

THE FOUR
NOBLE TRUTHS

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THE FOUR
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GELEK RIMPOCHE

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INTRODUCTION

We are here to talk about the Four Noble Truths: the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the truth of the cessation of suffering, which is nirvana, joy, or peace, and the truth of the way you get to this cessation. These four are divided into two positive truths and two negative truths.

The two positive truths are our spiritual practice. We would like to replace two negative truths by two positive truths. According to Buddha, that is what spirituality is all about. It is not about magic, not about how to fly, not about any of that sort of thing. In old Tibet if someone said, “With my teaching you can fly in the air,” people would reply, that is nothing to be surprised about; when we were birds, we flew all the time. If someone said, “You will be able to remain under the water,” they would reply, that is nothing surprising; when we were fish we remained under the water all the time. If someone said, “You can remain under the ground for years,” again there is nothing surprising; when we were worms, we remained under the ground all the time. This is a basic, normal Buddhist teaching. In Tibet before 1959, you heard that all the time.

This tells me that our life today is neither our first life

nor our last life. It is one of our lives, a fortunate one, a good one. Although we may not be able to fly in the air, we can sit on the ground nicely and become grounded. The message is that this is one life, not all of our lives. We have a life after this life, and a life before this life. That is what we call reincarnation. It doesn't prove anything, but that is what this teaching tells me.

Unless we understand reincarnation, it is very difficult to understand how the first two noble truths work. It is not that difficult to know that good brings good in life and bad brings bad. That is no secret, no mystery. That is clear, simple, and straightforward. However, without the idea of reincarnation, we are very limited, and our views are narrowed. If we see only one life from birth to death, life becomes just some short thing in between.

The moment we have even a suspicion that reincarnation exists, the partition that separates this life, beginning at birth and ending at death, from our other lives, is removed. When the partition is removed, we begin to have a panoramic view of our lives. When we see this panorama, we have a very different view of causes and results, karma, good and bad deeds and their consequences.

The Four Noble Truths are the basis of Buddha's teaching. Maitreya Buddha, the future Buddha of Love, gives the example of helping someone who is sick: First, you need to diagnose what is wrong, and second, you have to treat or get rid of the cause of that particular misery. Recognizing suffering and then looking at where it comes from, seeing its cause, are the first two noble truths.

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The first and second truths are the negative aspect of the Four Noble Truths. One brings the other as a negative consequence. The cause of suffering brings about suffering itself—pain, a life in samsara, and all of that. Maitreya also talks about the purpose of the Four Noble Truths. The purpose of the First Noble Truth is to recognize our suffering. The purpose of the second is to learn not to entertain, develop, or grow the causes of suffering. [The third and fourth truths are the positive aspects.] The purpose of the Third Noble Truth is to attain cessation of suffering. The purpose of the fourth is to show you how to practice.

I

THE FIRST NOBLE TRUTH: SUFFERING

We actually don't need much introduction to the First Noble Truth, suffering. We are all experts in that! Let me talk a bit about the reason Buddha taught the truth of suffering. Some people feel threatened when they hear about suffering and particularly about death. They think that Buddha talked about these things to threaten us so that we will put more effort into our practice. That is certainly not true.

People think the same thing when Buddha talks about the heavy negative karma that leads to rebirth in a hell realm. They perhaps get that idea from the practice in some churches of collecting money based on people's fear of hell. Eastern traditions are totally different. At least in the olden times, monasteries did not depend on donations. Some monasteries were quite rich, so they did not depend on donations. I am not saying that this is the case today; we do depend on donations, but still, we are not here to talk about suffering in order to collect donations. We are not threatening you, which would not work at all anyway. You would tell me, "I know better."

Then why does Buddha talk about suffering? Because

suffering is the true reality of ourselves, our lives, our existence. I am talking to you with the background of reincarnation. All our lives are in reality full of suffering. It is all suffering, honestly. Maybe we can see some picnic spots here and there. Samsaric picnic spots are fun, no doubt. When we meet a new girlfriend or boyfriend, we get into a samsaric picnic spot. Then, after being with that person day after day, week after week, month after month, the picnic spot picks up a little chili taste. We begin to burn our tongues a little bit. We are lucky if we don't get the chili into our eyes! All that is a clear sign that picnic spots are suffering in nature.

In reality, wherever we go, whatever we do, as long as it is contaminated, we have suffering all the time. Even samsaric picnic spots are suffering. Chili itself is suffering. When you first put it into food, it gives a spicy, pleasant taste. But if you eat a little extra, you will start sweating and burning and have to drink some water. As long as they are contaminated, all pleasures are suffering. When joy is no longer contaminated, it is true joy. Contaminated joy brings suffering and is suffering in nature. That is reality. It is not using fear and threats to get people to do something.

Once when I was traveling from Amsterdam to Detroit, the guy next to me on the plane saw me doing my prayers. During the eight-hour journey there was enough time to say the longer sadhanas, so I had taken out my books and started reading. After a little while, the guy noticed and asked me, "Excuse me, what are you?" I said, "I am Buddhist." He said, "Oh, yeah, I know, that

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is the religion of suffering, right?” But Buddhism is not a religion of suffering; rather, it is a religion that deals with suffering.

The First Noble Truth, the truth of suffering, is the absolute reality of our lives. We have mental suffering, physical suffering, and lots of emotional pains, plenty of them. Older people like me have their own emotional problems and worries, centered around our physical appearance, which must be terrible.

The truth of suffering really means four things:

1. Whatever we have accumulated, in the end that accumulation will be exhausted, finished, nothing left. We keep on collecting money, money, money, and in the end it all goes, honestly!
2. The end of life, the end of birth, is death. No matter how much we run around trying to look handsome, beautiful, young, whatever we do by losing weight and so on, the end is death, nothing but death.
3. We enjoy our companions, yet the end of company or togetherness is separation.
4. When you go higher, you can become great and be well known, but at the end of that, you have to come down. If you climb a tree, how high can you climb? In the end you have to come down. You can't climb and sit up there all the time: one day you will fall down. That is the truth of reality that Buddha discovered, which is totally and absolutely true.

That's why one of the Buddhist logos says: *everything*

accumulated or created is impermanent. The four Buddhist logos, also called emblems or seals are:

1. Anything created is impermanent.
2. Anything contaminated is suffering.
3. Every phenomenon has the nature of emptiness.
4. Nirvana is peace.

These statements all come from Buddha's discoveries. The first one says that any phenomenon that has been created is impermanent. Since it is impermanent, no matter what it is, it will end. That is the truth of suffering that Buddha discovered.

HOW BUDDHA DISCOVERED THE TRUTH

Talking about Buddha and his discovery is slightly different from what we normally think within Western culture when we talk about the spiritual path. In the Western understanding, the spiritual path can be so many things. The difference is this: when we think about Buddha we don't think about him as someone who was superior and came from higher up to guide and help us down here. No, we think about Buddha as a normal human being. I would love to say "ordinary," but that might not be right, because Buddha happened to be a prince, and we can't say that the Prince of Wales is an ordinary person—that would make the prince very angry!

So Buddha was born as a prince, but otherwise he was just like us with our tremendous sufferings, pains, and mental, physical, and emotional problems. In ancient

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India, 2600 years ago, the culture and society were totally different from what we see here in the West or even in India today. Numerous principalities or small kingdoms were fighting with each other. Each one of those kingdoms tried to be the superior power over as many other kingdoms as possible. That was the goal at that time.

In Sanskrit, *raja* means king. A raja was a big deal at that time, actually even on the spiritual path. Indians address great spiritual masters as *maharaja*. For example, Ram Dass and everybody else around would address his teacher as Guru Maharaji. *Maharaja* means “big king,” so Guru Maharaji is not an actual king, but he is a maharaja, a big king of the spiritual realm. In that culture maharajas are considered extremely important and powerful.

At that time in India, the rulers or ruling caste were considered very important and people respected that. Before that, people respected the Brahmins and considered them the higher, more important caste. At other times, people respected the untouchables as more important. The time changes the culture. Two thousand six hundred years ago was a time when rulers were very important.

So Buddha was born as a prince. His whole kingdom was focused on getting some kind of wonderful prince who would be able to overpower other principalities and become what was called a *chakravartin raja*, which means a “king who controls all kings.” In Indian culture, when they talk about the “king of kings, god of gods,” this is where it comes from. They were all praying for a prince who would become a universal king.

In those days there were many soothsayers, like today's psychics who give prophecies. The whole kingdom turned to the soothsayers and asked, "We're going to have a child from our king, and the child must be A) a son, and B) a king of kings. So, what is going to happen?" Every soothsayer replied, "This child is going to be an extraordinary king of kings, no doubt, but there's one problem. You may or not be able to keep the boy within the principality."

Everybody started thinking about why the prince might not stay in the principality. They thought, "Well, if he sees miserable things, it may make him run away. Let's not have that." So they built a new palace for the prince. You know, when the Indians build a palace, they know how to build it! It is not a joke. They are not like the castles we see in Europe. Look at the Taj Mahal! That will show you how Indians build. They really build tremendous palaces! In Delhi, where I used to live, there is the Red Fort that was once an Indian palace with running water and swimming pools, too.

They built a very special palace like that for the young prince, with music and lights twenty-four hours a day. Only young, beautiful and handsome people were allowed in. Anyone who became sick had to get out, except for the royal family members. The royal family, especially the little prince, was not allowed to leave certain areas. Inside everything was beautiful, the best ever possible. Outside was declared out of bounds.

They built him this restricted, artificial life, and they also they told him, "You are the prince," almost like,

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“You are the chosen one.” They used to tell him, “You are going to be the king of kings, the protector of all the subjects,” and so on. I’m sure they were pumping his head up all the time.

They kept the palace that way for two decades. Eventually that little prince who was no longer little started wondering, “What is beyond those walls where I cannot go? Beyond those doors and beyond this wall, what is out there?”

This always reminds me of the late Allen Ginsberg. Allen always talked about how when he was a kid – he even wrote a poem about it – he was always wondering what was beyond a tree behind his house in New Jersey. He wasn’t allowed to go out that far. Then, when he was ten he was finally able to walk out beyond that tree, and he found a glue factory behind the tree, a glue factory! It is very similar to this. It’s very funny.

That prince was always wondering, “What is behind those palace walls?” One day he sat himself on his chariot and told the driver, “Drive, now, out of that door!” The driver turned back and said, “That is out of bounds for you.” The prince said, “Who will be king, you or me?” So the driver said, “Yes sir!” They crossed that boundary, and the prince began finding out what was out there.

What he encountered first was not a glue factory, but very similar. He encountered suffering. I won’t go in detail about how they went east and west and north and all that, but anyway, first he encountered somebody who was sick and in pain. He had no idea what the hell that was. He asked the chariot driver, “What is this,

what's happening here?" The charioteer replied, "That person is having pain." "Why? What is pain?" The driver explained, "This is pain, this is called illnesses," and so on. The young prince was saddened and returned to the palace.

Another time he made the driver go in another direction and found a dead body at a cremation site. He asked, "What is this?" The driver said, "We call it death," and explained more. Then the prince saw an aged person and had no idea about old age. He said to the driver, "Is this a human being or what is it?" Thus he learned about old age and so on.

Every time he encountered suffering, he asked three questions. Question one: "Will I be subject to this?" Question two: "What about my family? The royal family, are they immune or will they be subject to this?" The third question was: "All these subjects of mine whom I'm supposed to protect and help, will they go through this too?" The driver turned around and knelt down. "King of kings, god of gods, yes, you are going to be subject to this. Your parents are not immune, even though they are the royal family, and neither are your subjects that you are supposed to be protecting."

Finally, on their fourth trip, the prince saw a peaceful meditator sitting and meditating. He said, "What is that?" "That is called meditating." "What is that, then?" "That's supposed to be a way of overcoming all those problems." "Oh, you mean this is the solution for these problems?" "Yes." "Then I must go and find it, because I have to do something for me, for my family, for my subjects. What

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else can I do?”

I'm not going to give you Buddha's life story in detail but that is the essence. He had an artificial life, but when he cut through to the out-of-bound areas, he encountered reality. For him it was discovering the truth. It was not an artificial, fake life, but what the truth was really all about. So, he called it “the truth of suffering.”

Suffering is the truth. It is funny and interesting. That was twenty-six hundred years ago. Suffering was the truth at that time and it is still true today. Today, for all of us, suffering is the truth and the truth is suffering. Truth is not only suffering, but suffering is the truth. No matter what we do today, no matter how wonderful we try to make our life, at the end of the best, or at the deep bottom-line of the best, there is suffering. Mental, physical, emotional, we have all of those pains. That is the truth. Buddha's teachings literally boil down to the four important points called the Four Noble Truths. The first is the truth of suffering.

Some people think that Buddhism is designed to threaten people with suffering in order to mobilize them to act, but that is not the case. Suffering is the truth, the reality of our lives. Everybody's life is suffering. Each and every one of us goes through all these pains. We may think, “The American life is okay. We are good, rich, spoiled, snobby New Yorkers!” New Yorkers always think they are different from all others – even within America. Everybody thinks that way. If you go to the Midwest, people will say, “Midwesterners speak the best

English.” Californians think, “We are the greatest and most relaxed.” That’s how people perceive themselves. Yet, although they think they are great, each and every one of them has all these sufferings. Yes, compared with people in Darfur today, we are great; yet we are not free of suffering. We do have mental, physical and emotional sufferings all the time.

