The big question for today, is: how can we achieve peace in society? Everybody is desperately indulging in the search for peace. All political and religious leadership claim that they have found the way for peace, yet peace is away aloof from us. The search for peace and calmness within is the core subject of the various religious traditions. We seek peace in the teachings of previous eras, yet cannot find peace in our life - the most desirable attainment. Very few people in past have achieved peace and we desperately try to imitate them in order to gain peace. In fact, we seek peace at a social level and not at the individual level. At the individual level, we are competitive and try our best to compete with others, rather destroy others and gain victory. Therein lies the contradiction. The way to peace is simple: when one tries to be peaceful from within a personal level, he will be in favor of peace at the social level. The teachings for the development of Bodhicitta can tell us how to achieve peace. The development of Bodhicitta itself is a ladder to attain peace and tranquility in society, along with internalized-calmness. As we know, evidently, from our own experience: inner peace is a prerequisite for outer peace and calmness. The development of Bodhicitta helps us to have tranquility in our social life and guide us toward the higher spiritual attainment needed for enlightenment. Although he was not a Buddhist, Mahatma Gandhi realized the need of inner peace, and through his personal effort achieved peace at larger level: societal, national and international levels have all been influenced by Gandhi’s work. The Buddha starts with inner peace, which then influences others around us. The Buddha encountered the reality of life and the need for peace: at the personal level then, really, no further formal training is required. Anyone can come and see for themselves, these proven methods – teachings and practical methods for anyone.

It is said there is sufficiency in the world for every man’s need but not for every man’s greed. If we can rightly infer this quotation: greed is the father of all sin. Alternatively, an ounce of practice is worth more than tons of preaching. This is the key to achieve peace under any circumstances without any pre-conditions.

The Buddha was in total favor of purifying the mind; to paraphrase from a verse in the Dhammapada: abstinence from all evil, fulfilment of all good, purification of one’s mind. This is the law of a Buddha. Here, law means teachings: if you can purify your mind, that’s all you need and the method for purification is given in this very verse. There is no need to search for further instructions. To paraphrase another quote from the Dhammapada: I wandered in many past lives in search of the house builder; but after continuous running-around, searching – the only yield was my own suffering. Now I have seen the house-builder and the components of house-building – all torn and destroyed from the root. The house-builder will not be able to build the house now.

The Buddha has no problem giving immediate attention towards moderately-indulging in the broad goal of self-purification, even if doing so takes a long time. Self-purification leads towards the path where no problems or conflicts exist. The goal is to resolve conflict or to reach the state where no conflict exists and the method is self-purification with the help of the realization and of truth and also following the path of truth.
**Lam Rim Teachings:**

Lam Rim teachings are very much popular in Tibetan Buddhism. Tsongkhapa’s book, Lam Rim Chen Mo, references the currents of four rivers acting as hindrances that led all sentient beings into the direction of the triple coil of defilements. Those currents take all beings along and never enable anybody do penances or work the act of renunciation – the first of the three steps leading to the ideal Buddhist Path. This paper is another attempt to present a comprehensive view of the teachings related to Bodhicitta towards the way to achieve peace through their application in modern times.

According to Ngulchu Dharmabhadra (1772-1851), the author of the The Words of Situ (si tu’i zhal lung), a famous work on Tibetan grammar based on the teachings of Situ Panchen Chökyi Jungné (1699 or 1700-1774) - the uncle and teacher of Yangchen Drubpé Dorje - this refers either to: the sufferings of birth, old age, sickness and death; or to the four rivers of desire, becoming, ignorance and belief. Hence, the current of the four rivers are interpreted through two lines of thought, and the possible explanation given in Lam Rim. Although there are better and more articulate ways of expressing Lamrim teachings, this paper will only offer a basic lesson for the sake of people unfamiliar with the expressions, and may they be lead towards greater analysis and comprehension as they move forward. Therefore, if we took the first syllogism then certainly we have to ponder upon how we are being carried away by the forceful current of the following:

