

CHAPTER 16 – THE SIX REALMS

By the time Garchen Rinpoche was nine years old, he had received many empowerments from the lamas at Gar Gon monastery. Empowerments were special ceremonies where the teacher gives the power of the practice of a deity to the student. In the first part of the ceremony, a vase of water is used to sprinkle the student with water, to purify the body so it is pure like the deity. Then nectar is given for the tongue, to purify the speech, to be like the speech of the deity. Next comes experiencing the blissful wisdom mind of the deity. Last comes the instructions to understand the nature of the mind.

Garchen Rinpoche also learned something from his father and from his teacher, Lama Chime Dorje, that was very interesting to him. He learned about the sufferings in the six realms, or worlds, of existence. Two of those worlds we can easily see: the human world, and the animal world. But there are four more that we can't see: (1) the heaven-world, where the gods, called *devas*, live; (2) the world of the *asuras* which are jealous celestial beings; (3) the world of the hungry ghosts; and (4) the hell-world. All these worlds came into existence because of negative emotions, such as anger and jealousy, called “afflictive emotions.” Here is a painting of the six realms of existence:



At the upper left of the wheel is the world of humans. It is for those beings, like us, who have good karma but who have many attachments – likes and dislikes. We like and want to keep some things, and we want to avoid other things. But it is most lucky to be born as a human because we have opportunities to purify our minds so we can escape all the sufferings and attain ultimate wisdom and happiness by becoming enlightened.

The world of animals is for beings who are ignorant. They just want to eat, sleep, and be comfortable, but most animals don't have a comfortable life.

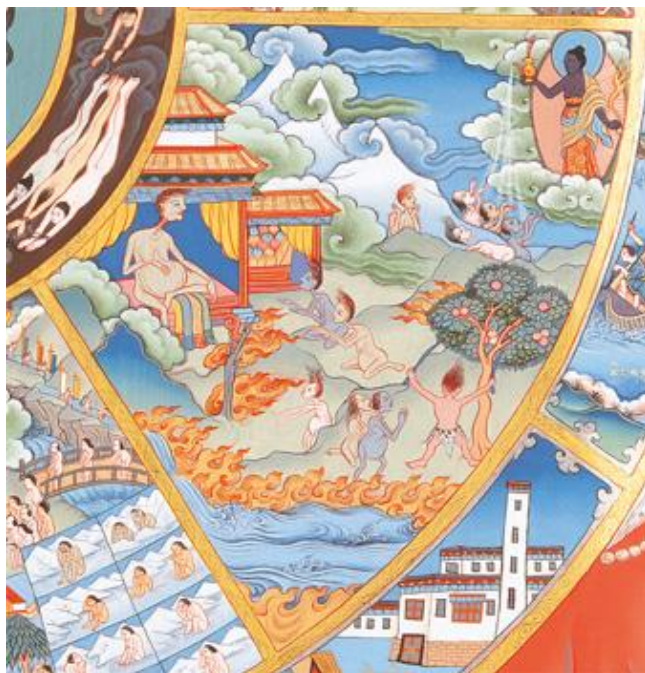
They are full of fear of being attacked and killed by other animals. They have to fight other animals to get what they want, and they suffer when

there is no food, they get sick or injured, or their home is destroyed.



Here, and at the upper right in the painting above is the world of the *asuras*. It is for those beings who are full of jealousy.

They are jealous of the gods (*devas*), and they spend their time making war on them and fighting with each other.



The world of the hungry ghosts is shown here, and in the wheel on the previous page on the lower left. That world is for those beings who are full of greed. They crave to have things all the time and are never satisfied.

Paintings show that they have big bellies and thin necks.

They are always extremely hungry and thirsty, but are miserably frustrated when they can't get food or drink.

And they don't even have clothes to keep them comfortable.

