

MEDITATION ON IMPERMANENCE



This text is published as part of the Nitartha Institute study program directed by Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche.

Commentary

Commentary on The Wheel of Analytical Meditation of the Detailed Examination, The Complete Purification of the Activity of Mind

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Root Text

The Wheel of Analytical Meditation of the Detailed Examination, The Complete Purification of the Activity of Mind

by Ju Mipham Rinpoche. © 2014 Khenpo Gawang and Gerry Wiener. Translated by Khenpo Gawang and Gerry Wiener.

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First Draft Edition

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An excerpt from
Commentary on
THE WHEEL OF
ANALYTICAL MEDITATION
OF DETAILED EXAMINATION
The Complete Purification of the Activity of Mind

Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche

Oral Translation by Tyler Dewar

Root Text Translation by Gerry Wiener

2012 & 2013 Nitārtha Institute

Our first meditation was the analysis of the nature of uncleanness and repulsiveness.

For our second meditation, we did an analysis of multiplicity. Impermanence is the third focus of our analytical meditation.

Lama Mipham says:

***Furthermore, the unclean skandha of form
And the other skandhas without essence,***

We have already done a thorough investigation and analysis of uncleanness, and now Lama Mipham is shifting the focus to impermanence. This form that has already been thoroughly investigated and analyzed as unclean, he is also saying in essence is impermanent. It does not have an essence. It does not have a substantial pith. It does not have any core that is truly existent or truly real. It does not have any core that exists as a single thing. It is of the nature of multiplicity. We also did that analysis earlier that led up to partless particles.

About these five skandhas that do not have a substantial pith or core, Lama Mipham says:

***Having arisen, they do not remain and in an instant
Fall apart—thus, contemplate clearly.***

The nature of these skandhas that we have been analyzing is not just limited to being unclean, nor is it limited to being of the nature of suffering. Those could be the sole nature of the skandhas if it were the case that something remained as an unclean entity or as an entity of the nature of suffering, without changing, but that is not the case. When Lama Mipham says “having arisen, they do not remain,” he is saying that these skandhas are also of the nature of impermanence.

The object arises due to the coming together of many interdependent causes and conditions, but it does not stay in the same way that it arose. It does not stay in the same form in which it arose. It dissolves in the very next moment, and this is our biggest hardship: it changes.

Even if you do not mind being unclean or being in the nature of multiplicity, the problem here is that they do not stay. If you become attached to repulsiveness, then you can examine the object of your attachment and find that it does not remain. It is not there in the second moment. The object that we are attached to now does not exist in the next moment. The object of attachment is always changing. It is impermanent. The object arises due to the coming together of many interdependent causes and conditions, but it does not

stay in the same way that it arose. It does not stay in the same form in which it arose. It dissolves in the very next moment, and this is our biggest hardship: it changes. It changes in the very next moment. In one moment, there is a great person who likes us a lot, but in the second moment that could all change. Nothing stays the same.



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Disintegration

That's the problem: nothing stays the same. Even though we begin to appreciate the filthiness and multiplicity of our skandhas and the skandhas of other beings, the problem is the moment we accept it, they have already changed. The moment you decide to accept it, it is already gone. Phenomena dissolve from moment to moment. As the Buddhist texts on valid cognition say, such as Dharmakirti's Commentary on Valid Cognition, the disintegration of a thing does not depend on any outer causes. Disintegration happens naturally from moment to moment. This argument is called the reasoning of nondependence, because the disintegration of a thing does not need to depend upon other causes and conditions. In order to have faster disintegration, it depends on other things, but in general, the disintegration of our skandhas does not depend on any other causes. For example, our skin cells are dying in every moment. They disintegrate naturally, or in other words, they change naturally. The idea of change is a little bit easier to accept than the idea of disintegration, but the analogy is the same. So the skandhas are of the nature of disintegration. The consciousness skandha also disintegrates. We experience more forgetfulness all of the time.

*The five skandhas are of the nature
of continual disintegration*

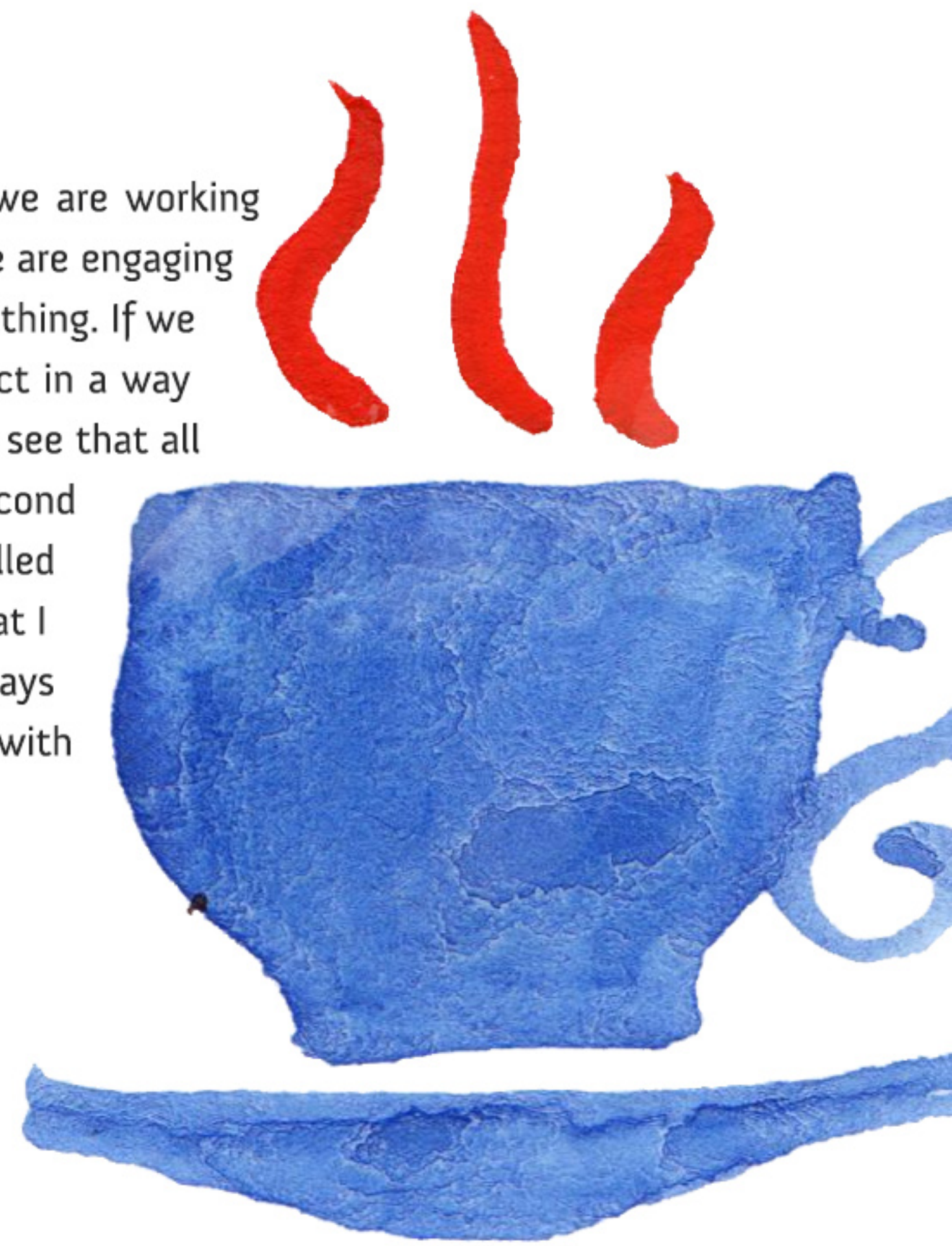
The five skandhas are of the nature of continual disintegration, and the impermanence of the skandhas are proven by two reasons in the valid cognition teachings. Disintegration itself is proved through two reasons in the valid cognition teaching. The first is called the reason of nondependence, which is the fact that the disintegration of a thing does not depend on outer causes and conditions. The second argument is called the argument of invalidation because our clinging to permanence, or apprehending the skandhas as permanent entities, is invalidated or harmed by our certainty that realizes their disintegrating nature. In short, if we analyze well through reasoning, we come to see that our skandhas are of the nature of arising and dissolution, or arising and disintegration. They are impermanent. Things that are present arise now, but they also cease now.