We have so much dissatisfaction in our lives. We are dissatisfied with our achievements and with everything else. This dissatisfaction really brings pain into our lives, in addition to the usual pain and misery of sickness and aging. Every single person, even those in their twenties, always thinks, “I am getting too old, too chubby,” and so forth. Then later it increases into worrying about getting wrinkles, gray hair, and so on. We build that pain within us. The true reality of aging will catch up with you when you are in your sixties, at my age, but the suffering begins even in our twenties. That is why we always put on make-up!

We have tremendous mental and emotional pains. We are very emotional people, extremely emotional. Likes and dislikes affect us tremendously, and we show it very clearly. Not only do we show it, but we also make the people around us miserable. Each and every one of us does that. When we are making the people around us miserable, that means that we ourselves are miserable. If you want to make others miserable, you have to be miserable yourself. That is reality.

In short, we live in pain and suffering. We are born with pain and suffering. We sleep with pain and suffering.

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We get up with pain and suffering. We don't want to die with pain and suffering. That is our challenge. That is our goal. That is the purpose of Buddha's teaching. That is the purpose of spiritual practice.

Other than that, pain is all around us. It dominates and torments our whole lives, every moment that we experience, life after life. We are completely deprived of joy. That is why we pray for *the joy that has never known suffering*. We have never had such joy. That is the First Noble Truth of Buddha.

The purpose of pointing out the truth of suffering is *not* to threaten us or to develop fear within us, but to recognize what is happening to us. Recognizing the situation doesn't give any additional suffering at all; you are just not fooling your self any longer. Often, when we experience a change of feelings, we consider that as joy, but in reality, it is suffering. That is how we fool ourselves. Recognizing suffering as suffering prevents us from getting fooled.

Further, by recognizing it, we begin to see how it happens. Where do these sufferings come from? Think about it. People will give you all kinds of answers. Some will say, "I can do nothing. It is God's will." I don't think people will actually say that God has given them suffering, but when you pin that argument down, it almost comes to that point. Some other people, when faced with suffering, will say, "Oh, it is my karma."

Buddha recommended that we recognize pain for what it is. That will raise the question in our minds: "What causes it? What can I do about it? Is there an

end to it? Can I achieve something to stop it?” Buddha himself raised that question and looked for answers. He tried to figure it out not only for himself but also for his family and, as an heir to the throne, for his subjects.

You can see that when you look into his life story. Even when he first rode out of the palace with his driver and saw suffering, he asked, “Am I immune to this pain because I am the prince?” The answer was, “No.” Then he asked, “My family, parents, and so on, are they immune, since they are the royal family?” Again, the answer was, “No.” The Buddha’s third question was, “What about my subjects that I am supposed to protect?” The answer was, “These people that you see suffering so much – these are your subjects.”

THE MISSION OF BUDDHA’S TEACHING

The prince looked at the sick, aging and dying people and recognized that here was real suffering and that it included him, his family, and his subjects. Everybody has to go through it. Then he asked, “Is there something I can do?” The whole purpose of the Buddha’s teaching, the whole purpose of Buddhist practice, pushes forward from here: it is really a mission to eradicate suffering. That became the mission of Buddha’s life.

The teaching tradition says that Buddha is our role model and that what he did with his life is the guide to our own development. We also see the pain and suffering in our own life and that of our family, fellow citizens, and fellow human beings. That should remind us to think,

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“What can I do?”

If someone tells you, “You are born with suffering, and you have to die with suffering,” it is total B.S. There is no bigger B.S than that. Why do you have to die with suffering? The very purpose of the great life that we have today is to make sure that we do not have to die with suffering. That is the first challenge in our spiritual path: what can I do for myself? Then, what can I do for my fellow human beings? It is almost what President Kennedy said, “Don’t ask what your fellow human beings can do for you; ask what you can do for your fellow human beings.”

This is the challenge and also the key to our spiritual practice. Whether we are going to have a genuine spiritual practice or not depends completely on this. If this doesn’t move us, everything else will be just showbiz. Within the showbiz you may think it is very deep and serious, but you can fool yourself with the whole thing. I am not saying that that is what we are doing, but I am warning you. It is possible that you may be fooling yourself.

THE FUNDAMENTAL BASIS FOR SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

Again, the fundamental basis for spiritual development is recognizing suffering and knowing that there is something you can do about it. That will be the basis for the individual’s spiritual path. The spiritual path is very individualized. We have groups, religious traditions, centers, and monasteries, but the development is very

much up to each individual.

The individual process begins right here: what can I do to get out of my own suffering? What can I do for my family? We talk a lot about compassion and great compassion, about the special mind called *bodhimind*, but the bottom-line question is: what can I do for myself? Until the individual raises this question seriously, everything else is flying in the air, not grounded. It doesn't matter whether you consider yourself a practicing spiritual person for twenty years, thirty years, or one hundred years—your whole life! You are just flying. You are not grounded. Even if by name your practice is called Vajrayana or Mahayana, everything becomes superficial, because the individual person is not grounded. Take it from me. To borrow the senior Bush's words: "Read my lips." Honestly, that's the reality.

Why? This is funny. In one way, we haven't suffered enough. That's why we aren't grounded properly. Human life is such that although we have suffering all the time, we always have something else to balance the suffering. Because we created positive and negative karma all mixed together, we get mixed results. What does that do? It prolongs the life of our suffering, because we don't get fed up enough, don't recognize enough, and don't come to the proper decision to renounce suffering. We do get pain and recognize that, but then we also get into the so-called picnic spots, which we often find in samsara. At every corner we turn, there is suffering and then there are picnic spots. We get that mixed message all the time. This is samsara's trick to prolong its own life. It is actually

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our own trick to keep tripping our selves up. If suffering were constant, we wouldn't like it. We would do anything to get rid of it. We would leave no stone unturned! But then there is always another picnic spot, and we enjoy ourselves a little bit there.

Actually, this pattern itself brings us more suffering and pain, since these very picnic spots always turn out to be less comfortable and enjoyable than we expected. Something is always wrong, and it is never fully satisfying. At first it is great, the second time is not that good, and the third time it is even worse. But we fall for samsara's trick again and again and again. We don't put enough efforts into getting out of samsara entirely. We are not convinced enough that it is so bad. Whenever we suffer, there is also a picnic spot in sight somewhere.

Now, look again at the purpose of Buddha saying, "Know suffering." If we don't know, we won't have enough enthusiasm, enough encouragement. We know there is something called pain and suffering, but we are not completely convinced that it is so bad. We just hope that there will be another picnic spot near by, not realizing that the picnic spot itself will change into suffering. It is changing suffering. We don't realize even that – forget about pervasive suffering! We only realize something when dissatisfaction hits us, and then we think something went wrong. "What happened? That's not what I remember! It has turned into something else!" Therefore the point is to know suffering.

Right now we have suffering, but we don't really

know it. When we actually know it, we will be convinced enough to do something to become free of it. That is the purpose of the First Noble Truth: knowing suffering. Once you begin to know it, you apply wisdom and that is what cuts the root of suffering. The fundamental basis for building the spiritual path within us really lies here. That's why Buddha sometimes says:

*The great Vajrayana practice is not so
profound.*

*The three words of refuge are more
profound than the highest yoga tantra of
Guhyasamaja.*

Refuge is profound because it affects the individual. It gets us in touch with the deepest part of ourselves. Somehow from there we can get to a deep change within ourselves.

Again, one has to be very careful not to make that change simply into an emotional “experience.” If it becomes some emotionally twisted change, then you have what we call “hairy renunciation,” something short-lived, just for today. Under that emotional influence, people may say, “I am going to give everything away, become a monk or nun, and sit in a Himalayan cave! I am ready to leave New York City and go into the high mountains of Tibet!” They would like to roam the high plains with the yaks! That is a short-lived emotional episode that will lead you nowhere.

Do not entertain such an emotional state, but work on a deep change in your life. If you move in deep enough

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you will become a spiritual person. Just running on high emotions, you won't get the full extent of development and may get lost somewhere in-between.

The deepest opportunities you have can be hijacked by emotions. Of course, you also need emotions, but some teachers look for emotions, whereas I mostly reject them, because they are too short-lived, not capable of delivering the goods. Let the emotions pass through. If you want to imagine and meditate based on emotions, see how long they live within you. When the powerful emotional movement goes away and begins to reduce, then you should have a solid movement building up. That solid movement's feeling is something we can count on – not the emotional stuff that depends on which way the wind blows.

I always give the flag as example: When the wind blows from the east, the flag will turn into the wind towards the west and go *pada pada pada* and make as much noise as possible. Then when the wind changes, the flag will change with it and make a lot of noise in that direction: *pada pada pada*. That is not stable development.

Allow the emotional period to pass by, and then you will begin to have solid development. The fundamental basis of your spiritual path will not be to look for quick solutions. Here you see the difference: The emotional feeling looks for quick solutions, while the solid feeling will not look for a quick solution but will aim at sustaining development.

I am not talking to any particular individual, but to every one of us, myself included. When the solid base

comes in, that will be a reliable foundation. No matter from what direction the wind blows, that solid base will not change. Whatever the conditions may turn out to be, the solid base will not change. It sees the reality of life, our true situation, and it sees the opportunity of this particular precious human life.

THE OPPORTUNITY WE HAVE

This life has value and meaning. Every life is precious, no doubt about it, but we are referring to this precious human life, with its special significance and meaning and value. The opportunity and capability in this life right now makes it tremendously precious. For example, if we look back at American life in the 1950's, that was a great life in itself, no doubt about it, but the opportunities we have today were not there. If the opening up of society during the 1960's had not happened, the opportunities we have today would not exist. Honestly speaking, they would not be here. The revolution that took place in the 1960's brought awareness to the American people, to our society.

Even today, this spiritual path is great, no doubt about it, but still, it is too crazy for some people—too unreal, not mainstream enough. The few of us who practice it seem to the others to be some strange species. That itself shows the lack of opportunity for those people. That is the true reality. We all have the same body, the same mind, the same capacity, but they are not able to do anything to get rid of their suffering. They were born with suffering and will die with suffering. We, on the other hand, can

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make a difference now.

Even among well-educated people you can see that difference. That shows you the rare opportunity that we have. It is important, therefore, to recognize both the suffering and the opportunity this life has. It should give you a feeling of joy and happiness that you can do something about suffering. It should inspire you to take advantage of the situation, to use this opportunity. If you don't do anything about your pain, then compassion becomes a joke. If you only see your pain but fail to do anything, then you just suffer more.

Right now we have pain. We recognize and feel it. We also notice the different layers, and know about those picnic spots that don't seem to be so bad. Yet deep down, even then, there is all this pain. Once you realize that, then you don't have to go into it and try to feel all the pain. All you have to do is to recognize it. You have to "get it." You have to know and understand how the pain is there. That is good enough. You don't have to experience it more.

Remember how during the election campaign between George Bush Senior and Bill Clinton, when George Bush went to a supermarket, it became obvious that he didn't know anything about the prices of things. He did not know how much a carton of milk or a pound of hamburger costs. He was even surprised to see the scanning machines. Clinton, on the other hand, knew the prices of all the different items. This showed people the difference: one candidate was in touch, the other out

of touch. That does not mean that Clinton had to suffer from not having enough money to pay for a carton of milk or a pound of hamburger! Yet he was able to link up his knowledge and information to imagine correctly how people have to deal with not having enough money to buy these things. Because he had that knowledge and understanding, the American public recognized that he was in touch with people and in touch with reality.

In exactly the same way, you have to know the pain, and how it tortures the individual. When you understand that, when you “get” that, then you are in touch. You do not have to experience all the pains yourself. That is the difference between being in touch and out of touch. Compassion has the understanding and “gets” the pain. That does not mean that compassionate people have to suffer all those pains. You have to know that distinction.

Therefore, the purpose of learning about the truth of suffering, the First Noble Truth, is not to suffer more, but to understand suffering, to know it. Doing so will make you dislike the situation as it is and look for a solution. That dislike has to be solid, not just an emotional experience. When you have that, you are building a solid spiritual foundation. That is the purpose of the First Noble Truth.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION/MEDITATION

1. What message is there for me in the story of the Buddha’s early life?
2. How have I experienced “samsara’s trick to prolong

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its own life”?

3. Have my deepest opportunities ever been hijacked by emotions? How could “getting” the First Noble Truth help me in these cases?

II UNDERSTANDING THE TRUTH OF SUFFERING

In the *Three Principles of the Path*, Je Tsongkhapa, founder of the Ganden Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, wrote:

*Swept away by four raging rivers,
Tightly bound by karmic chains, so hard to
escape,
Trapped in the iron cage of self-grasping,
Shrouded by pitch-black ignorance,*

*Born again and again in endless cycles of
life,
Constantly tortured by the three sufferings,
All our mothers are in this plight.
Please generate ultimate compassion and
love.*

The First Noble Truth is here, quite clearly. We are really swept away by four raging rivers: attachment, confusion, desire, and wrong view.

