

Four Seals Chant

by

Graham Woodhouse

*Through Lama's kindness this time they're revealed,
The foes that harm, the fourfold grasping at
The pure, the pleasant, permanence and self,
Who will not take the steps to stop all that?*

*A person who's possessed of sense will not
Do down this short life's enemies but still
Ignore the ones that last from life to life.
Ought they not to be stopped with all our skill?*

Gen Lamrimpa

Compounded things are all impermanent,
What is contaminated, suffering,
The aggregates lack self, nirvana is
The utmost peace that Buddha's teachings bring.

Sound is impermanent because produced,
As is the final moment of a flame.
Produced, right then it must disintegrate
For all effects in this are just the same.

If flame's produced, the fuel its cause has ceased.
These two events are simultaneous.
But when fuel ceases so must its effect:
If no more fuel, then no more flame of course.

A butter lamp's last moment gleams and dies.
Fuel ends in flame without an interval.
Between fuel's end and flame's though here there is
A moment, time infinitesimal!

So merely from its causes ceasing then
Immediately it must also cease,
No other cause required—impermanence!
Reflecting thus seek out the road to peace.

When life runs through the fingers like dry sand...
All worldly hopes and fears, the plans we lay,
Sandcastles circled by the lapping tide;
Birth, aging, sickness, death what more to say?

The glories of this world disfigured by
Its causal flaw, the worm within the bud;
What's flung by karma, from affliction sprung,
Brings suffering assured, no lasting good.

Not just that death is certain, even now
Remorseless degradation towards death:
Impermanence of gross and subtle kinds,
Sheer instability in every breath.

Continuum of similar type or not?
From gross, the suffering of change we know,
From subtle, compositional suffering,
So let revulsion for samsara grow.

Impermanence dissolve all fantasies
Of this life's comfort, wealth, prowess or power;
Let me, determined to forsake the world,
With focussed effort fill the fleeting hour.

As if a nature from within itself,
Own-being—that which by its own power is there:
Fixating on a self like this is sheer
Delusion; reason chokes and passions flare.

What's grasped this way as not depending on
Conditions, parts or designating thought
Appears as *really* bad, *supremely* good,
By vaunting self-importance we are caught.

Misgrasping, wrong attention, lust and hate,
We're lost within the fictions of a dream,
Blind alleys of self-pity, selfishness,
But how to know things are not what they seem?

We lack inherent being since we are not
Inherently one with, or different from,
Our aggregates, like bicycle and parts.
Through contemplating this may insight come!

The parts removed, what bicycle remains?
Yet it and they are not identical.
They're always found together, even so,
The bike is one, its parts are multiple.

—They're utterly one nature, bike and parts.
Contriving your distinction does not stand.
Same weight, same feel, same look: I *am* my parts.
You're splitting hairs—conceptual sleight of hand!

But one or many, self or aggregates?
Right there, it's your choice which you apprehend.
From its own side the object's neither, so
Here on conception we indeed depend.

No whole though that does not rely on parts
And parts on whole the same, so you must own
That neither whole nor parts are truly there;
No ultimate but voidness, that alone.

Nirvana far beyond the reach of grief,
Gone to samsara's ocean's farthest shore.
Afflictions all abandoned, so the round,
The spinning wheel of rebirth is no more.

With impure bodily remainder first,
And when that's shed complete extinguishment
Within the Unconditioned, the Unmade.
The power of *all* becoming there is spent.

All subject-object otherness dissolves,
The mind and ultimate reality
In Dharmakaya no more seen apart;
Enlightenment is non-duality.

Nirvana is the suchness of the mind
From all afflictions and their seeds released.
Remainderless nirvana, that is where
All true appearances have likewise ceased.

Not mere cessation of afflictions then
And not obscurer truth but ultimate;
Not just the adventitious stains dissolved,
The natural ones as well, the wise ones state.

I douse the dream blaze with dream water, why?
To quell my fright, much better to awake!
May I cut through with stainless reasoning,
And shake dull sleep off for all beings' sake.

I put away the world. I'll follow in
The heroes' footsteps till my race is run,
Forsake addiction and backslide no more;
'Bone in the heart' resolve till birth is done.

O Bodhicitta, sweetest of all fruits,
O Bodhicitta, noblest of all minds,
Inspire me to the greatest of all deeds,
Enlightenment, for creatures of all kinds.

Lines inspired by Gen Lamrimpa Ngawang Puntsok's *A Glowing Light of Scripture and Reasoning, Lamp Illuminating the Essentials of the View, the Four Seals Which Authenticate the Buddha's Word* and by the dear, late Nalanda tradition guru. They both indicated impermanence.

© Graham Woodhouse

27th January 2017