When we analyze the skandhas with reasoning, we find they are impermanent. They are of the nature of arising and ceasing, or arising and dissolution. What phenomenon is there that does not cease? The historical Buddha came to the world, but he also ceased. Even the genuine being Abraham Lincoln came to the world and then departed. I watched a TV show on Lincoln that said he was not assassinated, but in fact he killed himself when he saw how the Republican Party was going to turn out in the future. That may be a conspiracy theory, so I don't know what is true.

The last line in the verse says:

Fall apart—thus, contemplate clearly.

Here, “contemplate” is interchangeable with “analyze.” Whatever object we are working with, we try to contemplate and analyze that thing in our minds so that we are engaging the mind and object in a way that matches and harmonizes with the actual thing. If we are working with impermanence, we try to have our mind engage the object in a way that harmonizes with impermanence. When we analyze with reasoning, we see that all things arise and cease from moment to moment and do not remain for a second moment. That’s why I don’t get the name of the Canadian coffee shop called “Second Cup,” because it is always the first cup. When my mom tells me that I am drinking too much Coke, I say, “No, it is my first Coke.” Everything is always the first time. However, it might not be best to use this logic in conversation with your mother because it did not work for me.



Contemplate Clearly

When it comes to engaging in the core of the practice, the first stage is the analytical meditation on how the skandhas are of the nature of multiplicity. Furthermore, the skandhas are of the nature of suffering, so things are getting better and better, and if we engage in a thorough analysis of these five skandhas, we will also find that they are impermanent. The skandhas constantly change, and this is good news because it means there is no such thing as permanent suffering. Suffering is impermanent. There is one little hitch in this situation. Happiness is also impermanent. So that’s the bad news.



All that has previously come about in the world since beginningless time will disintegrate. “All the limitless occurrences” in the past could refer to previous lifetimes, which we talk about in Buddhism...

Analysis Of The Outer Environment

In an extensive analysis of impermanence, we can approach this topic on the basis of two categories: one is from the point of view of the outer environment that is the world, and the second is from the point of view of the inhabitants of this environment. Lama Mipham begins this discussion with an analysis of the outer environment. He says:

*All the limitless occurrences in the worlds of the past
Have come to dissolution.*

The Skandhas Are Impermanent

All that has previously come about in the world since beginningless time will disintegrate. “All the limitless occurrences” in the past could refer to previous lifetimes, which we talk about in Buddhism, or from a Western, scientific perspective, it could refer ●●●

... to what has happened to the universe over the course of billions of years, such as the different climatic eras and ages that the earth has gone through. People seem to have a lot of fondness for dinosaurs, but if dinosaurs lived today, we would not like them. In other words, we really like nonthings, but we do not like things very much.

From a Buddhist perspective, this refers to the sequence of our previous lifetimes. The mind and body we have right now are not only connected to the present; they are also strongly connected to our past lifetimes. For example, peacocks have many brightly colored feathers.

It is said in the Buddhist scriptures that each individual feather has its own individual cause from the past. In the same way that these individual feathers have their own individual causes, our skandhas and all the phenomena we experience at present have their own individual causes from the past. Moreover, what has previously occurred is limitless. It is without an end, from the perspective of the world as the external environment, as well as from the perspective of our own skandhas and the skandhas of others. If we perceive our present body, our present skandha of form, as being unclean and unattractive, it is no big deal, because we have already taken on a countless number of unattractive and unclean bodies.