**Birth:**

Let’s take the first term: ‘birth’ (jāti), which also comes across in the twelve links of dependent origination. Kaba Paltsang has given this analogy of twelve links, and there the word sKye Ba (ས་བ) has been used to mean being born. In Dhammachakkapavattana Sutta too, it is given as the cause of aging, death and lamentation and positioned as the eleventh link of the twelve of dependent origination. Therefore, it is very easy to understand that birth is the cause of sickness, old age and death, etc., as suffering. In one of his speeches, Lama Geshe Rabten also gave reasons, enabling us to understand, that it is our very existence on this Earth that alone is one of the three types of suffering. Here it may be noted that birth is not the cause of suffering but it itself is a form of suffering. In this rendition, suffering through birth is extremely difficult to understand – we are too young. We can recognize the physical harm, mental agony and distress etc., from the outside as we view a child subjected to this form of suffering. We can also understand with greater wisdom that the form of happiness that we experience is also the cause of the creation of attachment, hence another form of suffering. Our very existence is suffering, and this advice is the subtle most form of the Buddha’s teaching – and anyone with an elevated form of consciousness can comprehend this.

**Sickness:**

Recollect one of the four life-changing events that Prince Siddhartha encountered while out amongst the villagers with his companion, the charioteer, Channa. At that time he couldn’t discern exactly what he was seeing, but then determined after a short explanation that sickness along with old age and death is an inevitable part of life, and then Siddhartha became thoughtful.

Sickness means something is not healthy and not functional as usual. Be it our physical body, mental status or spiritual well-being. Health is therefore to be understood in its wholeness. It is the expression of harmony within oneself, in one’s social

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1. Lotsawa Kaba Paltsang, A Manual of Key Buddhist Terms, LTWA, p. 36
relationships, and in relation to the natural environment. To be concerned about a person’s health means to be concerned with the whole person: the physical, mental, and moral dimensions; social, familial, and work relationships; as well as the environment in which the person lives and which acts upon him or her. What we are today is the result of our past karma, therefore sickness is directly related to our past. So, the physical illness we experience – whatever it is - when any part or limb of our body doesn’t function properly, does not function at all, or we get hurt, this is physical illness. By mental illness, I mean the kind of mind that escapes seeing reality; a mind that tends to either exaggerate or underestimate the qualities of the person or object it perceives, which always causes problems to arise. As similarly expressed, or likewise, to mental or physical pain: aging and death is also part of the life of being human and mortal. Buddhism cannot eradicate aging and death, but can do its best to prevent future birth/rebirth. This is evident from the life of the Buddha himself. The four divine-scenes he witnessed, did not disturb him. What disturbed him is their inevitability. What he tried to find out by leaving the royal palace is not the way to remove sickness, old age and death but to seek out some meaning and determination about their inevitability.

Old Age:

Seeing old age reminds us of our impending death. The twelve links in the chain of dependent origination conclude at old age and death. Old age (jarā) is the period towards the end of an organism’s natural life span. The Tipiṭaka defines old age as being elderly (vudāhha), worn out (mahallaka), far gone in years (addhagata), approaching the end (vayo anuppatta, A.I,68); and the Buddha described it as characterized by ‘brokenness of teeth, greyness of hair, wrinkling of skin, decline of vigor and the failing of the facilities’ (S.II,2). At the time of the Buddha, human-life expectancy was much shorter than it is today and relatively few people lived to be ‘eighty, ninety or a hundred’ (A.I, 68). However, the problems most often associated with old age – senility and illness, loneliness and fear of death – were as common then as they are today. The difference is that with people living longer than ever before, at least in developed countries, such problems affect a much larger section of the population and are therefore seen much more often.