Attachment and desire are slightly separate. In Tibetan, they are two different things. Not every desire is attachment, but every attachment is also desire. It is

possible to have desire for enlightenment, but that might not be attachment. That is Buddhist dogma, so let it be there. We are caught up in some very strong pull-and-push dilemmas, torn between love and hate, and attachment and rejection. That is the meaning of being swept away by four raging rivers. Almost every activity in our lives, every agenda, is directed by these powerful currents that sweep us back and forth all the time. Otherwise, why do most of us show long faces so often? We share our tears all the time. I am sure many times they are real tears and not just crocodile tears. We have been tormented in this way throughout our life and lives.

Even though we are swept away by those four rivers, it would not be so bad if legs of compassion and hands of wisdom were at our disposal. We could probably swim to the shore. We have very strong survival instincts and would definitely manage to survive. However, we don't have the wisdom of the hands. We may have some human intelligence, but even that is tied and shackled by the confusion, fear, and ignorance that I call ego.

Ego is so powerful. Any tiny little disagreement comes up, and our ego feels hurt. Whatever anybody does anywhere, ego reads it as an insult, as being put down, and reacts with pain. It tells us, "I have not been respected! They don't remember what I did for them! I am not being treated like a human being!" When we feel hurt all the time, it is the ego that is getting hurt. These feelings are very powerful, and they completely control us. That is what is meant by *tightly bound by karmic chains so hard to escape*. Our hatred pushes in one direction, our

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attachment pulls in the other directions, and ego holds us tight.

Then, being swept away by the four rivers with hands and legs bound would still not be so desperate if at least it were daytime and someone could see us and help us. However, it is dark, and no one can see us. That is the effect of ego-ignorance. It is the reason why many people are not straightforward, though they would like to be. In reality, they hide their wrong motivation and wrong actions, their agendas. Again, this is the work of ego. It tells us that if we do things openly and clearly, we are exposing ourselves and making ourselves vulnerable, so we try to hide our agendas. In that way, ego keeps us under the cover of darkness, so that no one can see and help us.

THE THREE KINDS OF SUFFERING

Not only that. Being swept away by the four rivers happens not just once, but we have been repeating this pattern life after life. We do it all the time, day after day, week after week, month after month. Again and again we live in that condition. In fact, life after life, we are in that situation, tortured by three sufferings: *the suffering of suffering, changing suffering, and pervasive suffering.*

We know about *the suffering of suffering.* It is the mental, physical, and emotional pain we always experience. This kind of suffering is gross and vivid and obvious.

Changing suffering is also our constant, daily experience.

We feel hot, so we turn on the air conditioner. Then it gets too cold, so we turn it off. We may even turn on the heating. Again it gets too hot, so we turn the air conditioner on. Soon it gets too cold, and we have to grab every blanket we can reach. If we can't, we have to pull the curtains down! We experience something that seems at first like a little bit of joy, but when it is slightly more or less than what is comfortable, it immediately becomes suffering.

This goes for everything we enjoy. If we overdo it just a little, it gives us pain. It goes for food and everything else, including sex. It looks like something pleasant, but a little extra turns the experience into pain. You don't even need the extra bit. Just doing the same thing regularly makes the quality of the experience get worse and worse and worse. You know what I am talking about. That shows you that what you think is pleasure is really changing suffering.

Pervasive suffering is a little more difficult to understand. According to the Buddha, everything we experience, including joy, is not happiness at all. In the prayer *The Four Immeasurables*, we pray for *the joy has never known suffering*. That shows us that there is a kind of joy that we have not experienced so far. According to the Buddha, we are constantly in samsara, the state of misery and pain, and not in nirvana, the state of joy and peace. In our experience we think that some moments are joy and happiness, but in reality they are all pain and suffering.

This is true. The joy we experience is like the joy of

people addicted to cigarettes. It becomes a physical need to have another drag on a cigarette. Not having one causes physical tickling in the joints and sometimes headaches. I know because I have been through it. I never knew that these were called withdrawal symptoms. When I stopped smoking, I took aspirin. For thirteen years I smoked up to three packs a day of an Indian brand called Panama, a heavy cigarette without filters.

I finally gave up smoking through willpower. I didn't stop because I got sick, but because I was supposed accompany a big Rimpoche who had come from Tibet on a trip to Ladakh. He is related to our family and is the head of the Drikung Kagyu school. He came out of Tibet as a young man and stayed for a while in America. By rank he is pretty much the most prominent lama in Ladakh. He was supposed to visit Ladakh for the first time and asked me to go with him. He was asked to compose texts and do blessing ceremonies. They needed someone to help and asked me to go, and I agreed.

In Ladakh, if you smoke, they look at you almost as if you are a butcher, a very low class person. That is their culture, so I had to cut it out. A friend of mine said, "You should stop after this pack." I thought, "Right." But then I thought, "Oh, if I wait till after the pack, I am never going to stop. If I stop, I have to do it right now!" I did not even finish the cigarette I was smoking. I put it out half-smoked and flushed the rest of the pack down the toilet.

Then I got this itchy business. I kept on looking at my watch. Half an hour went by, one hour went by, then four hours, and then I thought, "I feel like smoking one

now, but do I want to blow the sacrifice of the last four hours for a few drags on a cigarette?” Thinking like that I extended the period of not smoking to days, and then weeks, and then it was certainly not worth blowing all that effort again. Just the headaches alone wouldn’t be worth it. I never knew that they were withdrawal symptoms. I was taking aspirin anyway, quite a lot. After I while, I forgot all about wanting to smoke, until I saw other people doing it, and I got the itch again, but I forced myself to remember that I had stopped.

Once you make your mind up strongly, you are not going to go back and submit to the addiction. Then later, if you smoke one here or there, it will not bother you.

The little joy-kick of smoking a cigarette may be experienced initially as wonderful, but you know how harmful it is. It will give you lung cancer and so many other problems. Clearly, it is not joy but suffering, and so are alcohol and all other intoxicating substances, including some prescription drugs. They may not give you much joy, but they certainly give you a lot of trouble.

Like that, Buddha tells us that in samsara, every joy we think of as joy is actually pain. Pain is hidden within that fake joy. It will cause pain and create ego-boosting mechanisms that hurt the individual more and cause more pain. That is what pervasive suffering is all about, briefly speaking. Normally, when you talk about pervasive suffering you are supposed to talk more in detail about “anti-wisdom” ideas. But in brief, “pervasive” means that the suffering is everywhere. Every joy we experience is

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contaminated; every experience is contaminated by the cause of suffering or by its result—the suffering itself.

Basically, these three types of suffering constitute what Buddha identified as the First Noble Truth of suffering. Every single thing that we consider happiness and pleasure is included. We don't have any uncontaminated joy at all—any *joy that has never known suffering*. We have never experienced this kind of joy; we don't even know what it is all about. We have just heard the words and repeat them like a parrot, but other than that, we have no idea.

We do have suffering, but many times, we do not recognize it. When we are young, we don't know about it and don't think about it. We think we can handle anything. We think we can run as fast as a galloping horse! We think we can catch anything in our hands, even a bird flying in the air! But year after year, day after day, week after week, we learn we can't do this, and we can't do that. We slowly discover the truth of suffering. We are not discovering anything new. It was already there, but we hadn't encountered it directly yet.

We know for a fact we will encounter it gradually. It is going to happen. The police can make computer drawings from a photo that show how the face of a suspect will look after twenty years. All these really show is how the natural process has taken place. In reality, that natural process is the true suffering of aging, plus illness, plus death. All of those are there waiting right in front of us. We cannot escape that reality. However, we can learn how to handle it.

We had a public debate in New York once between Professor Thurman and myself. At the break, Dr. Anthony King and Jim Winter did a comedy skit with Tony mimicking me and Jim Winter mimicking Professor Thurman. It was wonderful, perfect! Tony pretended to be me with a big pillow under his shirt, lying back in his chair. Then I realized that must be exactly how I look. So then I began to worry, “Oh my god, I didn’t know I was that big and fat, almost like immovable furniture!” Of course, the show was a little exaggerated, but you can’t exaggerate unless there is a basis for it. Naturally, there is a big basis here [pointing to his belly] and now I realize I have to sit more upright, instead of lying down, too relaxed. All these thoughts and emotions come up, which are not really suffering, but they do give you a little pinch.

Just like that, all sufferings, illnesses and so on give you that feeling.

A few weeks ago I went to a medical checkup in Malaysia. This time they said, “Oh my god, your kidneys are not functioning properly. They are only functioning at 40 per cent of their capacity. That is terrible!” For two days I was worried. I asked them how long I could rely on my kidneys. They said, “If there is nothing else, like a stroke or a heart attack, your kidneys will only function for another two and a half years maximum.” I thought, “I am only going to live for another two and a half years? Then I will die? Oh well, so what? Everybody has to die. The most important thing when you die is that you have some solid spiritual development to carry with you. If you are a great spiritual practitioner, you will see this as a

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great warning, and you will focus: Let me not waste my remaining two and a half years and work hard, so that I can achieve something. I am not a good practitioner and just keep on doing my normal work. Perhaps my normal work is my dharma work. If that is true, let me do it for as long as I can.”

These pains and worries are there. We get them. However, we have to realize that it is not that much, not unreasonable. People die much younger everywhere else. Often healthy ones drop dead, while chronically sick persons continue to struggle on. Uncertainty is one of the sufferings in samsara. Anyway, this is the reality, the nature of our life. When you are young, you look beautiful. That is not a surprise, since you are young. When you get old, you look ugly. No surprise there either, since you are old. So what's wrong with that? Old people worry about their looks. We all do, even the young ones do. They put on makeup and so on, and that is because they worry. It is mental pain. We all have that. That is the nature of our life.

THE SUFFERINGS OF THE SIX REALMS

If it stopped there, it would still be okay. But it doesn't. As long as you are in samsara, every life you take, every transition you go through, every change that happens is suffering in nature. Not only that: much stronger suffering exists than what we know in our human life.

Life in the hell realms is reality, not a fabrication. A lot of people say, “Hell may not exist, but we can experience

hellish suffering within our human life.” Many spiritual leaders say that. I wish it were true, but unfortunately I cannot say that.

I remember once during a spiritual conference, with Ram Dass, Jean Houston, and I think Roshi Joan Halifax, at some point Joseph Goldstein raised a question. He said, “Nowadays in America, none of the Buddhist teachers talk about the hell realms at all. I don’t either, since insight meditation teachers don’t talk about the hell realms. I wonder whether we may be doing a disservice to the community. If the hell realms are true, aren’t we doing a disservice by not talking about them?”

The reason why spiritual teachers avoid talking about hell realms is the fear that people may not like to hear about it and the fear that people may lose faith and not believe it. No one can say, “Yes, I went to the hell realms and have just come back. I saw So-and-So down there and that person sent a message.” At the same time no one can confirm that the hell realms are not true, either. So in between that, we choose not to talk about it and would rather leave it alone. Joseph Goldstein’s point may be true. Personally, I don’t have proof that hell exists, nor do I have proof that it doesn’t exist, but if it exists and we don’t talk about it, it may not be right.

I know we have many Catholics around here. Many of you may have run away from Catholicism to Buddhism, but unfortunately you are going to be greeted by talk about the hell realms here, too. If I don’t mention it and pretend that it doesn’t exist, I would be sweeping it under the rug, and that might not be right. According to

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the Buddha's teachings, not only is there one hell realm, but there are eighteen of them! There are eight hot hell realms and eight extremely cold hell realms, plus two in the usual human realm.

Let's talk about the lightest of them, which in Tibetan is called *yang ts*. That means "reviving" or "recovering hell." People there are so controlled by hatred that no one can stand anyone else. They pick up weapons and kill each other. The moment everybody is dead, a voice comes from the sky saying, "You may all revive." So they get up and pick up their weapons and start fighting and killing each other again. That happens a hundred times a day.

One step below that is another hell. You know how carpenters, before they cut a piece of wood, draw lines to indicate where they want to cut? In this hell, the hell attendants draw lines on your body and then cut through your body along those lines with sharp weapons. Then you revive and the same thing happens again. You don't die, because you are in a hell realm. You go through this again and again until the hell experience is finished.

Another hell is one that butchers are supposed to experience. The animals that you butchered appear to you in this hell as huge mountains and smash you in between them. Then you revive, and it happens again.

The lowest of all hells is called "vajra hell." *Vajra* means "indestructible," and the person suffering in that hell is indestructible, like a vajra. You burn in such intensely

hot fire that there is almost no separation between your body and the fire. But no matter how hot you burn, you don't die. It is like a very dry, three-year-old log that you put into the fire. It burns immediately, and you cannot see the difference between the log and the fire.

As I said, I have no proof that the hell realms are reality and no proof that they are not reality. But Buddha's teachings tell us that the hot and cold hells are there.

Similarly, there are indeed hungry ghost realms. These ghosts or spirits are so hungry, yet they can't eat. Some of them are extremely wealthy, but they can't use their wealth. Sometimes I am reminded of my experience as a diabetic. I love sweets, and people give them to me, but I can't eat them. These hungry ghosts, even if they find food, can't eat it. They can't get it through their throats.