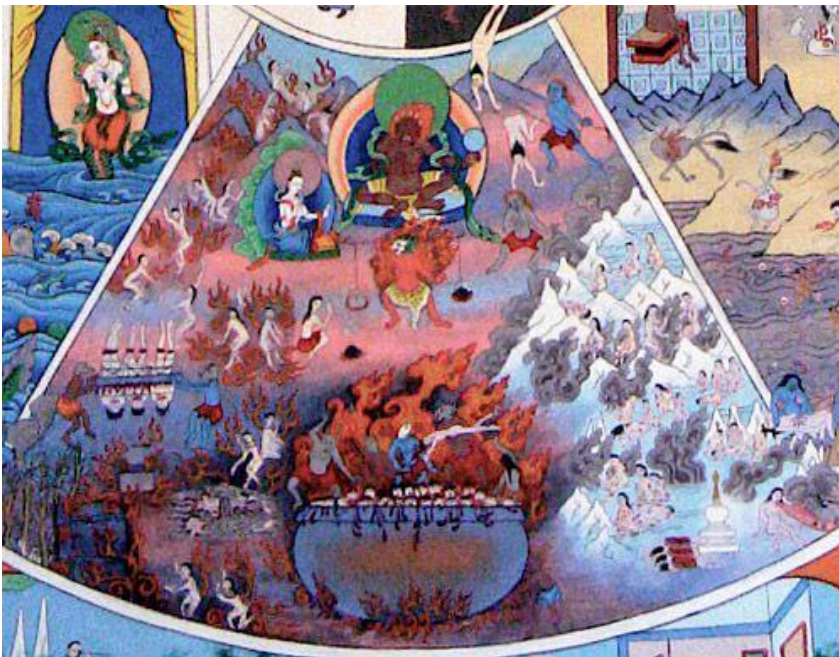


Shown here, and at the top of the painting above, is the realm of heaven, for those beings who have very good karma, but still have desires or pride. There are many heaven-worlds in this realm.

In the lower heaven-worlds, the *devas* enjoy the pleasures there so much that they don't want to be born in any other world. But they still suffer a little because they can't stay there permanently-

they have to be reborn again in another world, depending on their karma.

In the highest heaven-worlds, and Pure Lands, some beings don't have to be reborn into another world. The Bodhisattvas, because of their great compassion, may go to a Pure Land, but want to be reborn in the human world later to help people purify their minds and become enlightened.



Shown here are the hell-worlds, for beings that are full of the afflictive emotions of anger and hatred.

There are hot-hells with beings burning hot, and cold-hells with beings who are freezing, and other areas of the hell-world with other types of suffering.

But the beings only stay in this world - as in other worlds - temporarily, for the time it takes to exhaust the negative karma that brought them there.



Here is another thangka painting showing the six realms. In the center of the painting are a pig, representing ignorance; a snake, representing aversion (dislike-we try to get away from snakes); and a bird, representing craving and attachment.

The scary creature holding the whole wheel of existence represents impermanence, meaning that everything is temporary and always changing.

The Buddha on the top of the painting, pointing to the moon, shows that there is an escape from the six realms, by attaining enlightenment.

The six realms are shown in a wheel shape because we are all in a cycle of being born and dying and being reborn in the different worlds over and over again, depending on our karmas. We can only escape the cycle and the suffering when we become enlightened, when we attain *nirvana*. The cycle of birth and death in the six worlds is called *samsara*.

Garchen Rinpoche thought a lot about the beings in the different realms. When he observed animals and insects, he saw that they are similar to human beings, because they have fears and feelings like we do.

He also saw that even in the human world, people have the same kinds of sufferings as beings in the other realms. There are people who are like *devas* in the lower worlds of the gods, who are so lucky, wealthy and beautiful that they don't try to develop compassion and wisdom and purify their minds. Then they suffer when their luck runs out.

There are people who suffer like *asuras* - very jealous of others, so they say negative things about others and often argue, quarrel and fight.

There are people who suffer like animals, who live in situations where they are often afraid that others will hurt them, take away what they have, or attack them.

There are people who suffer like hungry ghosts, who live in situations where they suffer starvation or thirst, or they are always troubled by other cravings.

And there are people who suffer like the beings in the hell-worlds, who are full of anger, who suffer extreme heat or cold, or who are in constant terrible pain from disease, illness or injury.

Garchen Rinpoche realized that there is no permanent freedom or happiness as long as beings are suffering as a result of the afflictive emotions, such as jealousy, pride, ignorance, greed, and anger.