The Buddha recommended a range of strategies to help keep the mind healthy in the face of old age and impending decline, and we will briefly look at three of these. The first is learning to accept old age. Modern society sees old age as a state to be feared and denied. Science, medicine and surgery are marshalled in a frantic effort to stave it off for as long as possible. The results can be both comical and sad – consider these examples from popular-culture: the aged matron going for her sixth face lift; the 70 year old man putting on his toupee and teenager’s attire; Mae West at 90 still asking young men to come up and see her some time. Of course, the old men who marry women decades younger than themselves were known at the time of the Buddha too (Sn.110). The Buddha asked us to be realistic about old age and see it as a natural and inevitable process. Doing this will help us to ‘gracefully surrender the things of youth’ so we can use the energy we would otherwise expend on denial, and instead fill our time with meaningful endeavors and in preparation for the end. Secondly, the Buddha also asked us to consider that longevity is perhaps not as important as what we do with ourselves in the limited time we have on this planet. He said: ‘It would be better to live for one day wise and meditative, than for a hundred years stupid and lacking awareness. It would be better to live for one day full of vigor, than for a hundred years lazy and idle’ – in Pāli:
We should now consider the story of Khanu-Kondanna, the target of Dhammapada, Verse 111 (the setting is at the Jetavana Monastery): The thera (elder) Kondanna, after taking a subject of meditation from the Buddha, went into the jungle to practice meditation and there attained arahatship. Before returning to the monastery to pay homage to the Buddha, he stopped along the way to rest, because he was very tired. He sat on a large stone-slab, and fixed his mind on jhana concentration. Coincidentally, and at that moment, five hundred robbers came to that spot, after raiding and looting a large village – there they encountered the seated Thera. As an insult to the Bhikkhu, they acted as if the monk was a tree stump, and covered their bundles of loot all over and around the body of the resolute-thera. When the next day arrived, they allegedly realized that what was thought to be a tree stump, was really this monk, a living being. Alternatively, some thought he was an ogre and ran away, scared. The thera finally revealed himself to them that he was only a bhikkhu and not some monster, and told them not to get frightened. The robbers were awed by his words, and asked his pardon for having wronged him. Soon after wards, all the robbers requested ordination from the thera, and sought admittance into the Order. From that time onward, Thera Kondanna came to be known as: “Khanu Kondanna” (Tree-stump Kondanna). Then Khanu-Kondanna, and his newly ordained bhikkhus, went to the Buddha and told him all that had happened. The Buddha said in return: “To live for a hundred years in ignorance, doing foolish things, is useless; now that you have seen the Truth and have become wise, your life of one day as a wise man is much more worthwhile.” Then the Buddha spoke Verse 111, as follows:

Better than a hundred years in the life of an ignorant person, who has no control over his senses, is a day in the life of a wise man who cultivates Tranquility and Insight Development Practice.

Here is the story of Thera Sappadasa, the rationale for Dhammapada, Verse 112, again situated at the Jetavana Monastery: the bhikkhu was not feeling happy with the life of being a monk and at the same time he felt that it would be improper and humiliating for him to return to lay-life; so: he thought it would be better to die. Thinking a form of suicide was a better option, for this occasion: he put his hand into a pot where a poisonous snake was – but the snake did not bite him. The rationale for this behavior was given: this was because in a past existence, the snake was a slave and the bhikkhu was his master. Because of this incident, the bhikkhu was known as Thera Sappadasa. On another occasion, Thera Sappadasa took a razor to cut his throat; but as he placed the razor on his throat, he reflected on the purity of his morality practice throughout his life as a bhikkhu and his whole body became inundated with delightful satisfaction (piti) and bliss (sukha); then detaching himself from that piti, he directed his mind to the development of Insight Knowledge and soon attained arahatship; and subsequently, returned to the monastery. On arrival at the monastery, other bhikkhus asked him where he had been and why he took the knife along with him. When he told them about his intention to take his life, they asked him why he did not do so; he answered, “I originally intended to cut my throat with this knife, but I have now cut off all moral defilements with the knife of Insight Knowledge.” The bhikkhus did not believe him; so they went to the Buddha and asked. “Venerable Sir, this bhikkhu claims, that he has attained arahatship as he was putting the knife to his throat to kill

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3 Kushito: An idle person, who spends his time only in evil thoughts
himself. Is it possible to attain Arahatta Magga within such a short time?” To them, the Buddha said, “Bhikkhus! Yes, it is possible; for one who is zealous and strenuous in the practice of Tranquility and Insight Development - arahatship can be gained in an instant. As the bhikkhu walks in meditation, he can attain arahatship even before his raised foot touches the ground.” Then the Buddha spoke Verse 112, as follows:

Better than a hundred years in the life of a person who is idle and inactive, is a day in the life of one who makes a zealous and strenuous effort (in Tranquility and Insight Development Practice).