In his praise to Avalokiteshvara, the Seventh Dalai Lama describes the suffering of the hungry ghosts. He says that their stomachs are a hundred times bigger than ours. They are like little mountains, but due to some kind of karmic knot in their throat, they can't get any food through. Their legs are as thin as stalks of hay. Their bodies are extremely dry, as if they were made of dust, totally covered by dust. When our human skin is very dry, it feels as if there is some dust on it, but hungry ghosts are covered in dust! They are extremely hungry and thirsty, so much so that fire comes out of their mouths.

That is the description of hungry ghosts. Many of the powerful ghosts that come and help or do harm are in the category of hungry ghosts. We know that they are

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there. They come and talk to psychics and give them all kinds of messages.

The suffering of animals is very well known to us. We see it all the time. Some animals we like, and some of them we don't. Some of them we cut, chop, and eat. We use their bones, their skin, and their meat. The famous oxtail soup is made from an ox's tail, the tail of an animal. In order to get that oxtail, we kill the ox. In order to get ivory, we kill elephants. And of course, animals also eat each other. Shantideva says that the biggest suffering of animals is that one eats the other. That is reality. We see it. Within the animal realm, a tremendous number of creatures live in the ocean. Deep down in the darkness there are zillions of them.

As human beings we know how much pain and suffering is in the human experience. That is no mystery to us. We don't need to be a rocket scientist to find out what sufferings we have. We know very well, as I have described already.

According to the Buddhist teachings the demigods are always jealous of the samsaric gods. They keep on fighting with them all the time, and they lose all the time. Still, they keep fighting. They won't give up.

The samsaric gods have suffering too. They may have a wonderful time and not see any suffering while they are in the god realm, but that does not mean they have overcome suffering.

According to the Buddhist sutras, Shariputra, one of Buddha's outstanding disciples, himself had a disciple who

was totally dedicated and devoted and was developing very well. Suddenly, an unfortunate incident took place, and the person died. Shariputra thought, “I will find out where he has been reborn and give him continuous teachings until he is liberated.” Through his meditative power, Shariputra found out that this guy had been reborn in the thirty-third heaven, and so, he went there to teach him.

Residents of the thirty-third heaven are known as “three-timers.” By their own karmic power, they know three times—their past, present, and future lives. Therefore, when Shariputra showed up in the thirty-third heaven, his former student recognized him. Since as a human being he had been totally devoted, Shariputra expected that his disciple would run towards him the moment he saw him, but the disciple was riding on an elephant, throwing flowers. Shariputra thought, “Now he will jump from the elephant and come running,” but instead, he just briefly raised his hand and went on his way. Shariputra appeared again for him somewhere else, but again, the disciple only raised a hand and moved on. That happened three times.

Shariputra went to Buddha and said, “I tried to connect with him and to continue to teach him, but he ignored me.” Buddha said, “Don’t you know that he is in a samsaric god realm?” Shariputra said, “I know. That’s why I went there.” Buddha said, “The gods in the samsaric god realms don’t have any suffering and are not in touch with suffering at all. Suffering is not a problem for them until the time they are about to die.”

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These samsaric gods are supposed to have flowers on their bodies all the time, naturally, from birth onwards. They don't have to replace them. The flowers are just there, by the power of karma. We human beings have to change our clothes every day, but samsaric gods don't have to do that. The flowers are all naturally fresh. But close to the time of death, suddenly the flowers begin to get old. That is the sign that their life as a samsaric god is coming to an end. That realization causes them extremely intense suffering. They begin to worry, "What is going to happen to me?"

Also, all their friends begin to avoid them. They know, "This person is going to die. They are full of disease and bad things. If I go nearby, I will be contaminated." So they avoid the dying gods, who end up sitting in a corner somewhere by themselves. Some very close friends may give them a flower garland to wear, but they won't give them the flowers by hand. They take a long stick, put the flower garland at the tip of the stick, and then throw the garland at them. That is experienced as a terrible insult.

The dying god thinks, "Where am I going to be reborn?" and through their karmic power, they realize, "Tomorrow I will be a little piglet in the slums of Calcutta." That will give them tremendous worry and suffering.

Therefore, as long as we are in samsara, no matter where we are, we have suffering by nature. Therefore, Buddha declared: *Samsara is suffering. Nirvana is peace.* In samsara, everything you do is contaminated. Everything in samsara is suffering.

There are a lot of different ways of determining what constitutes contamination. The views vary according to the various schools of Buddhist thought. Most Buddhist schools say that you overcome contamination on the third [of the five Mahayana paths], the path of seeing [emptiness]. In any case, as long as everything we do is ego-controlled, ego-influenced, we have contamination. And as long as that contamination remains, we are under the control of suffering. We are not only within reach of suffering, but we are inside of suffering. Everything is suffering.

Some sufferings are experienced as painful, and some are experienced as nice little picnic spots. If it weren't for these picnic spots, no one would remain in samsara. The negativities are so clever; they know they have to sell samsara to you. That's why there are picnic spots.

We have talked about the sufferings in the six realms of existence: hells, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, demigods, and samsaric gods. The first three are called "the lower realms," full of the suffering of suffering. Human beings, demigods, and samsaric gods are part of the better or higher rebirths. They have changing suffering as well as the suffering of suffering. All of the six realms have pervasive suffering. These three kinds of suffering completely control our life as well as our previous and future lives. They have tormented us and tortured us life after life.

Today, it is a different picture. We now have this precious human life with a precious mind. We have a

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mind that can understand and analyze, can decide to do right or wrong, so we do have a choice. We have the capability to make a difference. That is the value of the open-minded human life; we are willing to do something for ourselves to end our suffering once and for all. It is indeed a great time.

While the tradition may tell us that we are living in a degenerate age, for us this time is the greatest time that we could hope for. We have the opportunity to fulfill the mission of life: to end our suffering. That's why this life is different. In many lives, we have been multi-billionaires. At other times, we have been poor, homeless, and sick. In some lives we have been born in Darfur-like environments and undergone the sufferings the people have there. Sometimes we were born in situations like being in the middle of Iraq today. Some lives were okay: a life when we were in touch with pain and had an understanding of how we could end it, a life when we could decide between right and wrong, as we wanted to. Such a life is a precious open-minded life, and that is where we are today.

My dear friends, this is where we are today. This is not a joke or just a dharma talk. It is reality. If we want to help ourselves, we can. If we don't want to, we don't have to. No one can force you to do something that you don't want to do, anyway. That's our life. That's how it is.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Audience: I am intrigued by the idea of understanding

suffering without necessarily having to experience it. How does that work? If it is a direct perception (Tib: *ngön sum*), then that means you do in fact experience it yourself. If not, you are just watching others go through it. You may think that homeless people feel cold and hungry, but to what degree can you really understand it without experiencing it yourself?

Rimpoche: Very good question. Your understanding of suffering is still a direct perception, even if you don't suffer yourself. I don't think that in order to have direct perception, you have to suffer. Let's say we see a car running over somebody on TV or the Terminator shooting everybody. Let's presume he is not the governor of California!

Two things are happening here. One mind is telling you that it is just a movie, not reality. On the other hand, you can go too much into it and no longer experience it as a movie but think it is really killing and hurting. You may say, "Turn off the TV. It is too much violence. I can't bear it any more!" That indicates where you are and how you are able to handle it. If you can make the distinction and tell yourself, "It is a movie; it is a movie," you are reminding yourself that this is not reality. Another person gets really involved and believes it is real.

Both do "get" what's happening. One gets the message of the violence and takes it so much on them selves that they can no longer watch it. The other sees the same thing, and gets the same meaning. It is the same direct perception through eye consciousness seeing the same

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action and getting the same message through to the sixth consciousness, mental consciousness. However, the way the sixth consciousness takes the message is different.

Actually, a movie is not really the best metaphor, because nothing is really happening. Let's assume the TV show is real. In that case, you see all the pain, and yet that does not mean that you need to suffer. Some individuals do take on the suffering and have to turn off the TV. Some individuals can see it and realize that it is a movie. So, not every knowledge of suffering necessarily means that you have to experience it.

Audience: I am still not clear about it. Some people will somehow understand your suffering better than others. It makes you feel better to talk to them about it. What is that difference?

Rimpoche: Again, let me use the ordinary term: the one whom you feel understood by, the one who “gets” what you are suffering from.

Audience: Let's say I am myself in acute pain. I am experiencing that as pain . . .

Rimpoche: The pain that you experience as the one who is suffering and what the person who understands your suffering feels cannot be compared. There is no comparison.

Audience: If I have strong physical suffering, there is also mental and emotional suffering that accompanies

that. Maybe I can remedy the mental and emotional suffering through understanding the illusory nature of everything, but meanwhile, living in the relative world, I still experience the physical pain. How can I have any joy then? How can I deal with that suffering?

Rimpoche: Take some aspirin. If that is not enough, take Tylenol!

Audience: How does a highly developed individual who has understood reality and developed bodhimind while living the life of a human being handle getting stomach cancer and having strong physical pain? Can they adjust to it only on a mental level or can they change the experience also on the physical level to eliminate suffering?

Rimpoche: I don't know. I should have asked the Sixteenth Karmapa, who did die of cancer. It is not certain whether the physical pain really tortures a person with high development, but by being born in this life as a human being, they do have discomfort, for sure. I don't know how much physical discomfort they really have. Of course, the mind plays a very powerful role in that. Some physical pains can be made into pleasure just by mind.

I am sorry, but I have to give you a dirty example. In some magazines you see these girls with rings in their nipples and "down there" as well and then they pull at that and call it pleasure. To me, it looks like pain, but these individuals, because of their minds, may actually

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read this as samsaric pleasure. Otherwise, why would they willingly pull on that? This is proof of mind over matter. If you look along those lines you may get some understanding of this issue.

Audience: Why do we, as spiritual practitioners, have to wait for the moment of death to end suffering?

Rimpoche: Nobody says you have to wait for death.

Audience: You said earlier in the talk that we were born with suffering and are suffering now and will continue to suffer, but that we don't have to die with suffering.

Rimpoche: I did say that by the time we die, we don't want to still have suffering. That means we should get rid of it *before* we die.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION/MEDITATION

1. How have I experienced the three kinds of suffering?
2. What is my reaction to the descriptions of the sufferings of the six realms of existence? In what ways do I find these descriptions helpful?
3. How does taking a panoramic view of my life and lives help me to “get” the First Noble Truth?

III

THE SECOND NOBLE TRUTH: THE CAUSE OF SUFFERING

Where does all this suffering come from? It comes from somewhere. Even if you say that it is natural, you can't say that everybody has the same suffering. Your experience of pain and my experience of pain differ. What accounts for this difference? Suffering doesn't just pop up, although it may look like it does. Sometimes, all of a sudden, it's right there, but the next minute, it is gone.

Pain is reality. I don't think we doubt that. You can even see it in young people. Look at young girls. When you see them, they are nicely made up, trying to show the best face they can, but then you see dissatisfaction between the cracks of the makeup, the pain of not fulfilling their desires. It all pops up. As a matter of fact, we all carry that dissatisfaction and pain year by year, and meanwhile we get more and more wrinkles!

Each and every one of us here knows people who have lost their lives. The older you get, the more people you lose. This is reality, true reality. The younger ones will experience this later. The older ones are experiencing it more today. In reality, when someone we know dies, we should dedicate our virtues to purifying all the negative karmas that person may be carrying. We should

dedicate our virtues to fulfilling his or her wishes for a next wonderful human life—not only a human life, but a human life that meets with the teachings of the Buddha and of great Tsongkhapa, so that by doing so, that person can complete the path and become fully enlightened within that lifetime. Because we have a connection to that person, and the connection works, our efforts are not just simply praying. We do have that connection with our sangha members, so we dedicate and we pray.

If we could end our pain and suffering by death, we could all go easily, but it doesn't end there at all. As a matter of fact, death itself is pain, tremendous pain. Can you imagine the separation of the consciousness and its companion, the physical body? The physical body is like a rented apartment, and our consciousness is the occupant. It sits there and occupies the body. Death is like an eviction. You are being kicked out of your apartment.

Where I live in Michigan we sometimes see someone's belongings thrown on the curb, even if it's raining or snowing. Some friends may be able to come and pick up the belongings with a truck or something. Death is like that—an eviction. You have been kicked out of your house. Your physical body that you remained in for a whole lifetime has now kicked you out. That is pain, no doubt about it. People sometimes say that death is so easy, so beautiful, so wonderful, blah, blah, blah. True on one hand, but on the other hand, not everybody goes that easily. There's a lot of pain.

Separation itself is very painful. How difficult it is

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when two human beings separate, especially if they have been together many years! No matter how much you may pretend that nothing has happened, that's not true. In reality, there is tremendous pain. That is separation after a few years, but at death there is separation after a whole life. Born together, our body and our consciousness are now separated. If you think there's no pain, you've got to be crazy. There has to be.

Buddhist teachings sometimes tell you how many hallucinations you suffer during death. In absolute reality, they may be hallucinations, but in relative reality, we really experience these hallucinations. We call them hallucinations, but for the person who's going through them, they are absolutely real. That person is going through mental and physical pains and miseries, and they are all absolutely real.