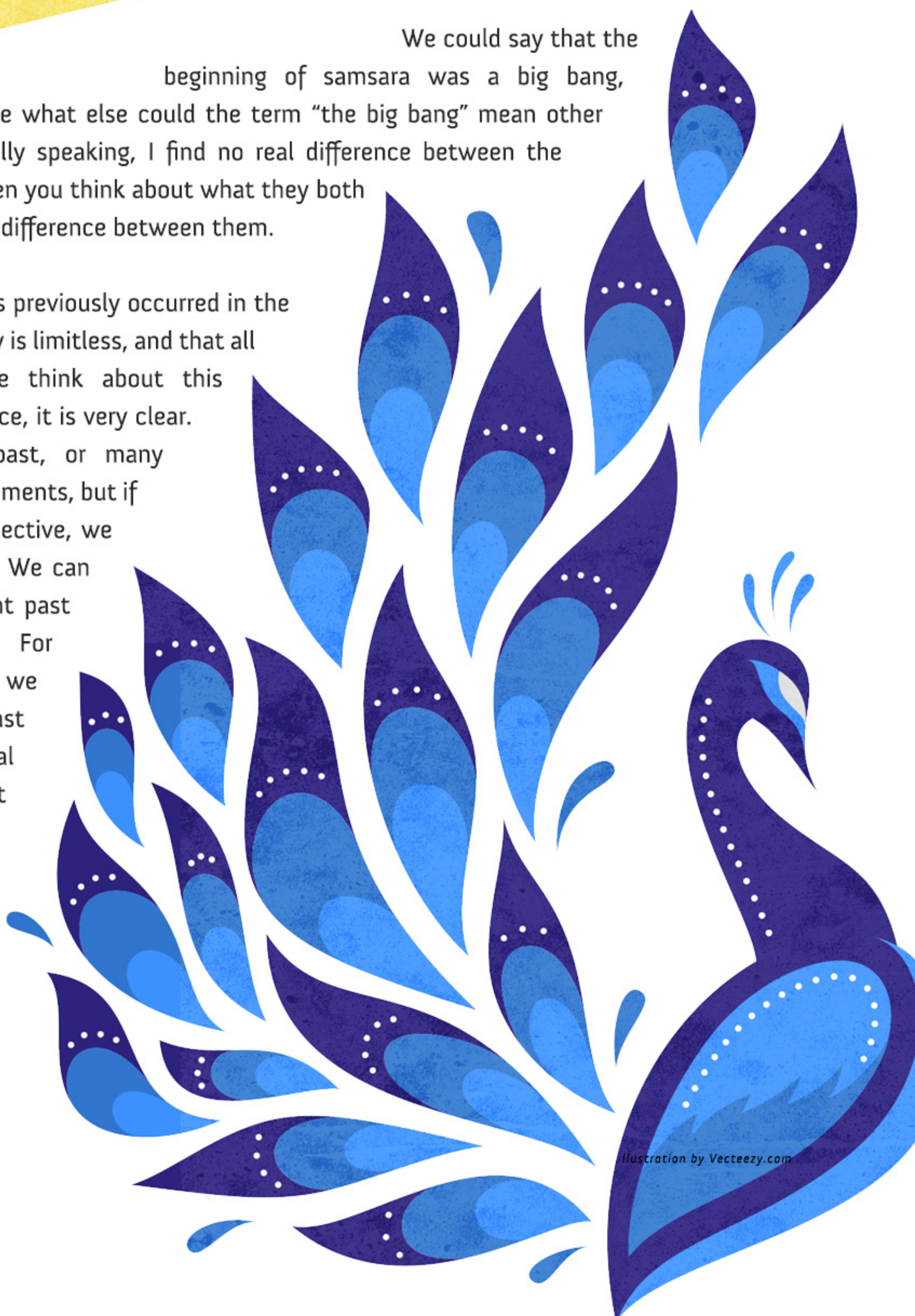
When we analyze the outer environment of the world, we see that it is without beginning. From the Buddhist perspective, in terms of the outer world, the beginning of our existence is beginningless.



From the Buddhist perspective, in terms of the outer world, the beginning of our existence is beginningless.

We could say that the beginning of samsara was a big bang, because what else could the term “the big bang” mean other than beginningless? Personally speaking, I find no real difference between the terms “the big bang” and “beginningless.” When you think about what they both point toward, there does not seem to be a big difference between them.

In brief, Lama Mipham is saying that what has previously occurred in the world is limitless, or what has arisen previously is limitless, and that all previous worlds have dissolved. When we think about this statement from the view of our own experience, it is very clear. There were many outer worlds in the past, or many appearances of different kinds of outer environments, but if we think about them from the present perspective, we can see that they have all dissolved already. We can think about outer environments of our recent past and reflect on how they have dissolved. For example, in the case of American governance, we can think about the administrations of past presidents and how those individual presidencies and the environment that went along with each presidency have dissolved. In this way, we see how the outer environment that is the world is also of the nature of disintegration and dissolution.



If you ask whether if it is just the past worlds and environments that are impermanent, the answer is no. Lama Mipham continues:

The same will be true for everything existing now and in the future.

The nature of conditioned phenomena is to cause grief.

In brief, the past, present, and future worlds are all of the nature of impermanence. They are all of the nature of disintegration and dissolution. As soon as an environment arises, it is already dissolving. One example of how all phenomena are of the nature of dissolution is health care. It sounded really great in the beginning, but it is dissolving fast. It is different now from what it was originally in the past.

How do we bring these truths of impermanence and dissolution in relation to the outer world into our reflection and meditation? The meditation process has two aspects: first, the coarse impermanence of the continuum, and second, the subtle impermanence of the basic nature.

Coarse Impermanence Of The Continuum

Let us look at how we analyze and contemplate the coarse impermanence of the continuum. We can think about the coarse impermanence of the continuum in four stages:

- (1) genesis, creation, or coming into being; (2) abiding;
- (3) disintegration; and (4) vacuity, absence, or emptiness.

1 Creation

The first stage is the creation and establishment of the environment or continuum. Whatever environment we are analyzing, it first has to be established. There are many detailed explanations of how environments come into being, both scientific and Buddhist. From the Buddhist perspective, we speak about how the four elements come into being and how an entire environment develops based on those four elements. The development of the environment starts with the lower foundation of the mandala of the wind element, and then from there, it builds into the detailed stages of the four elements. That is the stage of genesis or arising.

2 Abiding

Next stage is the middle stage of abiding. We can clearly observe the stage of abiding, for example, the stage of abiding our planet is currently in now. Abiding refers to a stage of continuous presence. Here, we bring this middle stage of uninterrupted abiding into our analysis.



...the past, present, and future worlds are all of the nature of impermanence. They are all of the nature of disintegration and dissolution.

3 Dissolution

Next we reflect on the stage of dissolution, or the way in which environments sequentially dissolve. The environment dissolves in a gradual manner, beginning with the melting of the ice and continuing onward. There is no escape from dissolution. As soon as something is born, it must dissolve. It is like the lighting of a candle. The lighting of the candle is the arising stage, because that is the beginning of it performing a function as a candle. However, from that very moment onward, you cannot stop it from dissolving with each passing moment. In the same way, as soon as our world comes into being, it must enter the process of dissolution. It does not matter whether people are living in that environment or not. The basic nature of the environment is that it will dissolve and disintegrate. It is uncertain to what degree human beings are accelerating this process of dissolution, but the dissolution itself and the fact that the dissolution will happen is something that we cannot escape. It is possible that we are speeding up the dissolution, but we cannot protect the environment completely from dissolution itself. If we analyze well with reasoning, we see that everything is subject to dissolution.



