

Change Your Ticket, Get Off the Plane

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Translation by John Dunne

"Let's suppose you want to go to California. What you say is, 'I'm going to get on a plane, and I'm going to go to California.' That intention is like the karma in the second link of dependent origination, which is also called projecting karma, because it is the karma that is going to project you into a new rebirth. But at that time you haven't done anything. You've only thought about it. You haven't bought any tickets. You haven't packed your bags or anything like that. The idea of going to California doesn't mean it necessarily has to happen. So, too, when you have a negative karmic potential in your mind, if you engage in a purification practice such as the Four Remedial Powers, you can prevent the karma from ever actually producing an effect--such that you won't have to take a negative rebirth.

Let's suppose, however, that you not only decide to go to California, but you actually buy a ticket. When you actually go out and buy the ticket, what that means of course is that you've moved from 'Oh, I think I should go to California' to actually having a strong enough intention to buy the ticket. That increasing of the intention is like the eighth link [on the Wheel of Life], called craving, where the karma that's going to project you into your next rebirth becomes a little bit more augmented. It's getting closer to being able to produce an effect. That's what we mean by craving. It's a stronger desire for that rebirth. But just as you can cancel the ticket-- even though you bought it, you can still cancel it--so, too, you can still engage in purification practices. You can still prevent yourself from actually having to take that particular rebirth that you have craving for.

"Now you've bought the ticket. And you actually get yourself to the airport, and you're at the ticket desk and you're getting your seat. This is where the potential of that idea 'I'm going to go to California' is getting much closer to the point of actually giving an effect. This is like appropriation [the ninth link], where you now have a mental state where the mind is intent upon taking rebirth. Even at this time, when the potential has become even stronger, a very great yogi or practitioner can still prevent that potential from actually occurring. Likewise, one can do so through very great meritorious acts, such as gathering the Sangha together and making great offerings, and so on. Of course, you might have to take a little penalty on your ticket if you cancel it at that late a date. But still you can cancel it.

"It is quite rare for someone to have their bags all packed and get to the counter and suddenly say, 'I'm not going,' and to cancel their ticket. It's equally rare for a person to get to the point where that potential which is leading to the next rebirth has become so strong that it's at the stage of appropriation--it's rare for them to be able to actually prevent that karma from producing its ripening effect, which would be that next rebirth after death.

"This appropriation stage happens when the person is already starting to die... You've started to go through some of the stages of dissolution and death. Now when you get on the plane, and they close the door and lock the hatch, that's it. You're going... This is what we call existence, the tenth link. Existence is that state like being on the plane and the hatch has been closed--now you

can't cancel your ticket, that's it. You can't at this point avoid taking on whatever aggregates you're going to take on in the next rebirth, whether they're good or bad. That's it. The decision is made. It's definite. Then being on the plane and flying is like being in the bardo, the intermediate state, where you've actually died. Just before you died, you have the link of existence. That potential is really going to give its effect now. When you're in the bardo, it [existence] is directing you toward your next rebirth. So, you're on the plane and you're going. When you open the hatch of the plane and you get out of the plane, that's like being conceived. And that's what we mean by birth."