This way or that way, young or old, man or woman, human beings, animals, or the other living beings, we all suffer tremendously, all the time, constantly, continuously. If not one, then the other suffering gets us. If not ourselves, then it gets our family. If it's not the family, then it's me. If not me, it's my mother in-law. In addition to the obvious suffering of suffering, every day we are constantly getting older, sicker, and closer to dying. We are walking, almost running towards death.

A 17th century Amdo master said:

*The moment we were born we do not have
the right or freedom to sit for even a*

single minute.

*We are running, running towards death,
just like a galloping horse.*

*We call ourselves living being, but all of us
are on the way to death.*

Further he says,

*How sad it is, no matter who you look at,
yourself, your loved ones, or someone you
hate, all of them are in that situation.*

This is reality, the absolute truth. Nothing can reverse it. Life is always moving forward. That itself is pain, that itself is suffering. Physically you may look better today, worse tomorrow, better day after tomorrow, and worse the day after that, but the whole movement, if you look at it, is going from bad to worse, honestly. That is the reality.

On top of that, there are all our other sufferings. When one comes, it brings the others. They all come together. Some sufferings take you on a spiral, make you circle round, and push you deep down under the ground. All our emotional sufferings do that. I'm sure we all have experienced that. It doesn't have to be a really big thing, even a tiny little thing, the way someone looks at you, what words they say to you, sometimes can trigger something and push you down that spiral, all the way down—seven layers below the earth where no one can get to you. Though it looks like there's no way out, it

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never ends there. You know the beauty of it: The good news is, whenever you go down, the end of going down is coming up! It has to be. This is the circle. This is our life is and how it functions. It goes down, and whatever goes down comes up, and whatever comes up has to go down. That's what it is

Is there an end to this? Is there something you can do, or do you just have to wait for millions of years for your chance, or your turn, or whatever it is? The answer that Buddha discovered is no, you don't have to wait. You can do it by yourself. But you have to deal with suffering at the causal level, not at the symptom level, which is the result. If you are sick, you have symptoms. From the symptoms, we know what is wrong with us. But we don't treat the symptoms; we treat what causes the symptoms.

Why do I have to acknowledge that my beautiful, youthful, cute, sweet face looks like a monkey now? Why do I have to know this? Because it's the truth, and by knowing, I can change it. I have a way of changing it. How can I change it? Do I have to go to a plastic surgeon? Plastic surgery will do no good. Maybe for a year or so, surgery will hold your eyelids up and make you look better, but they will come down again. So that's not the point, really.

The point is that we need to find out where these sufferings are coming from. Why are they happening? We have a tendency to say, "Oh, that is reality; that is life." But that's not the answer. Yes, it may be life, it may be reality, but why do we need to know about it? Because if we want to make changes, it does no good to make

them at the symptom level, the result level; we have to make changes at the causal level. At the result level, the only changes you can make are like plastic surgery.

Change the cause. When you change the cause, you can change the result. In fact, the result can only be changed at the causal level. When Buddha first went out of that palace made especially for him, wherever he looked he saw miseries. Then he asked, “What can I do?” He wanted to get free himself, to help his family to get free, then also to free his subjects, and finally to free all living beings connected to him. Buddha realized that you can change all this only at the causal level.

If a third person could really create the cause [of suffering] for us, it would be terrible! Then you would have found a true enemy, one who really created suffering for you. If an enemy like that existed, then you would take hold of that enemy and do whatever you have to do, cut it, kill it, or whatever. But it’s not anybody else! It’s me. I did it. This is my responsibility. That’s what it is all about.

ANALYTICAL MEDITATION AND THE CAUSE OF SUFFERING

When you hear statements like this you may think, “What has that got to do with meditation?” I am actually giving you the materials to meditate on. Without the materials, you cannot meditate. If you keep on meditating without the materials, you’re just sitting and watching.

When I arrived in the US in the mid 1980’s, I

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decided not to talk too much about meditation yet, because I thought people were not very familiar with it. But when it slipped from my mouth one time, I noticed that everybody started moving into meditation position. So people knew something about it, but for most, even now, meditation means just sitting and watching or counting your breaths. This form of meditation, called concentrated meditation is helpful, but it cannot challenge the ego at all. It does bring calm, quiet, and wonderful feelings, which are absolutely needed before we can challenge our ego. Right now our mind is not stable. It jumps around, like fleas on the fur of our pets. Our mind jumps even faster than fleas! Just to get used to meditating and settle the mind down a little bit, you need concentrated meditation.

But concentrated meditation alone is not going to give you much. No matter how long you sit, nothing will really change. You may sit like Mt. Everest, but that is not challenging your ego. Without doing that, you cannot challenge the cause of your suffering. At best, you can postpone your suffering for awhile, but that is not getting rid of it. The intellectual capacity is the one that really does the work. Many people think the holy thing to do is to sit there and think nothing. You want to look holy, fine, it does not matter, but that does not serve any purpose. Our goal is to cut suffering. In order to do that, we have to cut our negative emotions. Concentrated meditation can reduce or block out anger or obsession for a while, so it is a good thing. We can build up a little compassion and generosity, a little bit of morality and

patience. That's all great, no doubt about it, but it won't get us very far.

Also, concentrated meditation can help you train your mind to be able to focus, which is very helpful. Our minds are extremely busy. So give the mind a little relaxation. On a regular basis at home, give yourself a little quiet time: make sure no one's yapping at you and the television and radio are off. Just give yourself twenty minutes if you can, or even five minutes, and you'll see the difference. It is best to do that in the morning and evening, but if you can't do both, at least do it once a day so that you can see how you feel. Then you can extend it.

When you get a little relaxed, you can begin to meditate on how the mind works, how anger pops up. Remember how you got angry before and try to remember how it happened. You may recall, "I was very happy but then this person looked at me in a horrifying way, so I got angry." Recognize that you are blaming the other person, but the reality is that some mood within you changed. Why did the mood change? Because your moods are impermanent, and they change!

All of that is very good, but can it get you out of suffering for good? Can it free you from the First Noble Truth, the truth of suffering? I can clearly say, "No." [Concentrated] meditation gives your mind relaxation, mental peace, and harmony, but that's not going to liberate you from suffering at all. To be liberated from suffering, you have to have wisdom; without wisdom you cannot be liberated. Even compassion, no matter how good and wonderful it is, cannot liberate anyone from

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suffering. It can reduce the suffering, reduce the pain, reduce the cause of suffering, no doubt, but it is unable to liberate you.

The early Indian teacher Dharmakirti said:

Compassion, love, etc., is not the direct opponent of ego, which makes the individual suffer; therefore, kindness and compassion cannot cut the root of evil or samsara.

In other words, compassion cannot cut the suffering. That statement gives the experience of the earlier Indian Buddhist teachers, followed by all Tibetan masters. When you meditate, you need something to think about; otherwise it is simply sitting. It will not necessarily be a great form of practice or meditation.

We have to know how to handle our problems. How do we move forward on our spiritual path? What are the paths we are supposed to follow? Why should we follow them? What will make a difference to me and to all other beings? You have to know all of that. I don't mean you have to become a scholar, but you have to know what you're doing. If you don't know what you're doing, then you are like people who say, "The situation is under control" when it's not. It's as if water is going under the foundations of your house, and you keep sitting there saying, "The situation is under control." You do not know anything until the house collapses. If that happens,

it is a terrible waste of your spiritual life.

This is very important, and this is why we talk here, instead of teaching you how to meditate. I am giving you a lot of information, so take this information and meditate by yourself. You know how to meditate. It is not something secret; it is very simple. [Analytical] meditation is thinking, processing, and analyzing, drawing a conclusion, and focusing on the point on which you have drawn the conclusion. In order to do that, you need to get the information to think about and analyze. That's why we are talking here.

I would like to say that every thought, even the jokes, is meant for you to meditate on. Everything is part of the meditation material. In addition, whatever we may be talking about—suffering, the cause of suffering, cessation, path, good, bad, virtue, non-virtue, all of them—are totally focused on one point and one point only: the result that we are looking for, freeing ourselves from suffering.

Honestly speaking we cannot go on praying to Buddha, “Oh, free me from suffering!” That never, never, never happens! You can go on praying for Buddha to free you, but Buddha can't free you from suffering. You have to free yourself from suffering. Buddha himself said:

*Buddhas cannot wash the negativities by
pouring holy water . . .*

You can pour holy water on your head, but you cannot wash away negativities. In Vajrayana we meditate on

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blessed nectars coming to us and purifying everything, but on the other hand, Buddha has clearly said:

Suffering cannot be removed by hand.

Getting free from suffering is not like a mechanical system where you just press a button. Mechanically, we can stick a needle into our vein and pull blood out by hand, but the sufferings we experience cannot be pulled out by the Buddha's or anybody's hands. Gradually, they can heal. Everything can be healed because everything is impermanent. You can heal it, but you cannot change it just like that. No way! Only knowing the truth through practicing and meditating can cut through the pain and deliver you to the joy that has never known suffering. That is the whole purpose of whatever we talk and joke about here. Never ever forget that!

When we talk about suffering, what are we doing? We are learning about suffering. Why learn about suffering? You may say it is because Buddha taught that the First Noble Truth is the truth of suffering. That's not right. We are learning about suffering because *we* suffer and *we* want to get out of it. Remind yourself: "I'm not learning to be a professor. I'm learning because I want to know how to handle my suffering. I would like to get over it. I would like to get rid of it. That's why I'm learning." The learning provides the materials and the tools; the actual work is meditation. That's how it works.

We have to use our beautiful, intelligent minds and make the best choices. You people should discuss among

yourselves, form your opinions and challenge each other on these points. When you have debated them out, you will know clearly what's right and wrong. If you talk about it, read about it, discuss and debate, each and every action of every individual can be discussed. You don't have to ask or confess to each other, "I did this. Is it right or wrong?" No! You say, "If someone does this and that, is it a right action or a wrong action?" This is what the sangha is all about. The sangha discusses that and forms an opinion. Some people will contradict the opinion; other people will agree with it. Then you can see how far your logical power can lead you.

Whatever right conclusions you draw, that is what you meditate on, so that it becomes a part of you. That is how you go through the practice. Sitting down alone to meditate is a good thing, but what you meditate on has to be correct information. Whether it is correct or not will be decided by your intelligent mind and what you learn through reading. Then, after you pour the information in, you discuss it. When you hear me talking or the instructors talking, that's one thing. When you are using your mind, analyzing and debating, that is another thing. Then finally you are meditating. Whatever you have analyzed, whatever has come out of the analysis, that's what you meditate on. That is how you make your practice perfect. If you just sit down and do nothing, it is not that great. Even the cows know how to sit down. If you say, "Keep silence!" the cows may say, "Mooo." Other than that, they will keep silent.

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EASING OUR PAIN

Dharma means changing negative emotions and negative actions into positive ones. In Tibetan dharma is *ch*, the past tense of the verb “to correct.” So *dharma* means “corrected.” What has been corrected? Our negative addictions have been made into positive habits. That is dharma. That is not the translation from the scholarly, academic point of view, but from the practice point of view. When we say we are spiritual persons, the key is to make ourselves better persons.

When you meditate, analyze how your mind works. What does attachment do? What does anger do? You will see it. The cause [of negative emotions] is already there, and if the conditions arise, they will spark up. That is not a mystery. If you go deeper, you’ll see that everything functions by the same mechanism. Finding the cause introduces you to the target—what you need to get rid of. By getting rid of it, what you hope to gain is nirvana, peace, joy and happiness. We know we don’t want suffering, but if we know where suffering comes from, and we can get rid of the cause, we can get the result: nirvana. If you have to have an enemy, don’t look in Iraq; look inside yourself.

We can have poetry; we can have music; we can have dharma. All those are there to contribute to easing our pain. Allen Ginsberg asked me once, “What is the purpose of poetry?” I said, “The purpose of poetry is to ease the pain of the people.” If you read poetry, you will enjoy it and, at least for a minute, you’ll forget about pain

and suffering. Living is a little easier. Entertainment is all about that, anyway.

But, the spiritual path has to work in a different way than entertainment. It is supposed to end our pain forever. That is why each and every one of us puts energy into the spiritual path. Each and every one of us tries to be open-minded, and each and every one of us tries to be good, and each and every one of us tries not to hurt anyone else. That is what dharma is all about.

I would also like you to remember that suffering is not permanent, but impermanent. Even if you are flying in the air and are so happy, don't be overly happy, because happiness is impermanent, and you will fall down. Even if you are very deep down seven layers beneath the earth and suffering badly, still don't be so sad because that's impermanent, too. It is going to change, and you are going to go up. Recognize and acknowledge the suffering, but remember that it is impermanent and that the solution is in your own hand and nobody else's. God will not make you suffer, that is not in God's job description. It is your own job description! You have got to change that job description.

TWO TRUTHS ABOUT THE CAUSE OF SUFFERING

A verse of praise to Buddha by the great master Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Gelugpa or Yellow Hat tradition to which I belong, says:

You are the one who really experienced, and

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*whatever you experienced, you expressed,
and because of that I praise you, teacher
without equivalent!*

Tsongkhapa is saying, “You, teacher, are incomparable, not because you are holy but because you saw and experienced, and whatever you have seen and experienced, you have expressed. That is why you are great.”