4 Emptiness

In sum, from a coarse perspective, the lifespan of a continuum has the stages of arising, abiding, and ceasing, and then at the end, there is absence, vacuity, or emptiness.

From a coarse perspective, the inhabitants of the environment go through the stages of birth, old age, sickness, and death. This is the irreversible nature of all inhabitants in the environment. We put all our hopes on ginseng to cure us of this situation, but it is not able to solve the problem. People in California placed their hope in the practice of rebirthing, but that did not accomplish their wishes either. Even people who do rebirthing die. It is really hard to counter the nature of impermanence. Through products, such as those made by Lancôme, we can temporarily deceive ourselves and others, but only for a limited amount of time. The actual state of one's face is the same in both instances: before you apply the makeup and after you apply the makeup. It is hard to trick impermanence in the end. Therefore, all things are of the nature of disintegration.

Mistaking the Coarse Impermanence of the Continuum for Permanence

What happens is that we mistake the coarse impermanence of the continuum for a permanent entity, and because of this mistake all kinds of mistaken appearances arise to us. Here, we analyze the continuum with reasoning to find out that it is not a permanent entity; rather, it is simply a collection of moments that pass through the phases of arising, abiding, disintegration, and vacuity, both in the case of the environment and in the birth, old age, sickness, and death of sentient beings.

We rely on our analysis of reasoning and logic as a method to break down our misconceptions about these continuums. The basic confusion that we are dismantling here is our clinging to the continuum as permanent. If we do a thorough analytical meditation on the coarse impermanence of the continuum, we can reverse this confusion and mistakenness.

Subtle Impermanence Of The Basic Nature

The second type of impermanence is the subtle impermanence of the basic nature. Subtle impermanence means that any given phenomenon arises from moment to moment and does not remain for a second moment. Furthermore, its dissolution does not depend on any other causes and conditions; rather, it bears the nature of disintegration. It dissolves all by itself. It destroys itself.

Therefore, the skandhas do not need to depend on any other cause in order to dissolve. Once a thing arises in the first moment, there is no portion of that thing that remains for the second moment. It has already dissolved. Our misconception is that the thing of the first moment is present in the second moment. We think to ourselves that the continuity of the thing is present in the second moment, but that is our confusion. In reality, the first moment has already ceased.

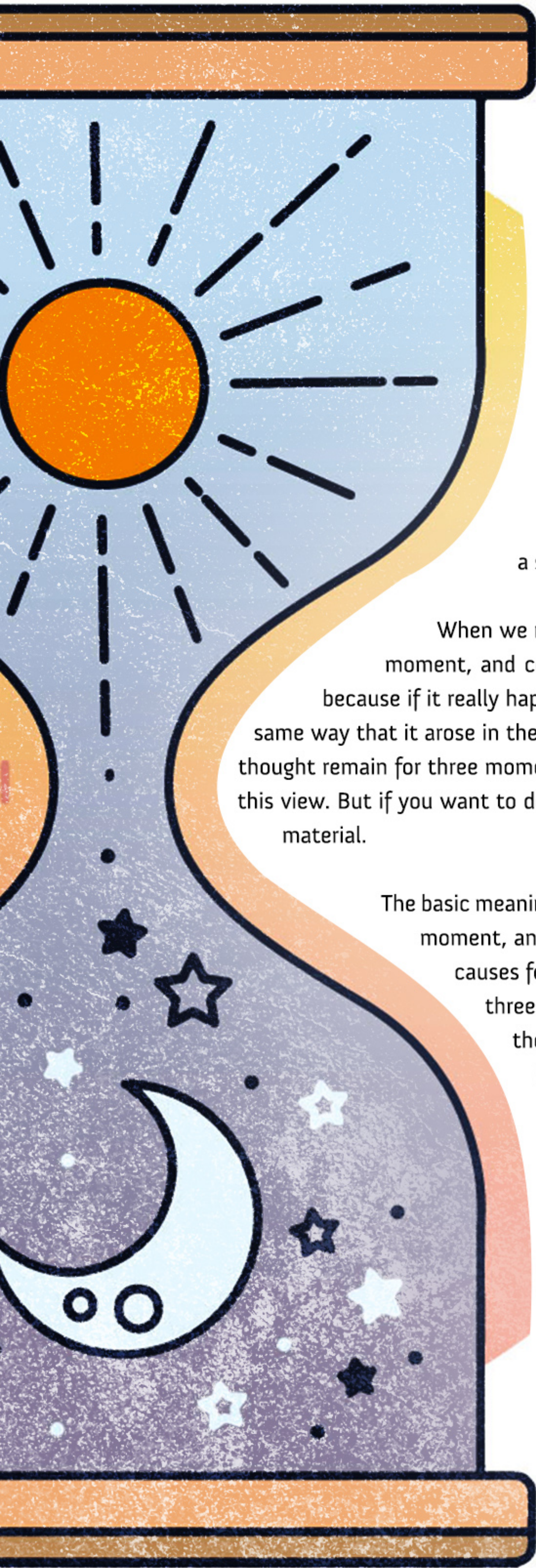
From the perspective of subtle impermanence, it is actually a misconception, because there is no thing that remains. Since the thing that arose in the first moment has already ceased, what is left to remain in the second moment? Nothing is there. If nothing remains, then where do we get the idea of the cessation happening in the third moment? Therefore, thinking that something arises in the first moment, remains in the second moment, and ceases in the third moment is contradictory to the way things are. It is contradictory to the actual reality of impermanence. It is an instance of incorrect mental activity.

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... thinking that something arises in the first moment, remains in the second moment, and ceases in the third moment is contradictory to the way things are.

It is not present in the second moment. Thinking it remains in the second moment is how we cling to permanence, because in reality the thing has ceased. Thinking of impermanence as a process that entails arising in the first moment, abiding in the second moment, and cessation in the third moment is not a contemplation of subtle impermanence. It is a coarse way of thinking about impermanence.

