

The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment
(Lam Rim Han Mo)
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How the afflictions arise

Karma and the afflictions are both necessary as causes for the creation of cyclic existence, but *the afflictions are primary*. For, just as a seed without moisture, soil, etc. will not produce a sprout, so in the absence of afflictions – even though you have accumulated immeasurable karma in the past – there will be no sprout of suffering because the karma lacks the necessary cooperating conditions. A further reason afflictions are primary is because – even without previously accumulated karma – if afflictions are present, you immediately accumulate new karma, and will thereby appropriate aggregates in the future. Similarly, Dharmakirti’s *Commentary on the “Compendium of valid Cognition”* says:

The karma of one who has transcended craving for existence
Lacks the potency to project another birth
Because its cooperating conditions are gone.

and also:

because the aggregates will arise again, if you have craving.

Consequently, it is very important to rely on a remedy for the afflictions. Moreover, since this requires understanding the afflictions, you should become knowledgeable about the afflictions. There are four parts to this:

1. Identifying the afflictions
2. The order in which they arise
3. The causes of the afflictions
4. The faults of the afflictions

Identifying the afflictions

Asanga’s *Compendium of Knowledge* gives a general definition of an affliction:

An affliction is defined as a phenomenon that, when it arises, is disturbing in character and that, through arising, disturbs the mind-stream.

Thus, when it is produced, it disturbs the mind-stream.

The specific definitions of the ten afflictions are as follows:

1) *Attachment* means noticing a pleasant or attractive external or internal object and desiring it. When attachment clings to its object and grows stronger, it is hard to tear yourself away from the object, just as it is difficult to remove oil which has soaked into a cloth.

2) *Hostility* means observing origins of suffering – such as living beings, pain, weapons, or thorns – and giving rise to a harsh, tormented mind that contemplates harming these objects.

3) *Pride* means observing – either internally or externally – qualities that are high, low, good, or bad, and, based on the reifying view of the perishing aggregates, allowing your mind to become inflated; you assume an aspect of superiority.

4) *Ignorance* means possessing the affliction of misunderstanding on account of a mind that is unclear about the nature of the four truths, karma and its effects, and the three jewels

5) *Doubt* means considering those three – the four truths, karma and its effects, and the three jewels – and being uncertain whether they exist or are real.

6) *The reifying view of the perishing aggregates* is an afflictive intelligence that observes the appropriated aggregates and regards them as “I” or “mine,” that is, as the self or that which belongs to the self. Here, since “perishing” means impermanent and “aggregates” is plural, the terms indicate that what are apprehended are simply impermanent and multiple phenomena; *there is no permanent and unitary person*. This is why it is called “the view of the perishing aggregates.”

7) *An extremist view* is an afflictive intelligence that observes the self as apprehended by the *view of the perishing aggregates* and regards that self either as permanent and eternal or as subject to annihilation in such a way that there will be no rebirth from this life into a future life.

8) *A belief in the supremacy of wrong views* is an afflictive intelligence that observes *one of the three views – the view of the perishing aggregates, an extremist view, and a wrong view* – along with a view-holder’s aggregates on the basis of which such a view occurs, and regards such a view as supreme.

9) *A belief in the supremacy of ethics and religious discipline* is an *afflictive intelligence* which observes an ethical discipline that renounces faulty ethical discipline, or a religious discipline which requires certain forms of dress, manner, speech, and physical behavior, as well as the mental and physical aggregates on the basis of which these forms of ethics and asceticism occur, and regards them as cleansing you of sin, freeing you from afflictions, and removing you from cyclic existence.

10) *Wrong view* is an *afflictive intelligence* that *denies the existence of things such as past and future lives or karma and its effects, or that believes that the cause of living beings is a divine creator or a primal essence, etc.*

I have explained these ten afflictions in accordance with the *Compendium of Knowledge* and *Levels of Yogic Deeds* and with Vasubandhu's *Explanation of the Five Aggregates* (*Pañca-skandha-prakarana*).

The order in which the afflictions arise

One way to look at this is to consider ignorance as distinct from the view of the perishing aggregates. For example, when twilight falls on a coiled rope, its status as a rope will be unclear and someone may imagine that it is a snake. Similarly, according to this view, *the misapprehension of the aggregates as a self arises due to the darkness of ignorance, which prevents clarity about how the aggregates exist.* The other afflictions then develop from this misapprehension. On the other hand, if you hold that ignorance and the view of the perishing aggregates are identical, then the view of the perishing aggregates is itself the root of the afflictions.

When the view of the perishing aggregates apprehends a self, discrimination arises between self and other. Once you have made that distinction, you become attached to what is associated with yourself and hostile toward that which pertains to others. As you observe the self, your mind also becomes inflated. You develop a belief that this very self is either eternal or subject to annihilation. You come to believe in the supremacy of a view of the self and the like, and you also come to believe in the supremacy of the detrimental practices associated with such views. Similarly, you develop the wrong view that denies the existence of things such as the Teacher who taught selflessness and that which he taught – karma and its effects, the four truths, the three jewels, and so forth; or else you become doubtful as to whether such things exist or are real. Dharmakirti's *Commentary on the "Compendium of Valid Cognition"*:

Once there is a self, there is an idea of an other.
On behalf of self and other, there is attachment and hostility.
All of the faults come about
In association with these.

The causes of the afflictions

These are six fold as presented in the *Bodhisattva Levels*:

- 1) *Basis* refers to the latent proclivity for afflictions.
- 2) *Object* refers to the appearance of objects conducive to the arising of an affliction.
- 3) *Social context* refers to the influence of bad friends and foolish people.
- 4) *Explanation* refers to listening to wrong teachings.
- 5) *Habituation* refers to the process of becoming accustomed to past afflictions.

6) *Attention* refers to incorrect attention that *projects* “pleasantness” onto what has an unpleasant character, conceives an impermanent thing to be permanent, and the like [the four erroneous conceptions that mistakenly consider things that are actually impermanent, painful, impure and lacking a self to be permanent, pleasant, pure and possessed of a self].