Looking at suffering and the cause of suffering from that point of view, the sufferings that we go through are real experiences. Even when we think what we are experiencing is joy, there is suffering within that joy. You get little picnic spots, something nice happens, and it’s so great and wonderful. Some people get married, some people have a new girlfriend, some people have a new boyfriend, some people win Miss America, some people win the lottery, all this. But each and every one of these “joys” is attached to pain and causes pain, though when we are carried out with that new wave, we don’t realize it. We think, “I’m great, I’m above the clouds, sleeping on the clouds!” You know those mattress ads, “sleeping on clouds,” that is what we think.

The difference between a wise and a not-so-wise person comes in here, when you’re sleeping on the cloud. Sure, you can enjoy the cloud. There’s nothing wrong with that. However, you realize that you’re on the cloud and that the cloud is moved by the wind and can break at any time. It can disappear at any time and you fall through the cracks. Sleeping on clouds is for only a short time, a few minutes. One who realizes that is, I believe,

called wise. If you don't realize it, you carry on until suddenly you get into some kind of trouble. That pattern is common with many people. That is the truth about our life.

The trouble doesn't really have to be physical pain. It can also be mental or emotional pains. They're all real, absolutely real experiences. On the other hand, you can look at everything as impermanent by nature and to think that, therefore, it is all an illusion. You can look at everything in that way and cut through every event in life. But, on the other hand, everything is real.

Buddha says there are two truths: absolute and relative. Both are true. From the absolute truth point of view, we may all be living some kind of hallucination or illusion. When you deeply look at anything, it's not real. Remember, a few years ago, when George Bush was trying to get the Iraq War going. Now we know that all the allegations about "weapons of mass destruction" turned out to be about nothing—a huge thing we had imagined. When you look through that angle, you see the emptiness behind it.

The emptiness of it all is the reality, in one way. On the other hand, what happens is real. In life we just run parallels between what is real and what is not. I don't want to say that what we experience is hallucination, but it is sort of "non-real." And yet, these events in our life are also real. You know death is real. It really happens. Sometimes you are prepared, and you expect it. You expect it when a sick old man dies. But then sometimes,

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when you're not prepared, a young person all of a sudden goes. The son of one of our friends just died in a car accident. He was twenty-two years old. You know, he had a good rebirth, no doubt, but twenty-two is a bit too short. He didn't have much time or opportunity to do anything. So sufferings come in like that. Whatever is happening—pains, misery, or joy—everything is real, though in absolute reality they are empty, and you have to handle both together.

So, in life we really have to take both the absolute and the relative together. They complement each other; they do not contradict each other. They are real things, real truths. They are where the truth of suffering and the truth of the cause of suffering come in. Every time the wind blows differently, we suffer tremendously. Buddha saw this and personally discovered this because he himself experienced the same things we do.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION/MEDITATION

1. When in my life have I experienced the principle that “if you change the cause, you can change the result”?
2. When in my life have I become aware that even when I think am experiencing joy, there is suffering within that joy?
3. How can analytical and concentrated meditation help me to overcome the causes of suffering?

IV

THE CAUSE OF SUFFERING: ADDICTION TO NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

We are addicted to negativities. Believe me, no matter how much you think you're not, we're all addicted to negativities. We're addicted to hatred; we're addicted to obsession; we're addicted to attachment; we're addicted to jealousy; we're addicted to fear. We like it. Even if we don't like it, we get into it because we're addicted.

You don't have to take a training course to learn how to hate a person. You don't need to go to school to learn attachment or obsession. Obsession comes up like this: you look at it, you like it, and you want to touch it again and again and again. That's how you get addicted to it. That's the reality. Jealousy also happens immediately, without learning. Something happens and jealousy pops up in our life. Look at the causes—our addiction to negative emotions and the activities that we engage in—and you will see that it is no wonder that we suffer. If we don't suffer, who else will?

Your mind is no secret to you; my mind is no secret to me. My mind may be a secret to you, your mind may be secret to me, but your mind is no secret to you. So

look at it, look at how your mind functions. Your mind is more busy and naughty than a wild crazy monkey. If there is a wild crazy monkey in the temple, what happens? The monkey will jump all over the place, knock down all the candles, drink all the water, and if there's anything to be eaten, eat it. It will be jumping everywhere.

Our minds are much faster, much quicker, much more damaging than a wild crazy monkey. Even though we try to sit in a holy way, our minds don't see the holy way at all. They are bumping here and jumping there, caught by attachment, like a magnet picking up all the metal, zoom! What you are thinking of doesn't have to be something fantastic, but the mind will make it fantastic. Your mind will trick you. If you are obsessing about a person, you make the person ten times or maybe a hundred times better than they really are. You reduce the size and build up whatever you have to build up and cut whatever you have to cut. It's like getting the best artist available and shaping that image. You imagine that and then you obsess about it. Then, when you don't get it, you suffer. The person doesn't pay attention to you, and you suffer. That brings jealousy. Then you hate. That is how obsession becomes suffering, all the time.

That happens not only with persons, but also with things, fame, health, food—everything! It's like overeating. A little too much of anything is not good for you, even if it's healthy. Too much brown rice is not necessarily great. Too much wheat grass juice is not necessarily great. Attachment creates two effects in our minds: one is positive, nice,

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smiling, and beautiful, and one is negative, hating, and hurting. They both come together in the mind.

Love and hate also function together. Each action we take, even how we look, even how we say hello, creates pain and pleasure for other people. We create pain, and it hurts people. But when we create pleasure, it also hurts people, because we're not capable of 100% pure love—we're not there yet. We don't yet know the "joy that has never known suffering."

So, how can we stop hurting our selves and others? Buddha discovered the answer and shared it with us, but to understand it, we need to examine our minds very carefully. Ask yourself: "What makes me hurt myself or other people? What kind of mind makes that come up?" As you will discover, we don't function at all without mental direction. Without the mind, we are a dead body. Mind moves first and makes us do this and that. Mind makes us function. Even walking, sitting, going to the toilet—for every single thing we do, the mind comes before the action.

Our job is to observe that mind. As yourself: "What kind of thoughts and emotions make me do things?" Everything that we do that hurts us or other people follows some thought or emotion of anger or hatred or obsession or, most importantly, fear. Fear makes us do all kinds of things. Fear, hatred, obsession—these are the negative mental faculties.

Sometimes we think we have no control whatsoever over these feelings. It seems that way because we are addicted to them. It's like people who are addicted to

a substance, like drugs or alcohol, and it looks like they can't do anything—they have to have it. It's the same with people addicted to negative emotions, like us. We do the same thing. It is nothing but an addiction.

But though our addiction to some completely huge emotion rolls over us and feels completely controlling, it's not permanent. It is impermanent. Not only that, but it is preventable, avoidable. It's not just treatable, like some chronic illness that still gets you in the end, but completely correctable and preventable. If you go to an AA program, you can prevent it. I don't mean that Buddha made an AA program, but our addiction to negative emotions is preventable and correctable. We don't have to suffer.

Negative emotions are reversible, and you don't even have to submit to them in the first place. You don't have to entertain them. But we do, all the time. This happens because we don't recognize them, we don't know what's happening until our negative emotions have completely rolled over us and soaked us. We have a saying in Tibet about some clever people, "They are so witty, not only have they sold the item to you and taken your money, but they have already recycled it before you even know it's been sold."

So that is our problem. The answer is to recognize and acknowledge. It's nothing to be ashamed of. Everybody has the same problem. Some people don't want to say it. They try to smile and cover it with makeup. Denial keeps us from recognizing the problem. Denial never gives us the room to help ourselves at all. So do not deny: recognize, acknowledge, and remember.

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Once you recognize a negative emotion, even though it's too late to stop it, it doesn't matter. Better late than never. Even if it's past tense, you can still say, "Oh, that's what happened. That's fine." So acknowledge it. When you acknowledge problems in the "past tense," it helps you to acknowledge the present, too. That helps you to acknowledge a negative emotion even before it comes up, and that's how you prevent it.

NEGATIVE EMOTIONS AND THE EGO

Behind all the negative emotions is the ego. Ego is the problem. By the word "ego" I refer to the combination of fear and confusion. Traditionally in Tibetan they call this *ma rig pa*, which means "ignorance," but that doesn't make much sense here. The senior guru of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in his teaching in Delhi in 1980 used the word "ego," not in the sense that the psychologists used, but in the normal usage such as when we say, "That is your ego talking."

Ego has complete control over us, and makes us do exactly the opposite of what we want to do. We want to be good. The definition of what is good for me is not hurting anyone, being kind, compassionate, but ego makes us angry, hateful, obsessed, and jealous. All these emotions are the results of ego. Ego produces this. And truly, if you sit down and meditate, look inside yourself, you will see it, how ego makes you do everything in the name of protecting you.

Then you begin to see the real enemy, the real

challenge: your opponent. Ego gives us the idea that we must be better than the other one. It is natural; we all have it. If you pull back, sit down, meditate, and try to figure out how your mind works within yourself, you will clearly see it. Oh, that's the enemy. Avoid it. Or cut it out. Or kill it. Go beyond. Overpower it. If not, at least protect yourself. Right? So hold it, don't lose it, hang on there! Think. You will get it. We do not need Buddha to discover this. Just you and me, we sit down together, all by ourselves.

Think about how your mind works. Make yourself the observer. Move away from your mind, like a little fellow that goes outside, and look back at yourself to see how your mind is working. And hey, you have such a show there. You don't have to go to the movie theatre. You don't have to watch television. There's a tremendous show there, and it is completely relevant to your self. You will see how we build the "me." It is all about "Protect me, me, me, me! I want to be happy. I'm the one. I want, I, me, I, me, me, me! If anyone acts against my happiness, what I will do is kill them." Right? It's there, in our minds. Believe me, honestly. You don't have to tell anybody else; tell yourself. Watch, you have it. We all do. And that makes us react like a porcupine, ready to shoot anybody who comes in our way: Boom!

Where is that beautiful person we want to be? It's gone. It has become a porcupine. That is caused by ego, which is traditionally called ignorance. Ego is the combination of confusion, fear, and also a little bit of self-cherishing all

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together. That is the source of all our negative emotions. Our negative emotions make us do the negative things, although we don't want to. With or without knowing, sometimes even knowingly, we do it with a little chuckle, hey-hey-hey, but we do it. We can't help it. That is the ego influence.

We are addicted to our negative emotions. And that makes us do negative things. Because the original source is confused, we think if we push the person out who is in our way, then we are going to be completely happy and everything will be wonderful. We don't realize that if we get rid of one layer, another layer pops up. We all do this. As a society we do it, as individuals we do it. Look at our history for the last two hundred years or so. We think there's an enemy out there. We fight with them, and when we get done with them, we think we will be happy.

But enemies never end. Yes, we got challenged head on by Hitler, and we had World War II. The peace didn't last very long, and within a couple of years, Communism popped up. And then we got over that, and then all these dictators popped up. And then we got over them or not, but very soon Al-Qaeda and all these extremists popped up.

It is never ending because of the ego within us. That is true for nations, society, families, and true for the individual. Buddha found the key. We have to handle the emotions over here. The change and what you can do is over here. Because this is the causal level, not the result level, the change is not at the gross level, but at the subtle

level. These are our own deeds, and if we deal with them directly, it is much easier to handle the change from our own side.

That is how our lives are really functioning. One after another, one layer after another, it continues. We are confused because of our egos. The Noble Truth of the cause of suffering is actually the ego. It is the “me, me, me.” Why? Because if there is no “me,” then the question of “my” does not arise. And if there is no “my,” there is no need for attachment. And, if there is no “me,” there is also no “you” and therefore, no ground for hatred. That is very simple to say, but very hard to realize.

Ego is grasping at something called “me” within me that seems completely superior, almost supernaturally superior. Everything we do is for the purpose of protecting that, making that prosperous, developing that. Entertaining the ego is the cause of suffering. Not only should we not entertain the ego, but we should completely wipe out the ego. If we can do that, we’ll be free of suffering. That is Buddha’s discovery. That is the goal of our spiritual practice. Just opposite those negative emotions are love and compassion. That’s also what the Buddha discovered. When you wipe out your ego, you’re left with nothing but love and compassion.

PHYSICAL, MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL SUFFERINGS

The question is: the pains and sufferings that we experience—physical, mental, and emotional sufferings—

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where do they come from?

The sufferings in the hell realm, for instance, where do they come from? In Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* (Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life), we read:

*chak sey sang shey su ye je mey so te dang jig
le jung*

. . . who made the charcoal burning grounds?

Buddha's reply is:

*te dan te don tom je je dig sem ye mo tu way
sung*

*All of them come from our negative
emotions.*

According to the experience of the Buddha, all our sufferings come from our negative emotions. Mental, physical, emotional sufferings, all come from our negative emotions. Do you get it? Hatred, obsession, jealousy, fear, those types of minds cause our sufferings. You are not going to find any pain that does not come from those negative emotions.

Addiction to negative emotions and negative actions are the causes of suffering. Nothing else. No one made the fire ground and the fireballs that are supposed to be hitting individuals in the hell realms. Nobody gets any individual addicted to drugs. It is the individual who does it.