He told these thoughts to his teacher, Lama Chime Dorje, who listened attentively to the young tulku. The lama said, "Yes, you are right. In our human world there exist all the sufferings of the six realms... Every day, every minute, every second, countless human beings pass away with very negative karmas and habits of these afflicted emotions. People and animals die helplessly with a mind of fear, and the suffering of dying and death, followed by unpleasant and predictable rebirths!"

Soon after this conversation, Lama Chime Dorje decided to give the *Phowa* instructions to the nine-year-old tulku. *Phowa* means to transfer your consciousness out of the top of your head to a pure Buddha-land at the time of your death. The Buddha-land is a land of great bliss, total happiness, created by a Buddha named Buddha Amitabha. The Drikung *Phowa* is considered to

be the most effective and powerful *Phowa* of all. It gives you a way to enlightenment, a way to avoid rebirth in any of the six realms of suffering.

Lama Chime Dorje explained to him, “Through this practice, you will be able to benefit many dying people as well as animals and even insects. You will be able to guide their consciousness at the time of death, not letting them go astray and wander helplessly. You can direct them to the land of Great Bliss.”

Garchen Rinpoche then practiced *Phowa* according to his lama’s instructions. While other children spent time playing, he spent time visualizing his consciousness passing out the crown of his head to a pure Buddha land. As his practice improved, he could begin to see the signs of when someone was dying, and he felt compassion for them, whoever they were, rich or poor, young or old.

QUESTIONS:

1. Of the six realms, which is the most pleasant to live in? (the world of the gods (*devas*))
2. Of the six realms, which is the most lucky world to be born into? (the human world)
3. Why is the human world the most lucky one? (you can become wise and purify the mind so you can escape suffering and attain enlightenment)
4. What is *Phowa*? (transferring consciousness at death from the top of the head to a pure Buddha-land)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – JEALOUSY:

“Where you go will be determined by your present actions.” Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 12.

“...[T]he cause of the hell realms is anger, the cause of the hungry spirit realm is greed, each of the six negative emotions is the seed for the six realms of samsara. If you find these seeds inside your mind, you must work hard to eliminate them each and every day through sustaining mindfulness. You must recognize the emotions upon arising and see its fault. Then, you must sustain mindfulness and not fall under the power of the emotion, not act out on it. Then, gradually, the negative emotions will disappear. Always remember this. This is the root of all practice.” Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 57.

“You have to look at the nature of obscurations and eliminate them, whether they are greed, anger or ignorance. It is very important to know how obscurations develop. If you don’t know this, you can’t dispel them....If you know how obscuration develops, you can immediately look at the nature of the obscuration when it appears. Our minds are like ice that is frozen by the cold of the afflictive emotions. In order to melt it, we need sunlight, which is the cultivation of bodhicitta. Ordinarily, if your enemy harms you, you will feel anger. This is like cold freezing

water into ice. In a situation like this, it is important to be mindful and to cultivate bodhicitta.”
Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 82.

“Jealousy and pride can be tricky and are difficult to recognize; they sometimes manifest as a subtle feeling of dislike... When others are praised, we do not like to hear about it....It is important to recognize each and every subtle arising of jealousy and pride. This requires a great deal of diligence in mindfulness, as these emotions in particular are very difficult to identify. Whenever such a thought arises you must apply a method to abandon it....If your mindfulness is not yet strong enough you can apply the bodhisattva approach, considering that the other person is your mother, [or] your best friend ... and therefore give rise to love and compassion for them....And if this is too difficult..., you can ...contemplate the faults of the emotion, understanding that as a result of acting on such an emotion you will fall into the lower realms.” Garchen Rinpoche, Quote No. 6.

When we look at the six realms on the painting, it reminds us that there are many beings who are suffering in the different worlds.

So we can remember to have compassion for them.

And it's a reminder for us not to fall into the worlds of the worst suffering – the hell-worlds, hungry ghost world, the *asura* world, or the animal world.

So it's a reminder not to be too angry, greedy, jealous, or ignorant, which could make us be reborn in one of those worlds.

What do we mean by “ignorant”? Uninterested in wisdom and a pure mind – just wanting to eat, sleep, and play.

We're usually quite aware of feeling angry or greedy.

And you aren't ignorant if you are reading or hearing this story.

