

SWEPT AWAY BY THE FOUR RIVERS

TOI Newspaper (Speaking Tree) August 22, 2013

Lama Doboomb Tulku

Once a guru was giving a discourse; thousands of his followers gathered to listen to him. God sent his messenger to check who would all be interested to come out of *samsara* or worldly life to be present permanently in heaven, in nirvana. The messenger went around asking people but none seemed ready. Finally, an 80-year-old man showed some interest and agreed to go with the messenger after he finished what he intended to do. The man asked for time to get his grandchildren married.

When the messenger returned to take him to the heaven, he found that old man had died and taken rebirth as a dog in the same household. As a dog he wanted to safeguard his children's property. When the messenger returned after some years, he found that dog had died and was reborn as a frog near the kitchen drain of the family. The god's messenger dutifully reminded the frog of his old promise, the frog decisively said he was happy as he got surplus food and drink from the drain. So it is that heaven became last priority.

In the Buddhist *Abhidharma*, scriptures say that we are being swept away by the strong current of four big inner rivers – desire, *samsaric* existence, views and ignorance.

When we see a beautiful human or object, we go beyond just appreciating the beauty by getting attached to it and wanting to take possession. We are unable to take our eyes and mind off it. Likewise, we create many imaginary things which are not there in reality like name, fame, position and glory. We develop and nurture such imaginary ideas and do not let go of them. Sometimes the glories may have already been achieved, then we are anxious of losing what is achieved. Our insecurity makes us build strong forces to protect our glory from all that we see as challenges or threats to it. And so we flow with the rivers of desire.

River of views is that which carries one to illusive states of mind such as viewing the body as "I", having extreme views on any subject, regarding one's own point of view, moral codes and rituals as being supreme. This extends to one's own race, language, tradition and so on as being supreme. This view eventually leads chauvinism and fanaticism, and could lead to violence including terrorist activity.

River of ignorance is the cause of all trouble. Ignorance is not bliss because it implies holding on to the very opposite of the fundamental truth, Hence, it is the mother of all troubles.

River of *samsaric* existence is much more subtle because it is focused inwards rather than deriving from the external sense objects. There is no desire, no sleep, no worry, no emotional suffering and no regrets. One remains for very long in the blissful experience of *Samadhi*. But it is still linked to *samsaric* existence. However, a time comes when the strength of *Samadhi* is exhausted and one gets caught in cyclic existence.

On the whole, in the *samsaric* situation, nothing is really desirable and dependable. With this notion, one should try to free oneself from the *samsaric* situation instead of changing on to something or other that holds us down in these rivers. Like the old man in the story.