

THE WHEEL OF LIFE

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Pronunciation Sipé Khorlo

Sanskrit *Bhavacakra*

The Wheel of Life depicts samsara, the cycle of suffering, death and rebirth. Its sections are read from the centre outwards.

At the centre, a pig, rooster and snake represent ignorance, craving and aversion. Their linked arrangement shows how these tendencies reinforce one another. The surrounding light and dark paths illustrate karma: how intentional actions shape future experiences.

The six realms show gods absorbed in pleasure, demi-gods struggling with jealousy, humans with opportunities for awakening, and animals constrained by survival. Hungry ghosts' swollen bellies and narrow throats express endless craving, while hell beings surrounded by fire or ice depict intense suffering.

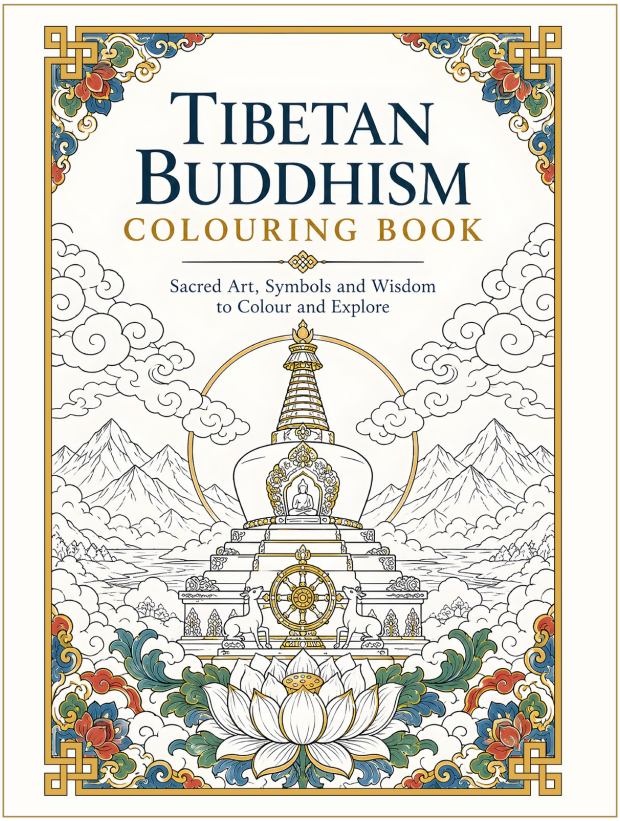
Around the rim, the twelve links of dependent origination explain how the cycle continues. Ignorance conditions actions and consciousness; mind and body, the senses and contact make experience possible. Contact produces pleasant, unpleasant or neutral feelings, which can lead to craving and grasping. These sustain becoming, birth, and ultimately ageing and death.

The scenes make these connections visible: a blind person represents ignorance; a potter, actions; a monkey, consciousness; a boat, mind and body; and a house with six openings, the senses. An embrace represents contact; an arrow, feeling; drinking, craving; gathering fruit, grasping; pregnancy, becoming; childbirth, birth; and a corpse, ageing and death. Their central lesson is that suffering depends on conditions: by weakening ignorance and responding to feelings without craving or grasping, the cycle can be interrupted.

The dark blue figure gripping the wheel represents impermanence. Outside it, the golden Buddha points towards liberation.

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