary fix. The second way is to understand the emptiness of inherent nature of the person who feels desire for things. **Desire is the first of the six root delusions.**

Hatred is the second poison of mind and the second root delusion. It is a mental factor;- an aspect of mind which is highly malicious, destructive and violent, wanting to inflict pain on its object. Anger and hatred can be toward the animate and the inanimate. It is developed towards objects that are perceived to be unattractive. When anger develops it blinds our perspective. Unlike any other negative thought it is the most destructive. A flash can consume a painstakingly accumulated store of merits in an instant. It can cause a rebirth in one of the three lower realms of existence.

Anger is highly disruptive and it robs your peace of mind. Temporarily it can be overcome by the practice of tolerance and patience and by cultivating true love for people. It can only be addressed permanently by seeing the emptiness of inherent nature of the object of anger and the person with anger.

Pride or haughtiness or arrogance is the third root delusion. It is a mental factor which observes again, mundane contaminated phenomena, like ones body and so on, which gives one a superiority complex. Mind becomes inflated with ungrounded pride. What is the immediate problem with pride? We achieve stagnancy due to feeling better than others. No fresh effort is made for higher growth. One rests on a plateau.

How can this pride be addressed? It is developed due to perceived superiority in knowledge, education, physique or whatever. Ask those inflated with pride to look at their own human body, how much do they actually know of what makes them up? Not much usually, so this would deflate them. Being knowledgeable about one area is not the same as omniscience. How much more do we not know about? Haughtiness will be put pride in its proper place.

Ignorance or unawareness (ma.rig.pa) is the fourth root delusion. There are two types. Great Buddhist scholars like Chandrakirti and Dharmakirti hold that the view of transitory collection of body and mind and ignorance are one and the same. Two others, Asanga and Vasubandu, distinguish between the view of transitory collection and ignorance. This clear difference between the two is clearly distinguished by Asanga. His scenario is that it is twilight and you are walking somewhere. You become startled because you think you see a snake. Actually it is a striped coiled rope which you mistake for a snake. There are reasons for this;- it was twilight and not seeing clearly you mistook the rope for a snake. You developed a distorted awareness. Similarly ignorance is like twilight. It clouds our mind; based on such ignorance we develop a distortion. We have a distorted perspective about who we actually are in relation to our own body and mind, to ourself. This is called the view of transitory collection.

This is what Asanga and his brother, Vasubandu, said. But according to Chandrakirti there is no distinction between ignorance and the view of transitory collection of the physio-psychological components which are the basis of our person. He says they are one and the same thing. Ignorance is said to be ignorance for it veils our mind from seeing the true underlying nature of our person and other things. Ignorance means to consider that one as a person exists inherently in and of ourself independently of a body or mind. That idea veils us from seeing the absence of such a mode of existence. How is that different from the view of transitory collection?

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The view of transitory collection looks at our person and possessions, mainly our body and mind, and views them as having innate intrinsic nature. It is no different from the perspective ignorance has. Therefore there is no difference between transient body and mind and ignorance. We as a person have one part matter and four parts psychological components.

How do we address the problem about ignorance that makes us believe things have a self-existent independent nature? We cultivate a perspective diametrically opposed to how ignorance views things, a fresh paradigm.

Deluded doubt is the next root delusion. It can be of three types—

- 1) Doubt about the three jewels as valid guides on the path to freedom.
- 2) Doubt about existence and cooperation of four noble truths.
- 3) Doubt about law of causation, cause and effect.

Doubt is wavering between two points- not being able to come to a firm, decisive conclusion. E.g. we hear a discourse on four noble truths and while most people believe they are teachings of the Buddha. If one has deluded doubt one sits on the fence about this. By hearing a vast body of teaching we can remove that.

Deluded View is the sixth root delusion. Not a correct, liberating view. There are five –

- 1) Transient view/jigta – seeing transient collection of body and mind as existent from its own side.
- 2) Extreme view
- 3) Distorted view
- 4) My View is Best/better
- 5) My/our way of life and my/our way of practice is better than anyone else's

As you can recall we have been talking about the Truth of Origin of Suffering. Delusions are more significant than karma because delusions come first. Delusions were identified under the four headings.

How do delusions arise and what are their causes and the drawbacks of delusions?

Disturbing emotions and negative psychological traits are considered our real enemies. Why do we call anybody our enemy? We label people enemies because they afflict pain on us. Negative emotions are far worse than conventional human enemies, because with a human enemy the relationship can change with a change in circumstances in life. Later you can become friends. If you remain kind towards the enemy showing a positive gesture again and again eventually both your hearts warm up and friendship develops.

With negative emotions if we nourish and give in to them they become stronger and afflict us even more. They never change no matter what one does. Any kind gesture towards them only strengthens them, then we receive more pain at their hands.

The worst a human enemy can do is put an end to your life. They are never able to harm your future prospects, but disturbing emotions only ever inflict pain year in and year out whenever they arise, robbing us of our psychological wellbeing and peace. Giving in to them, we act non-virtuously and that negative karma will create results we will have to experience.

One upside of negative thoughts as opposed to human enemies is that if we ever succeed in eradicating them they are permanently overcome, never to return in the future. They will leave you in peace. This is not the case with human enemies. You may defeat them, rout them, but they can gather forces and wage another attack. Even if you offer conciliatory gestures they can return to harm you. That is their downside.

It is considered vital to identify delusions and see their downside and therefore not cultivate them but keep them at bay.

Next Monday I will discuss negative emotions again, their causes and how they arise. We have a lot to cover in this area.