So, let's focus on jealousy, the afflicted emotion that results in birth in the *asura* world.

A similar word is “envy.” It's not always easy to notice when we are feeling jealous.

It means wishing to have something that someone else has. Or wishing to be like someone else.

Or thinking, “why is he so lucky?” “I worked so hard for it, why does she get it and not me?”

“Why does he get to do that and not me?” or “Why does she get all the attention?”

Maybe we notice thoughts like this occasionally.

But sometimes feelings of jealousy aren't as obvious.

Sometimes it just feels like dislike or irritated feelings toward someone.

That might happen when someone says something good about someone else but not about you.

Or when we see someone get something we'd like to have.

Or noticing someone who has a lot of money, a lot of friends, or a lot of nice things.

It's usually just an uncomfortable feeling, while noticing what others have, or what they can do.

We might even feel unfriendly or unkind toward the other person.

We might try to make ourselves feel better by thinking of something bad about them,

We might even say something unkind about them.

But saying something unkind doesn't really make us feel happier.

And of course it's not a good karma to do that.

It can become a very bad habit, to think or talk badly of other people.

So, how can we learn not to be jealous? First, we notice those uncomfortable feelings.

When we practice mindfulness, then we notice more often what we are thinking and feeling. We can learn to notice the signs of jealousy – the irritable feeling, or the feeling of dislike, toward someone. Or the thought, “why are they so lucky.”

When you notice a feeling of jealousy, that is actually wonderful, because you have developed your mindfulness enough to notice when you are feeling jealousy! Most people don’t even recognize when they are feeling jealous.

Next, we turn the negative thoughts and feelings into positive ones.

Even if we aren’t sure why we feel irritated, we can always use a special technique: the magic feeling that turns negative into positive - Bodhicitta!

We do that by remembering to have lovingkindness, compassion and altruistic joy.

That person may be lucky now, because they did good actions to deserve the luck they have now.

So you can be happy for them that they are getting the results of their good karma,

Just like you would be happy if your best friend was lucky, getting results of karma.

That is altruistic joy, being happy for others when they are enjoying something.

Remember, you are following Dharma, and that will lead to good results for you in the future.

So you may be luckier than that person in the future.

And remember, they feel unhappiness and suffering just like you do at times.

So you can feel compassion for that person.

It feels much better than just hanging onto those irritable jealous feelings.

And then you are really practicing Dharma and purifying your mind!

This will lead to great happiness for you!

But if the magic of Bodhicitta isn’t working for you in some situations,

then the next technique for learning not to be jealous is: remember the *asura* world!

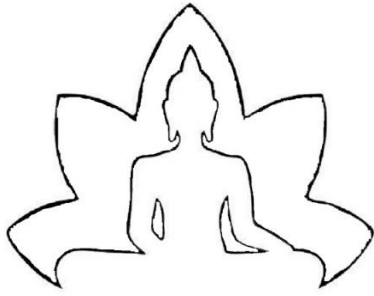
Remember that we don’t want to have a habit of jealous thoughts, words and behavior, and then fall into that world after this life!

FOR PRACTICE THIS WEEK: Be mindful of any feelings of jealousy. Notice any discomfort or irritation when someone gets praised or is successful or lucky in some way. Then apply your Bodhicitta to decrease the feelings of jealousy.

ACTIVITY – COLLAGE:

Make copies of the following page. Students use markers or color pencils to make the silhouette into a picture of himself or herself, a self-portrait. They cut it out and glue it to construction paper. Next, they color or decorate the Buddha figure, cut it out and glue it to the heart area of the self-portrait. Perhaps they can use a little bit of glitter glue to decorate the Buddha. This demonstrates their Buddha Nature or Bodhicitta within. Then color the clouds grey, cut them out and glue them to areas around the silhouette. This demonstrates the temporary afflictive emotions, like clouds around us, that we try to decrease or eliminate.

They may, if they wish, choose to draw streaks of light emanating from the Buddha Nature, with a yellow or white color pencil. And they may want to strike out the clouds with a large “x” or strikeout symbol, and/or draw monsters or cartoon figures representing jealousy, anger, greed, and ignorance, around the clouds.



JEALOUSY

IGNORANCE

ANGER

GREED