In the context of this subtle analysis, the three-moment model of impermanence is misconception, or wrong thought. When we really look at it, we see that what is there in the first moment is not there at all in the second moment. By the time the second moment comes around, the first-moment phenomenon has ceased, and that cessation does not depend on any other causes. From the moment it arises, it ceases, and this dissolution does not need to depend on any other causes. During the second moment, the phenomenon from the first moment has already ceased. Since it is not there, how can it abide in the second moment?



I am not refuting Mahamudra here. I am just explaining the reality of impermanence. Since the phenomenon from the first moment has ceased and there is nothing in the second moment that can be called an abiding phenomenon—such a thing does not exist—there is no need to talk about whether there is something that could cease in the third moment. If you meditate on impermanence by thinking that something arises in the first moment, abides in the second moment, and ceases in the third moment, it will be a meditation based on wrong thoughts. It will be a misconception. It will be an internally contradictory meditation. It will be a conceptual meditation based on thoughts that do not harmonize with reality. Once the thing from the first moment ceases and the second moment comes along, the thing from the first moment is utterly absent. It is utterly gone. Even if a hundred moments follow, they are simply moments of phenomena arising and ceasing in each moment. There is no such thing as a single continuum present as an entity.

When we really look at this idea of arising in the first moment, abiding in the second moment, and ceasing in the third moment, we can see that it has many internal flaws, because if it really happened that way, then the fourth moment would have to arise again in the same way that it arose in the first moment. We can also look at our thoughts and ask, “Does any single thought remain for three moments?” If we think about this clearly, we will see there is no reason to hold this view. But if you want to do a baseless meditation without any reason behind it, then you have good material.

The basic meaning of the subtle impermanence of the basic nature is that things arise in one moment, and in the very same moment they dissolve without depending on any other causes for that dissolution. They dissolve naturally, and so there is no framework of three moments or four moments or whatever. Just like a human being, as soon as they are born, we know that they will die. We do not have to kill them. Shantideva says in the Way of the Bodhisattva that you do not need to kill your enemies because one day they will die all by themselves. Maybe they will kill themselves. So dissolution does not depend on other causes.

If we have a thing that has a hundred moments that are similar to one another, even though these moments might occur one after the other in an uninterrupted succession, it is still just a series of individual moments in which a thing arises in that moment and ceases in that moment, and that’s all there is. If you ask whether it possible for moments of a similar type to arise after that, the answer is yes, it is possible for moments of a similar type to arise. But if you ask whether this is an actual continuity of something from one moment to the next, the exact same thing, then the answer is no.



There is no exact replica that transfers from one moment to the next. Since that is the case, there is no such continuity that houses the same thing. Therefore, clinging onto a continuum as being a single entity is a misconception. You can even see this even if you just compare two moments of a continuum. They are not the same thing, and taking them to be the same thing is a wrong view. We experience much suffering based on these wrong views.

When something arises in one moment and does not remain for a second moment, when there is nothing that remains in the second moment from the first moment, and when this process of dissolution does not depend on other causes, but happens just by the nature of the thing itself, this is what we refer to as dissolution or the impermanent nature of reality. This is the way we need to contemplate when we meditate on the subtle impermanence of the basic nature.


Becoming Familiar With Certainty

As we have discussed, the mind of inquisitiveness and investigation, the aspect of genuine quest and exploration, is the preliminary practice.

Second is the actual practice of analysis, the thorough and deep analysis of subject and object. The sense of inquisitiveness and desire to know leads us to a deeper sense of analysis, and from inquisitiveness and analysis comes a special kind of certainty. It is special because it is a certainty that does not rely on others, but arises from one's own prajna, one's own intelligence. Forms of certainty that depend on others are not special types of certainty. Another person can change your mind. Today, someone gives you certainty on the basis of his or her investigation and analysis and tells you that everything is mind only, and then after a few months that person changes his or her mind and says it is emptiness, not mind only. Then you are screwed. That is what happens when certainty depends on others. The certainty we are looking for here is the certainty that arises through our own power, a nondependent certainty.

Giving rise to this special certainty depends on going through the two stages of the inquisitive mind as the preliminary practice and the deep analysis as the main practice, and then when that special certainty arises, we rest within it. Resting within special certainty is the way that we become familiar with it. Becoming familiar with certainty is meditation. As Milarepa said, "It is not meditation; it is familiarization." What do we become familiar with? We become familiar with certainty. When certainty arises, we do not need to start analyzing again. Doing extra analysis is not only a waste of time and prajna, if we keep on analyzing even after certainty arises, it is a gateway for the development of corrupt prajna. So when certainty arises the instruction is to rest and to meditate.

Illustration by Vecteezy.com



If we do not meditate when certainty arises, our prajna will become twisted and corrupt. If that type of corrupt and phony prajna is allowed to develop, then instead of benefiting you, which is the purpose of prajna, it becomes a source of harm to yourself. Not only will this prajna not serve as a cause for accomplishing the steps of liberation and omniscience, it will also serve as a cause for the re-arising of many types of confused appearances. That is why it is so important for us to rest when certainty arises and sustain the continuity of that resting. This is the time you need to relax and just sit. You worked so hard to get there, so when you get it, you deserve to relax, especially those of you with Protestant backgrounds. Do not worry and do not think about whether you deserve to relax, because you do deserve it. This is how we rest. We need to rest in a relaxed way. When certainty arises, it is easy to rest, but how do you sustain the continuity of the certainty that you are resting in? You sustain it with mindfulness, which is of the nature of recollection. You recall the certainty you gave rise to again and again.

The Impermanence Of The Inhabitants Of The Environment

We have been discussing Lama Mipham's presentation of the external environment as impermanent, but we do not need to have a thorough presentation of this topic because you have all been studying impermanence. Beginning with your studies of Collected Topics on upward, you have done a lot of investigation as to the relationship between produced phenomena, impermanent phenomena, and so on. You have also worked with reasoning in debate, such as "Sound is impermanent, because it is produced." Therefore, we do not need an extensive explanation of impermanence here.

Next is the topic of the impermanence of the inhabitants of the environment. Lama Mipham says:

*All beings will certainly die,
And death comes suddenly, without warning.*

All sentient beings, whether they are of a high status, a low status, or a middle status, will certainly die. Those who have a lot of wealth have no means to avert death; therefore what need is there to mention the lack of means of those who have no wealth to avert death? No matter how many possessions you have or how much wealth and enjoyment you have, no one has found a method to avoid death or become free of death. We tried our best with ginseng, but it did not work.