FIGHTING

Even when two people are very close together, like two peas in a pod, there is still the addiction of fighting. You scream and yell. Maybe the roof will fall on you, or you may be landing down the stairs. Who knows? That is also suffering.

No one is made to fight. Fighting is also an addiction. One has to watch all the time. Otherwise, early in the morning, you'll already be screaming, and someone else could hear you on the telephone.

Why, when two people love each other, do they fight? Because of jealousy or dissatisfaction. "I want it this way, you want it that way!" I'll say, "I want red wine." You'll say, "I have to have white wine." That's just an example.

DEPRESSION

Among the mental sufferings, a big one is depression. Depression is part of addiction. You are addicted to sitting and doing nothing and not moving, afraid and addicted to fear, and you just can't shake it off. And then because the addiction builds up, it becomes worse and worse and worse.

Depression is like the dull, overcast weather we have here in Michigan. I was hired by the University of California, Santa Barbara, for one week as a visiting professor. I had to give six lectures, which I did, and then came back! The weather is very nice over there, but the weather here makes you depressed! The usual Michigan

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gray weather! However, you can have a sunshine mind! Why not? The mental capacity of the human being is unlimited and can do all kinds of things. That is why we should not let any of those pains overpower us.

Remember Spaulding Gray, the brilliant person who wrote *Swimming to Cambodia*? When I met him the first time, we did a Tricycle benefit together in New York. He was such a brilliant and wonderful person. Then, year-by-year, he got deeper into depression. That depression became so difficult for him.

One time he came to see me at Jewel Heart in New York. At that time he was still okay, but quite depressed. Then the last time [I saw him] was when he came to see me at Jewel Heart in New York, brought in by a common friend. His depression was so bad, you can't do anything; he was just not there. So even a brilliant person like him finally committed suicide by jumping into the water in New York.

Even if you don't do anything, depression will eventually change, because it is impermanent. At the end of the lowdown, miserable time is going to be a high up and happy time. High up and happy also doesn't stay there. At the end, it goes down to deep suffering. That is true reality.

One of my dharma friends told me about a dream. In the dream, he fell into the earth, thirteen layers down or something. Way down below, you know, like in a well. He was stuck there. But then some kind of wind came and made a little piece of paper fly out of there, and that

paper flying out of there happened to be him!

LAZINESS

All this is very easy to say, see, and understand, but in practice it is hard. Talking about myself, I can see that as soon as I do some exercise or even if I just walk, my physical body feels better, but my laziness is such that I do not walk. I know that if I don't walk, being the couch potato that I am today, I'll just get bigger and bigger. I could end up paralyzed—I know that for sure! However, I cannot make myself move. I say "I'll walk today," then "I'll walk in the evening," then "I'll walk tomorrow!" The mind of walking is there, but the mind of walking *now* is not there! That is how laziness works.

For me being lazy is an addiction. I'm addicted. When you are overcome by addiction, you need more than knowing about it. You really have to act. One good thing with Western people is this: if you have the knowledge and the understanding, you act. Persons like me, we have a lot of knowledge about things, but we don't act. We just keep on doing whatever we do normally every day. The sun rises, and the sun sets; we get up, and we go to sleep. We have the information, but still we don't act. But in the West, the good thing is that people act. That is your advantage and you should take that advantage. One you have the information, apply it. Do it and do it now, because tomorrow you never know. When is tomorrow coming? One of the great teachers, Gungtang Jampalyang, said:

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*Whether tomorrow comes first, or the
so-called future life, one never knows.*

So therefore it is better to act now rather than wait for tomorrow. Tomorrow may never even come. See? I have the information in my head. Without thinking it pops up in my head just like popping out of a computer. However, can I act? No, I can't, because I'm addicted to being lazy and doing nothing!

For example, we know we should get up early in the morning. I don't mean at 3:30 am or 4:30 am or 5:30 am. I mean reasonably early. But we think, "Yeah, it doesn't matter. If you need to sleep seven hours or eight hours or whatever, it doesn't matter. Whenever you get up, that's fine." We all think that way.

But for the purpose of stopping our addictions, I think it is important for the individual to have discipline from the early morning, when you get up. Yes, it's true. On the weekends, because you don't have to work, you sleep late, and on weekdays, you get up early. However, that causes you not to have discipline. Since you sleep in on Saturday morning, you also sleep in on Sunday morning, and so by Monday, you love to sleep because you've picked up the habit. His Holiness the Dalai Lama says that he gets up every morning at 4:30 a.m., wherever he is, even when he's traveling. No matter what time, which place, wherever he arrives, he gets up at 4:30 am. When he's at his place in Dharamsala, he gets up at 3:30 am. Here, we begin to go to bed at 3:30 am!

The point is that when you have that discipline and make sure you don't sleep beyond 7:00 am, when you are up, you've got to do something. So what are you going to do? It gives you an opportunity to do your prayers. Or it gives you the opportunity to do your exercise. Discipline begins at the beginning of the day. Once you keep on going with the discipline, then it goes throughout your day. No problem.

I've been doing that. When I was a kid, I had to get up early in the morning. If I did not get up by 5:00 am or 5:30 am, I used to get hit on my knees with a stick, and I would wake up with pain. I would have to get up immediately. This is how in old Tibet they disciplined kids, by hitting them. The point is that no one was angry. No one had hatred. It was just a part of the discipline; they hit you all the time. We even used to have a saying, "your ear is on your butt!" It means until you get a hit or a spank on your butt, you won't move, because you can't hear the message! Hitting is a bad thing, of course, no doubt about it. However, it might have protected the person from doing something wrong.

If I had been hit for not doing my exercise, I would be half the size that I am today. And no, I'm not inviting anyone to hit me! So the discipline really begins at the moment you open your eyes. That is the time to begin cutting the laziness, at the time when you are lounging around in the morning, having a cup of coffee with no disturbance. If you can begin to discipline yourself at that time, there is a better chance of discipline throughout the day.

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There is a Tibetan saying:

*If you did right on the 1st day of the month,
you'll do right until the 15th of the
month.*

It means, if you have discipline and do the right thing the moment you get up early in the morning, it will carry you for at least half a day. And within half a day, again motivate yourself. That will carry you through the other half of the day. That is how one should work against one's addictions.

FOOD ADDICTIONS

People may think, "You are diabetic because you had too much sugar!" That is true! I had too much sugar when I was young! I was obsessed with sugar. I used to eat big rock candy every night, and in the morning when I woke up, all my blankets were stuck to my face! Every morning! I mean, if I didn't become a diabetic, who else would become a diabetic? Right? In the early 80's, I used to eat those Amy Joys donuts—twenty-four of them at a go! Twelve at the place where I would have a cup of coffee, and then I took another twelve to the late Mrs. Yuthok's house and ate there, too! That is how I abused my physical body, because of my addiction to sugar! The consequence of that sugar addiction is that you become diabetic.

On top of that, there is high blood pressure because

of our addiction to salt and soy sauce. Some of my friends went to China and saw this soy sauce factory. What happens is that they put soybeans in there and hire a lot of the workers to walk over the soy beans in order to make the soy sauce. Yes, that's what they do! When it comes in the bottle, it looks nice and beautiful, with a wonderful label and all of that. We don't mind paying four or five dollars. But look at how it's made! People walk on it, you know, dozens of people, and they lose their sandals and their underwear and everything in there! Honestly! Even if we have total knowledge of that, we cannot stop using soy sauce because we're addicted to the taste. Without soy sauce, no matter what you do, the food doesn't taste right.

WHO CAN HELP?

These are the real sufferings we have. Who can help? Nobody, except ourselves. Actually when you have to depend on a second or third person's help, it's not good. You have to help yourself. You yourself have to understand reality, what is happening, and then try to act on your understanding.

How do we deal with this? Can we deal with it? Yes, we can! We do have one tool, which is willpower and determination. If we cannot apply this, we fall all the time. But as long as you keep in mind that you want to overcome the addictions, as long as you don't submit, every time you hesitate, you will make it. That's what we do in our prayers, in our commitments. Remember the

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example of the dead-tired, over-loaded donkey pulled and pushed and dragged uphill? That's what we do today with our commitments. We drag our feet as much as possible, but somehow, we have the good sense not to break them completely. No matter if it's two in the morning or three in the morning, we still do it. In a way, it's great.

But on the other hand you don't have to torture yourself doing that. If you have strong willpower, you can easily fulfill your commitments first thing in the morning or whenever you have time. You don't have to torture yourself. If we could apply the same method of dragging our feet until the last minute to our addictions, we would have less suffering, for sure!

But if you hope to end them in one day—like making a New Year's resolution and saying, "No more fighting!"—it's never going to work. One has to see to it that the addiction gets reduced. This week should be less than last week. Next week should be less than this week. The week after that should be less than that week. So, week-by-week and month-by-month, you will reduce your addictions, not only fighting, but all addictions: drugs, alcohol, sex, whatever. All of them should be able to be reduced day-by-day, week-by-week, month-by-month, hour-by-hour.

When the addiction is popping up, at that time, you have to recognize and realize, "Hey, here you are! You've come back again to haunt me!" If you realize that, it's great! But sometimes you lose. You realize, yet suddenly some friend will say this or that, and you may react badly,

although you might have promised yourself, “This will be the last time.” All that will happen. Don’t worry about it. We’re not Buddha yet, but keep up the determination. Don’t submit. Don’t say to your self, “I lost it, so I might as well let it go for a while. Then next time when something happens, maybe then I will stop.” That is a terrible idea. That will make you lose completely. So even if you lose now, it’s fine. But next time, you should stop.

Cigarette smoking is one addiction, as an example. The same thing goes for hatred. The same thing goes for obsession. Look at Buddha, 2600 years ago, who came up with all these ideas and thoughts. He was not stupid at all. He recognized that the cause of suffering is either the delusion cause—our addiction to negative emotions—or the karmic cause. Without the delusion cause, there will be no karmic cause, because one doesn’t act without thought. It is the mind that creates the ideas.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION/MEDITATION

1. What negative emotions or habits are my addictions?
What steps have I taken in the past to overcome them? What more might I do?
2. Do I agree that negative emotions and their consequences are preventable and avoidable? Why or why not?
3. In what ways have I experienced that the “cause of suffering is actually the ego”?

V
THE CAUSE OF SUFFERING:
KARMA

Karma is nothing but performing actions, positive or negative. Because we've got addictions, we perform actions that we know are wrong, even though we know we shouldn't do them and that there will be consequences. We ignore that knowledge completely until the consequences are so heavy that we are in danger of losing our lives! If we could switch the habit of dragging our feet about positive deeds to our negative deeds, things would be very different.

Buddha said:

*All the pains that I experienced are coming
from my karma; karma is nothing other
than my addictions.*

Negative emotions make me do things I should not be doing. Those actions become my negative karma and bring me suffering. That is how the Noble Truth of the cause of suffering brings the Noble Truth of suffering itself. If you want to reverse that, you don't need to be a rocket engineer to figure it out. When you cut the cause,

you cut the result.

It is similar to a river valley project. In third world nations, in the old days, you had to bring all the rivers from different hills and mountains together and build a dam to hold all the water and supply water wherever you wanted it. If you divert all the water coming from the hills, the water held by the dam is going to be empty without much effort at all. There will be no more water coming from anywhere. No matter how big the dam is—maybe between two big hills there are a zillion gallons of water—once no more is added, the water can dry up, go away, and be finished.

Exactly the same way, if you don't add up your addictions, the negative results will go away. It is in your hands, and you're capable of doing it. Nobody else can do it for you. The truth of suffering and the truth of the cause of suffering are in your hands, and you can easily handle them. That doesn't mean you won't have difficulties. You will. But you can handle them.

Some people think karma is something uncontrollable, something huge. When it does become huge, we ourselves created that. We created each and every karma we have, so we can cancel it. Before it begins to give us the result, we can divert it.

For me, becoming diabetic is an example. It is entirely in my hands. I could have controlled my diet, exercised, and gotten over the diabetes. It was entirely in my hands, and I didn't do it. I blew it. So then, the easy way is to take a pill. Eventually the pill doesn't work, so you take an injection. When one doesn't work, take two. If two

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doesn't work, take three. If three doesn't work, take four. Like that. Once the karma starts reacting, you cannot control it any more. But the original karma was made by us, so before it starts reacting, we can do everything: cancel it, divert it. Of course, if you killed somebody, you cannot bring that person back to life. However, that karma can be purified.

Life is in our own hands, under our own control. Nobody else controls it. If there is something to be praised, it is your deeds, and you deserve it. If there is something to be blamed, it is your doing, and you deserve to be blamed. If it's something good, I deserve it. If it's something bad, I deserve it, too, because I did it.

My karma is my karma. I create my own karma; you don't create my karma. Likewise, you create your karma, and I cannot create your karma. I can contribute conditions or I can be instrumental in interrupting conditions from coming together, but it is me and me alone who creates my karma, and only you create your karma. So that is how the first and second noble truths, the truth of suffering and the truth of cause of suffering, work. It's simple, straightforward, and completely grounded.