To get a better perspective on aging, and quite possibly this is the haunting factor that inspired Khanu-Kondanna and Sappadasa: two common psychological problems many elderly people face are regret – about having done or failed to do certain things – and a sense of having wasted one’s life. Such feelings can fill an elderly person’s days with sorrow and bitterness. Therefore, the third thing that the Buddha addresses is the issue of caring for the aged. The Jarā Sutta in the Samyutta Nikāya, Sagāthavagga, Jarasutta 71, the Buddha said, to Ananda: when young, one is subject to aging; when healthy, subject to illness; when alive, subject to death. The complexion is no longer so clear and bright; the limbs are flabby and wrinkled; the back, bent forward; there is a discernible change in the faculties - the faculty of the eye, the faculty of the ear, the faculty of the nose, the faculty of the tongue, the faculty of the body.” “Those who live to a hundred are all headed to an end in death.”

Death:

Contemplation and meditation on death and impermanence are regarded as very important in Buddhism for two reasons: (1) it is only by recognizing how precious and how short life is that we are most likely to make it meaningful and to live it fully and (2) by understanding the death process and familiarizing ourselves with it, we can remove fear at the time of death and ensure a good rebirth. In the fourth verse, Tsong Khapa shown how precious and short human birth is and also how rare it is to have it – the Buddha said this as well, centuries before. In the teaching of the Buddha, all of us pass away eventually through the natural process of birth, old-age and death - and that we should always keep in mind the impermanence of life. We all cherish and wish to hold onto our lives. In Buddhism, however, death is not the end of life, it is merely the end of the body we inhabit in this life. Our kamma/spirit, conceptually, remains and seeks attachment to a new body and new life. Where someone may be re-born is a result of the past accumulation of positive and negative action (volition), and the resultant karma (cause and effect) is a result of one’s past actions.

People may be reborn into one of six possible realms, determined to be: a heaven, the human realm as a human, asura-realm, hungry-ghost realm, the animal realm, or into a level in hell. Realms are stratified into thirty-one possibilities, according to the severity of one’s karmic actions, Buddhists know that none of these places are permanent and one does not remain in any place indefinitely – so, we can say in Buddhism: life does not end, it merely goes on in some other form, as a result of that past accumulated karma. Buddhism is a socio-philosophical system that incorporates as part of its doctrine, the emphasis on the impermanence of lives, including all those beyond the present life. With this in mind, we should not fear death, since it leads to rebirth, somewhere. The fear of death may stem from the fear of ceasing to exist and losing one’s identity and foothold in the world. We see death coming, long before its arrival. We notice impermanence in the changes we see around us, and to us – as the arrival of aging and suffering due to the loss of our youth. Once we were strong and beautiful, but as we age: we approach our final moments of life.
and realize how fleeting such a comfortable place actually was. Therefore, a clear awareness and correct understanding of the nature of death can enable us to live without fear, and with strength, clarity of purpose and joy. Buddhism views the universe as a vast living entity, in which cycles of individual life and death are often repeated. Death is therefore a necessary part of the life process, making possible: renewal and new growth.

The Second Analogy - The Four Rivers: Desire, Becoming, Ignorance and Belief.