We rely on all kinds of methods and techniques, whether they are scientific or religious or spiritual. How many long-life empowerments have you received from the spiritual point of view? For me, it is countless. I don't even remember how many long-life empowerments I have received. From the religious point of view, we believe in this and we believe in that. We have many religious beliefs. From the scientific point of view, we invest billions of dollars in scientific research, but still we have not found a way to escape death. There are really nice stories about long-life empowerments saving people from death and so forth, but the people who wrote them died. I am not a fan of long-life empowerments. If it was a nine hundred old guy telling me about it, then of course I would go for it. Whether it is Chinese ginseng, American ginseng, a Tibetan long-life empowerment pill, and so on, nothing can help us to escape the reality of death. I think the long-life empowerment is a little bit like a sugar pill. It is a placebo. It helps you, and it also helps me to make some money, so it helps both of us to feel good. Even people who have great power and strength die. It does not matter whether they are kings, queens, or gurus. Parents die and children die. All sentient beings will certainly die. Death is certain. There are a lot of things in life that are not certain, like who will win the election in November, but death is the one thing that is certain. We do not need a lot of analysis to reach this conclusion, because it is something we see and understand already.

While death is certain, the causes of our death are uncertain, and the time of our death is uncertain. Most beings die suddenly. No one makes plans for death, except in the Mayan calendar, where they actually say that they have run out of space to write. Our calendars do not tell us when we are going to die, so it is not so predictable when we will die, whether we are a guru or any other type of person. There is no predictable pattern that says old people will die before young people.

Analysis Is The Activity Of The Mental Consciousness

For this reason, Lama Mipham says:

*All these appearances of cyclic existence
Are subject to circumstance and change—
contemplate this.*

"Contemplate this" means to do analytical meditation on this. It is important to do analysis about the impermanence of the outer environment of the world and the inner inhabitants who are sentient beings.

Analysis is mainly the activity of the sixth consciousness. The eye consciousness already sees change. It sees the change of seasons and so on. Our ear consciousness is also aware of change in the world of sound, but these awarenesses of the sense consciousnesses are not taught to be important in this context. In this context, it is important to do analysis within the sixth consciousness, the mental consciousness. Why is this the case? The reason is because all of our clinging to permanence, all of our wrong views, and all of our fixation and grasping happen within the sixth consciousness, the mental consciousness. That is what causes us to suffer and go through so many hardships.

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Those things do not happen within the five sense consciousnesses. The eye consciousness sees forms, but beyond that it does not engage in any thoughts about the forms or labeling of the forms or fixation and clinging in relation to the forms. Just as the forms that the eye consciousness perceives change from moment to moment, the eye consciousness too is very adaptable and malleable. It also changes from moment to moment freely without any sense of fixation or clinging. The five sense consciousnesses are the same in this regard, whether it is the ear consciousness, the nose consciousness, or what have you. The problems originate within the conceptual aspect of the sixth consciousness.

The mind of clinging to permanence, the mind of self-fixation, and so on arise within the sixth consciousness, so we engage in analytical meditation as an antidote to dismantle the forms of fixation that occurs in the sixth consciousness. That is why we direct all of our analytical meditation to the sixth consciousness. You can do analytical meditation on the basis of the sense consciousnesses, but analytical meditation is mainly directed toward the mental consciousness. That is why one of the first lines tells us “Whenever there is an object of particular attachment / Envision it clearly in your mind.” You need to meditate on it just as if you were practicing the creation stage.

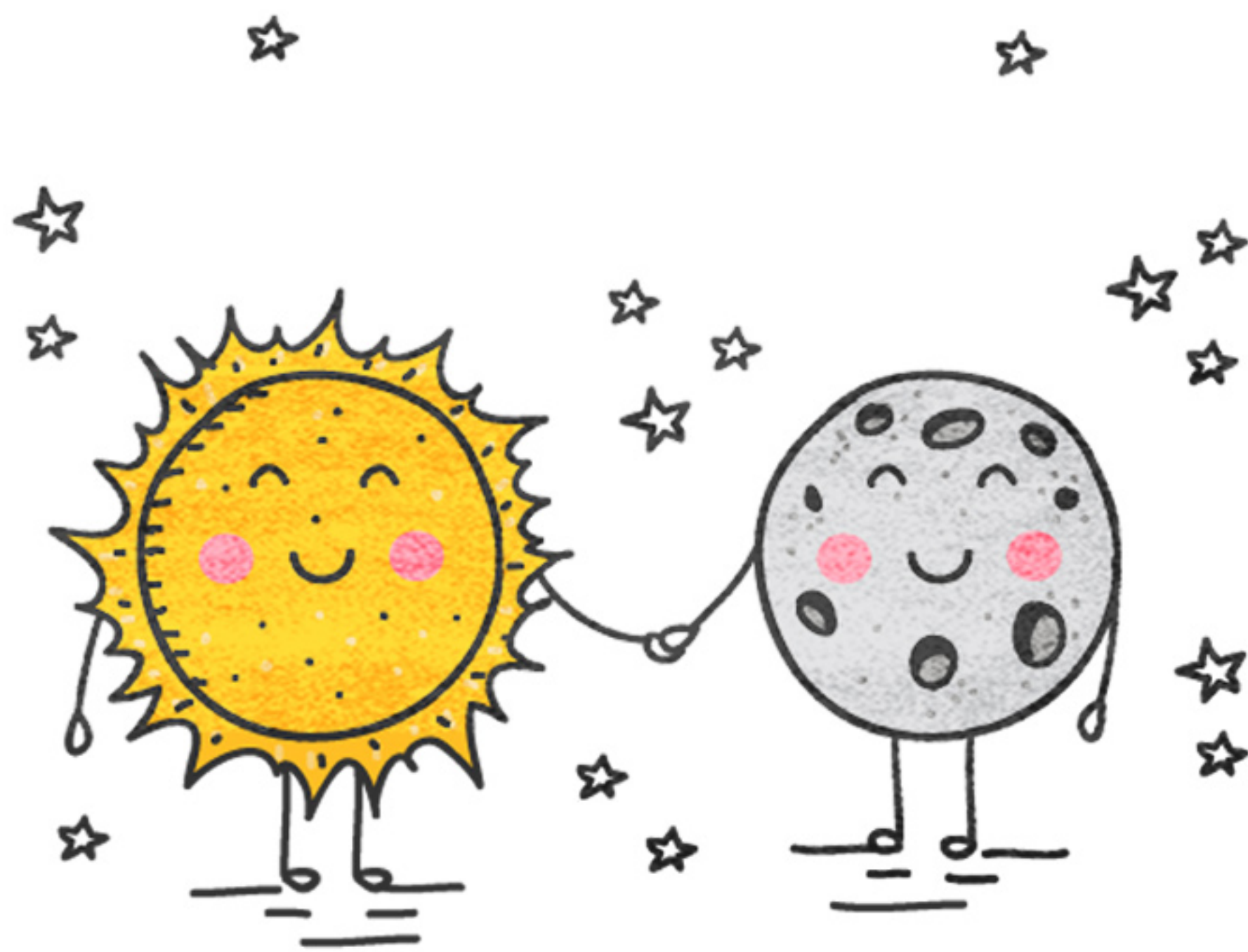
You need to cause the image of the object to arise very clearly within the sixth consciousness. Just looking at an object of your attachment is not enough, because your eye consciousness does not generate clinging to permanence and self-fixation. We give rise to the image of this object clearly in our mind, because it is our mental consciousness that engages in the clinging to permanence, fixation, and wrong views.