Desire:

Desire has deep roots in our life; so deeply rooted that generally we don’t notice. We take desire to be an essential force in our very existence. Desire is categorized in three ways:

i. Desire for sensual pleasure (kama tanha) is very easy to understand. This kind of desire is wanting sense-pleasures through the body or the other sense-doors and always seeking things to excite or please your senses. Contemplate: what is it like when you have desire for pleasure? For example, when you are eating, if you are hungry and the food tastes delicious, you can be aware of wanting to take another bite. Notice that feeling when you are tasting something pleasant; and notice how you want more of it. Don’t just believe this; try it out. Don’t just think you know and have the proper answer, because you can remember something from the past - try it out when you eat. Taste something delicious and see what happens: a desire arises for more. This is kama tanha.

ii. Desire for becoming or to continue this life. We also contemplate the feeling of wanting to become something. If there is ignorance, then when we are not seeking something delicious to eat or some music to listen to, we can be caught in a realm of ambition and attainment - the desire to become. We get caught in that movement of striving to become happy, seeking to become wealthy; or we might attempt to make our life feel important by endeavoring to make the world right. Note this sense of wanting to become something, since it is other than what you are, right now. Listen to the bhava tanha of your life: ‘I want to practice meditation so I can become free from my pain. I want to become enlightened. I want to become a monk or a nun. I want to become enlightened as a lay person. I want to have a wife and children and a profession. I want to enjoy the sense world without having to give up anything and become an enlightened arahant too.’

iii. Desire not to become or the desire to be alienated from worldly-life in order to avoid painful feelings, positions or thoughts – to disassociate from negativity. When we get disillusioned with trying to become something, then there is the desire to get rid of things. So we contemplate vibhava tanha, the desire to eliminate excess: ‘I want to get rid of my suffering. I want to get rid of my anger. I’ve got this anger and I want to get rid of it. I want to get rid of jealousy, fear and anxiety.’ Notice this, as a reflection pertaining to vibhava tanha. We are actually continually contemplating that, within ourselves, which wants to get rid of things. We never actually trying to get rid of vibhava tanha, just characteristics that we don’t want or appreciate. We are not taking a stand against the desire to get rid of things, nor discouraging the desire; instead, we can reflect: ‘It’s like this. It feels like this to want to get rid of something. I’ve got to conquer my anger. I have to kill the Shaitan (any distracting or demonic force; Mara or the Devil) and eliminate my greed, then I may become what it is that I desire to become.’ We can see from this train of thought that becoming
and wanting to get rid of something are very much associated with a common feeling.

We must bear in mind though that these three categories of kama-tanha, bhava-tanha and vibhava-tanha are merely convenient ways of contemplating desire. They are not totally separate forms of desire but different aspects of it.

**Becoming:**

Becoming, as a term in dependent origination, is the tenth link and is a factor for a cause of suffering, as advocated by the Buddha. It precedes the term birth. In Pāli, the term for becoming is bhava - in the sense of ongoing worldly-existence, from the root bhu “to become”. Bhava is the continuity of life and death, conditioned upon “grasping” (upādāna), the desire for further life and sensation. This bhava is the condition for the arising of living beings in particular forms, through the process of birth (jāti). The Bhava Sutta in the Anguttara Nikāya explains the definition of bhava. There, the Buddha says to the Venerable Ānanda: “Kamma is the field, consciousness the seed, and craving the moisture. The consciousness of living beings hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving is manipulated into a refined property. Thus there is the production of renewed becoming in the future. This is how there is becoming.”

Bhava can be related to bhava-tanha, the thirst for selfish pursuits.

**Ignorance:**

Ignorance (avijja) is the root cause of our suffering. Ignorance is the lack of light or lack of understanding, and usually refers to ignorance of the Four Noble Truths – in particular: life is dukkha. Ignorance also refers to ignorance of anatman, a teaching that there is no “self” in the sense of a permanent, integral, autonomous being within an individual existence. What we think of as our self, our personality and ego, are temporary creations of the skandhas.

The twelve links of dependent origination (nidanas) are illustrated in the outer ring of the bhavachakra (wheel of life). Ignorance is depicted as a blind man or woman. The three poisons or three unwholesome roots (akusala-mūla), refer to the three root defilements: ignorance, attachment, and aversion. These three poisons are considered the cause of suffering (dukkha). These three poisons are the primary causes keeping sentient beings trapped in samsara. According to Jeffery Hopkins: ignorance drives the entire process; [ignorance] isn’t just an inability to apprehend the truth but an active misapprehension of the status of oneself and all other objects, one’s own mind or body, other people, etc. It is the conception or assumption that phenomena exist in a far more concrete way than they may, actually. Based on this misapprehension of the status of persons and things, we are drawn into afflictive desire and hatred [attachment and aversion].

Not knowing the real nature of phenomena, we are driven to generate desire for what we like and hatred for what we do not like and for what blocks our desires. These three poisons: ignorance, desire, and hatred - are labeled as such, because they pervert our mental outlook. According to a seasoned practitioner of peace: where ignorance is our master, there is no possibility of real peace.

**Belief:**

Belief does not supplement our knowledge or intelligence, and hence falls under the category of wrong-view. In the Buddhist way of practice, there are ten non-meritorious

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4 (Anguttara Nikāya, Tikkanipatapāli, Dutiypammapasaṇa, Anandavaggo Pathambhavasuttam 3.77)
types of actions – or the basic moral practices that everyone should follow. Further, these
ten are divided into moral practices of body, speech and mind. Three categories from the
non-meritorious deeds of mind, are: (1) covetousness, or eagerly desirous especially of
things belonging to others, (2) ill-will, and (3) wrong view. The result of wrong/false view
is: having gross desires, lack of wisdom, being dull witted, having chronic diseases and
blameworthy ideas. So here then, we use the first analogy: ‘swept by the current of the
four powerful rivers’. If we use this imagery of four really strong rivers flowing very fast,
then we would be caught within the combination of those four rivers. The ‘four rivers’ are
four factors which hold sentient beings in the state of dissatisfaction, or suffering, being:
desire, views (wrong views), existence in and of itself, and then ignorance. If we look at
these four: ignorance is the initial cause of all the other destructive emotions. It is said the
first moment is ignorance - conceiving something in a wrong way - and confusion brings
about all the other destructive emotions. All actions that entered through the force of those
wrong thoughts are the various karmic results of those actions. As for desire: there are
various kinds of desire: the strong desire which makes one’s mind change from something
peaceful to something which is completely intent on one object; the desire of carefully
planning how to gain an object which one wants, and so forth. With regard to the various
views, wrong view here can be divided into five - the general wrong mind, or wrong
consciousness, and so forth. With regard the third, existence in and of itself: it can refer to
the cycle of existence or samsara, and can also refer to dormant karmic actions and also in
their fully ripened states.

**Conclusion:**

Those four rivers, combined as one, carry our kind mother, and sentient-beings, along. If we imagine somebody who has fallen into a fast-flowing river or fallen into the
rapids: if they are able to shout for help then that is one thing but still deserve our assistance.
We are ethically bound to assist anyone needing help, if it is within our power to assist; if
they are able to swim then there is every possibility that they will be able to reach the banks
of the river, but we can assist and offer a tree-branch or arm to help them get out of this fast
moving current. The point of this article is to demonstrate that we have options in our daily
path – options in which we react accordingly or how we should act according to proper
principles. There is a wholesome path or stream that we can take where we venture out
into birth, sickness, aging, death with appropriate mind-states and the streams of
consciousness which are desire, becoming, ignorance and belief – when we proceed
appropriately through our responses to the arising of these mental factors, we can engage
with others appropriately where the result we generate is peace, rather than conflict.

Lamrim teachings are usually expressions from untaught or secret lessons – the
hidden meanings behind ideas. These ideas are motivated by the personal level of the
disciple receiving the teaching. Generally as the abhidhamma teaches us, people are of
low, medium and high abilities – so expressions are catered to the comprehension level of
the listener/meditator. Everyone has their own level of experiencing suffering, so teachings
are experience-based - we can see this along the gradual training path. The greatest aspect
of Lamrim is to generate loving-kindness for everyone, with the liberated-mindset, and the
training along the way assists us in achieving the greatest happiness and ability to assist
others. Numerous texts are openly available on the internet pertaining to Lamrim, and we
highly encourage others to learn more about this, to improve their abilities to express
themselves when conveying the meanings of dhamma-ideas to other personnel along the
path towards Liberation.