Lama Mipham says “Contemplate this” because we need to bring the outer environment and the inner inhabitants clearly to mind, meditate on them, and do an analysis of impermanence in relation to these objects. If we are going to have a full and complete analysis that we can bring to its conclusion, then we have to meditate in this way.



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Summary Of Impermanence

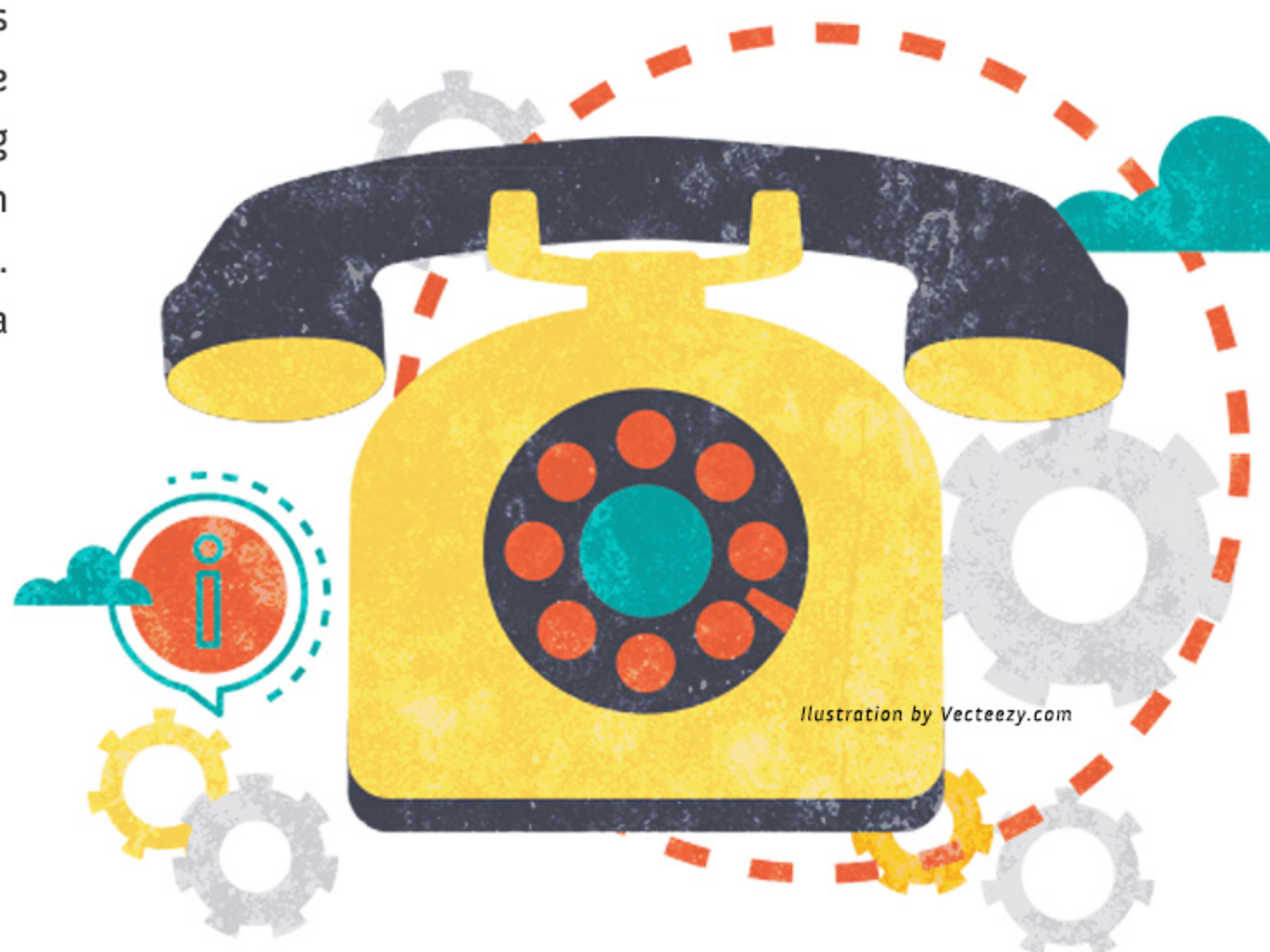
Previously in the text we looked at Lama Mipham's segue into the topic of impermanence. Then we looked at his extensive explanation of impermanence on the basis of the outer environment and the inner inhabitants. Next we have the concluding summary. He says:

*In summary, contemplate stage by stage with clear intellect
The countless types of impermanent formations
In accord with your own ability.*

In brief, whatever is produced through the coming together of causes and conditions is impermanent. Whatever things arise in this way and whatever aspect they take on, whether it be an outer object or an inner mind, we should analyze each and every one as best we can, according to our mental capacity.

"Contemplating stage by stage with clear intellect" means that we generate an image of the object that we are contemplating clearly in the sixth consciousness. Having given rise to that image clearly in our mind, we then engage in a progressive sequence of analysis of that object. For the meditation on impermanence, we first give rise to a clear image in our mind of the object of attachment.

It could be our own body, or it could be anything that we are attached to. It is interesting, even conceptually speaking, that all the objects we experience in everyday life change all of the time, such as our iPhones, our Blackberries, and our wallets. Fashion is another good example. It changes every season. The fact of the matter is that things change all of the time, and that change is what we call impermanence. Thinking about outer objects in this way, we can see that they are in constant change. Inner sentient beings are also always changing. All conditioned and compounded phenomena are impermanent. They talk about the four ends of conditioned phenomena, the end of being high is being low, the end of accumulating is exhaustion, the end of being together is parting, and the end of birth is dying. An example of the end of being high is being low is bungee jumping. One moment you are very high and the next moment you are absolutely low, fighting for your life! In sum, everything is impermanent. All things change from moment to moment. There is nothing that does not change. The clock is always changing. The sun constantly moves. Nothing stays stagnant. The good thing about it is that everything is fresh. Nothing is stale. Nothing stays the same.



Lama Mipham gives an example:

*Whenever a skandha, the object of attachment, arises,
See it as transitory
Like lightning, water bubbles or clouds.
Contemplate in the above manner while
The continuity of your understanding remains
undiminished.*

As we discussed previously, the foremost object of our attachment is our own skandhas, but we can work with any object of attachment that arises, whether it is our skandhas or the skandhas of others. We can also work with any phenomenon in the outer world or the inner world of inhabitants. All of these phenomena are like lightning, water bubbles, or clouds.

Lightning is a clear example of instantaneous arising and dissolution. We see how it arises in one moment, but it is gone in the next moment.

If you are trying to capture that moment of lightning with your camera, it is difficult because it is just a single instant, a short moment. It is almost as if the arising and ceasing are vividly simultaneous. It is very difficult to isolate a stage of abiding. Impermanent phenomena are just like lightning.

Conditioned phenomena are also like water bubbles. A lot of kids play with bubbles. They arise in a sudden way, but also dissolve in a sudden way. No matter how big the bubble is, it vanishes very quickly. It does not matter whether the bubble is big or small. The way cessation happens is similar.

Conditioned phenomena are also like clouds. Sometimes it seems as if the whole sky is filled with clouds and things are very dark, but when a different weather system comes in, the clouds quickly disperse and the sky is clear. When the wind rises, the clouds disappear.

Lama Mipham is saying that all conditioned phenomena are of the nature of change. All phenomena are of the nature of movement and transition. All phenomena are of the nature of the subtle impermanence. Remember, we talked about how disintegration does not depend on outer causes and so on. Subtle impermanence refers to when something arises in one moment and has ceased by the time the next moment comes along. The thing of the first moment is not there in the second moment. When you do a subtle analysis of this, the second moment does not actually exist. There is no second moment. It is the conceptual mind that counts the second moment, the third moment, or the hundredth moment. But from the side of things themselves, arising and ceasing happens in each moment. There is no such thing as a second, third, or any subsequent moment. Therefore, we should see conditioned phenomena as transitory and moving.





Lama Mipham's instruction is to do the analysis of subtle impermanence until certainty arises and then remain within that certainty until it dissipates. This is the way that we engage in analytical meditation. We analyze until certainty arises, and when certainty arises, we rest. That is the meditation part. We rest in the certainty until it disappears, until the continuity of those thoughts disappears. The thoughts here are of the nature of certainty.

This has been an explanation of the way to meditate on impermanence. Many of you have already done a lot of contemplation on impermanence, and you have studied it at Nitārtha Institute under the topic of things and nonthings.

Meditation Practice

Please do some meditations on coarse impermanence and subtle impermanence. In the beginning, you can focus on contemplating the outer environment that is the world, and the following stage is to contemplate the impermanence of the inner inhabitants of the world, sentient beings. Lama Mipham says:

*All beings will certainly die,
And death comes suddenly, without warning.
All these appearances of subtle existence
Are subject to circumstance and change—contemplate this.*

You have all heard a lot about impermanence, you have all studied a lot about impermanence, and you have all understood a lot about impermanence, so I do not need to teach it again and again. Therefore, I have simply presented the two types of impermanence, coarse and subtle. You can apply both types of impermanence to the outer environment of the world and to the inner inhabitants, sentient beings.

*...and the following stage is to
contemplate the impermanence
of the inner inhabitants of
the world, sentient beings.*

Lama Mipham says in his text that all beings will certainly die. On the one hand, this is something that we already know, but at the same time it is something that we usually ignore and deny. We push death off for as long as we can. If we live in a city, we cast all reminders of death as far to the limits of the city as we can, and we bury the signs of death as deeply as we can. You all know about impermanence, and death is nothing new to you, so you do not need to spend a lot of time listening to teachings about them, and the teacher does not need to spend a lot of time explaining them to you. If that was the sole focus, it would become a distraction, and it would be a waste of time. What you need to do is to meditate on them.

Illustration by freepik



Don't push death away.

Don't ignore it.

Don't deny it.

Don't push death away. Don't ignore it. Don't deny it. Rather, bring it to your mind and meditate well on it. Also, bring this outlook of impermanence to your mind and contemplate it again and again. When you experience the death of friends or parents or family members, you need to skillfully recall this contemplation of impermanence at that time. Do not just think of it as an instance when another person is dying, but also reflect on your own impermanence. Your own impermanence is difficult to predict in terms of when your death will happen, because the time of death is uncertain. However, there is no guarantee that older people will die first and that younger people will die last. It is possible for older people to die later than younger people and younger people to die earlier than older people. So you need to reflect on death well: how it is uncertain in terms of its time, and how you cannot be sure about anything you do in relation to death or what the causes and conditions of your death will be.

The causes and conditions of death are uncertain. It is not just poison that can kill you, your food can kill you too. If you drink too much alcohol, it can kill you, and eating too many cheeseburgers can also kill you. But hotdogs are okay! The very car you love so much and paid so much for can be the cause of your death. It does not have to be a tank or an F-16. You cannot be sure what will cause your death. Sometimes parents kill their children. Sometimes children kill their parents. You do not necessarily need to be killed by an enemy, and the enemy does not necessarily need to be outside.

Nor does the enemy need to be something poisonous. Sometimes medicine kills. You might think something is the cause of your happiness, but it might turn out to be the cause of the strongest form of suffering, death. Some people relate to drugs as a source of happiness, but then they overdose and die, such as Jimi Hendrix. So please meditate on impermanence today if you can, and if you can't, then relax with your mind of clinging to permanence.

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