Whatever we experience is karma—karmic consequences or karmic results. Good or bad, everything is karma. There is no doubt about it. Unless we, as individuals or collectively, engage in certain actions, we will never experience the result. Each and every one of our sufferings comes from causes. Every minute, every shade, intensity, and form of suffering is created by our karmas. Not one single karma,

but hundreds, thousands, actually millions of different karmas combined together created it. Every minute of our life, whatever we experience, joy or pain, together or separately, mental, physical, or emotional, comes about that way.

I think I am not exaggerating if I say that each and every suffering has multi-zillions of causes. They cross-connect, and all kinds of things happen. Sometimes we call it bad luck or good luck, but actually there are causes closely knitted together. Each of the causes we are carrying can be called karma. But karma does not mean the cause alone, but covers the result too.

We have very limited knowledge of how this all works. But as an example, it is unthinkable that our sophisticated physical structure, our brain and body, could come together without causes.

How sophisticated and complex and complicated our body is! There are the tiniest nerves and veins pervading our body. There is air and different liquids and enzymes and chemicals. It doesn't just come out of nowhere. Nor is it just produced by our parents. They couldn't have figured all that out in the short time they got together! It doesn't happen that way.

We do know something about how the body functions, particularly if you have seen the recent Bodies Exhibition in New York. I haven't seen it, but when you think about it, how does each and every one of our tiny little veins function? The heart and lungs and so on are very, very sophisticated, mechanical systems. Do you think all this just came out of nothing? Even fools will

not think that.

Then think about our brain function. Today, even the greatest neurologists probably know twenty-five to thirty per cent of how the brain functions. All that is not created by one karma. Millions of different karmas made the human brain and made it possible for us to function and do whatever we need to do, plus much more. Our capacity is almost unlimited. If we can utilize our body, even just our brain, completely, we will be almost enlightened.

It takes all kinds of conditions and causes for the human beings to function. Some people are physically challenged due to some karmic shortage or disconnect. Some physical part is not working. It takes so many karmas and causes to make it all work. Imagine just the functioning of our brain alone! Even the best scientists put together with all the resources available in the world today could not re-create a single human brain. Maybe some time later they will be able to, but not today. That shows how many multiple causes it takes just to have the human life.

Then sustaining this life and making it function continuously requires many more causes. That is why Buddha talks about the many different types of karma, such as throwing karma, running karma, karma of continuation, karma of closing down. We can see how many are needed quite clearly just by looking at the human body.

Equally complex are the mental aspects of our existence. There is not just one mind but multiple

mental aspects. We talk about the six consciousnesses, but these can be further divided into twenty-one, then a hundred and eight, and many more consciousnesses. So it is not just a single cause that makes a human life pop up. Then, all these causes interacting still need the right conditions. When you ask: who has created all the causes and conditions? Nobody else except our selves. I don't create your causes and conditions, and you don't create mine. Each and every one of us creates his or her own.

On top of that, each individual also has common karmas, like family connections, connections with fellow countrymen and with members of the same race. It is very, very sophisticated, and we have produced each of these karmas by our selves. If you want to change anything, you have to do it within yourself. That is why so many spiritual teachers say, "Don't look out there. It is within you." Since the cause is within me and produced by me, it is also me who can do or undo whatever I want. I can do it. The key is here.

I am not saying I found all this out because I am a clever person. I am talking about what Buddha discovered. This is Buddha's experience, not as a religion as such, but as life and how to conduct it. Buddha's teaching on the Four Noble Truths is found in Theravadan teachings, Zen teachings, Mahayana teachings, and Vajrayana teachings. All these traditions may look totally different, particularly how the people that practice them wear their robes, the color, style and all this. But the bottom line, the basic fundamental principle of them all, is the Four Noble Truths.

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KARMA: THE INDIVIDUAL MATTERS

Since I'm responsible for me, what should I do? Every step that I take, every thought that I generate, every action that I do, affects me—not only me but also my associates and companions. There is a saying in Tibetan, “If you are near a golden mountain, everything nearby becomes gold. If you are near a poisonous mountain, everything nearby becomes poisonous.” That is how each and every one of us affects our companions, our family, and everybody around. One individual affects all of them—family, children, parents, spouse. We especially affect our spouses. If you like being a nice, jolly fellow, that affects your spouse. If you like being an angry, lazy person, that affects your spouse. If you extend anger, anger will be met by anger. If you extend love, love will be met by love. No mystery about that.

Some time before we had this emergency of 9-11 and all this terrorist business, our aim was world peace. Remember? Since the war on terror came, we forgot about world peace. Nobody talks about it. But talking about world peace, I always think that no organization, no leader in the world, can bring world peace. Peace is going to be created by each and every one of us, within ourselves, within our families, within our country, and within the world. It's not going to be the other way around: that the world will have peace, then the country will have peace, then the then the family will have peace, then I will have peace. It is not going to work that way. It's the other way around. That's why the good old American

saying is, “Charity begins at home.”

It is the individual that matters. That means you and me. If I let my mind be influenced by negative emotions, such as hatred, anger, and obsession, I will influence my spouse, family, children, and so on. If I let my mind be influenced by peace, kindness, compassion, and love, that will also affect my spouse, my children, my everyone! Whenever we have difficulty getting along with another member of the family, do not think he is responsible or she is responsible. Please do think, “I am responsible.” If you have not created anger, the other person will not create anger. Even if the other person is angry, if you maintain love and compassion, and if you are not passive-aggressive, the other person has to give up and back down. They have no other choice.

In China, during the students’ struggle, in ’87, when the soldiers came with tanks and guns, the students were carrying flowers and giving them to the soldiers, and no soldiers were shooting them. Remember? The soldiers from Beijing sent to overcome the students could not manage because the students came up with flowers and offered them to the soldiers. Even the Communist Chinese soldiers don’t shoot when someone’s bringing flowers to them.

So within the family, if one person is angry, and the other one person gets angry, the consequence is a broken family. Please make sure your reaction is not passive-aggressive. Passive-aggressive behavior is the same as fighting.

No one but me is responsible for my happiness. No

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one is responsible for me getting old, except me. No one else is responsible for me getting sick. No one else is responsible for me getting fat. No one else is responsible for how I die. Likewise, every good experience that I enjoy in my life is due to my deeds. And I deserve it. That basically is the karmic rule; it is how karma functions. Nobody made the rule, but that's what happens. Nobody made a rule saying that the sky has to be up there, and the ground has to be down here. Nobody made a rule that the grass has to grow from down here to up there. But the ground is here and the sky is up there, so that's what happens. And just like that, karma functions. Buddha discovered that. He discovered that the key to our happiness and our suffering is in our own hands. Nobody else has the key.

When your mind is right, when you're not influenced by negative emotions, when you're thinking straight, of course, you like to be good. No one would like to be bad. Everyone would like to be happy. No one would like to suffer. But, we do bad things. And we suffer, too. Sorry.

Karma is not mysterious. In one way, it is extremely difficult to understand, but on the other hand, it is nothing but cause and result. When we create a cause, we will have a result. When we do not create a cause, we will never have the result, no matter what we do. That is what cause and effect is all about: every action that we take, every daily chore, whatever we do, including walking, sitting, sleeping—all of those things are creating karma, according to Buddha. I have no proof of that, honestly, but it is true. Not because Buddha said so, but because

when you look at the causes and the consequences, you will begin to see the reality of it.

KARMA: CAUSES AND CONDITIONS

It looks like our suffering comes out of nowhere, but that is certainly not the case. It comes from a cause--both a temporary cause and a deeper cause. The temporary cause, although I use the word *cause*, is actually a temporary *condition*. When temporary conditions come together, things materialize, either good or bad. Whatever it is, it is.

Suddenly people die, but there has to be a condition. The death can be from a heart attack or a stroke or from falling down or whatever it may be, but it happens because of some kind of condition. When the conditions are right, people get sick and people die. Everyone has the karma of dying and the karma of living. Each and every one of us carries a tremendous amount of karma of living, karma of being healthy, karma of being sick, and karma of dying. We have all of them. There is no shortage. When the conditions for a particular death meet up, zoom! The karma connects, and it happens. For instance, the condition might be that a person happens to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. The conditions meet, and karma takes over. That's not the fault of the person. Karma is everywhere. Everybody carries a tremendous amount of karma, as individuals and collectively.

Yes, we blame George Bush for the Iraq war. In a way it's true, but on the other hand, each and every one of the people who are involved in the war has his or her own

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karma, too. Those who lost their lives, whether they're American or among the huge number of Iraqi people who have died in the war, everybody also has collective karma involved. Even the innocent child who got killed by the suicide bomber had the karma of dying. The conditions met; then karmic consequences took over. That is absolute reality.

If you don't have a karma of dying, no matter what happens, even if your legs and hands have been blown to pieces, you will survive. Again, that is karma. That's why Buddha says that karma is so difficult to understand. It is more difficult to understand than the wisdom of emptiness. Even if you're not a developed person, you can understand the wisdom of emptiness to a certain extent by thinking about it logically.

Moreover, karma is a dependent arising. It is not independent. Even though it is so powerful, it is a dependent arising: it depends on the conditions. Who created karma? Me. Who provided the conditions? Me. Do I have control over it? Probably not, but I can try not to meet the conditions. We always have room to play.

The area of not meeting the conditions is the space in which miracles work. Why do miracles happen? Because of conditions. When a plane filled with people crashes and all die, except one person, we call that a miracle. Yes, it's a miracle, but at the same time that individual person just didn't connect with the karma of dying at that moment. That doesn't mean that person will live forever. No, at that moment, at that time, the karma to die was not there.

In the area of conditions, we can do and undo. There we have freedom; there we have choice. Conditions give us independence. Because we are the ones providing the conditions, we have the power to help ourselves. If we think nothing, do nothing, and just sit there, negative karmas will hit us like arrows. The conditions will come together, and we will suffer. As human beings, we are expected to do something so that the conditions don't meet up. Karma is all about that. I think we have to realize there is no shortage of karma in all of us, good and bad. The difference is only the conditions. Each and every one of us has the karma to be able to be, let's say, a great educated person, but if you don't provide the condition of learning, then no matter how much positive karma for that you have, you're not going to be educated. You're going to be stupid.

When I was a young kid in Tibet, say 13, 14, or 15, there was a new cinema house in Lhasa that was built by one of my cousins. I got in free whenever I wanted to go. I had one of those balcony rooms for free. I went a number of times, but I always saw the same picture. It was an old Indian movie called *Anakari*, a love story. It was probably shown there continuously for three years.

The monks were not supposed to be watching the movie. That included me. But every time, whenever I went, when I got up in the balcony, I looked down and the hall was filled with monks. All the monks had their robes over their heads trying not to be recognized. The whole movie hall was completely filled up with maroon cloth!

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In the movie, there is a couple, some kind of prince and princess. They are not married yet. They are lying down near a beautiful grape tree, hoping that a grape will drop into their mouths. But it never does. All the grapes are up there, but since they don't put any effort into picking one, the grape never goes into their mouths!

Similarly, the karma is always there, but when the conditions are not right, you don't get the grape. Even if it's dangling right in front of your mouth, you can't eat it, because you didn't provide the conditions of biting it or picking it. When I think about how karma works, I remember that movie all the time. As a kid, when I saw that movie, I used to think that way, too. Even in those days, I used to think about the karmic system. That movie was my example of what happens when the conditions are not right. Even though the grapes are there, they are not going to go into your mouth!

So, working with the conditions gives us freedom, choice, everything. That tells us, if you don't want to suffer, you can stop it by yourself by not providing or avoiding the conditions. We may think, "She created my pain. He created my pain." But that is not true. He became the condition. She became the condition. Apart from that, the cause is already within us. We have been carrying it for three countless eons within ourselves. It is so sophisticated, so complex, yet, it has to go through our physical and mental structure. The grape has to get through the bottleneck of the throat, and that throat is our self.

She is not your enemy, and he is not your enemy. There is no point blaming some other person. “It is she who did it; otherwise, I am doing fine.” “It is he who did it; otherwise, I am doing okay. But he did this, he did that.” It is like the usual American exchange of “he said/she said.” Now it becomes “he did/she did.” But that is not true. He or she didn’t do it. They might have contributed to creating the conditions, but the cause is something we ourselves have carried with us from the limitless beginning, and we are constantly and continuously adding to it. It is like carrying money and at the same time, adding money to our bank account.

Our hatreds, our obsessions, are baseless. They are confusions within us. We don’t know that we created the cause ourselves. We do not know that the person harming us has just triggered an already existing cause. We think, “That person did it to me, so I will not forget until I get my revenge.” On whom are you going to take revenge? On your own mother, no one else! If there is no cause that we created ourselves, we will not suffer.

Karma is very hard to change at the result level, because karma is definite. But it is always possible to change at the causal level. Sometimes you can even change karma at the result level, because it is impermanent. However, at the causal level we can cancel it, we can defuse, we can neutralize it. Everything is possible at the causal level.

KARMA: THOUGHTS BEFORE ACTIONS

What we do and what we don’t do both make an impact.

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We do a lot of things with awareness. We do things without any awareness. Awareness or no awareness, we do nothing without thought. For every action we take, a thought has come before. If you want to get up, a thought comes, "I should get up." If you want to go to the bathroom, first the thought comes, "Oh, I have to go to the bathroom." If I hit somebody, the thought has come up, "I have to hit, I have to hit, and I'm going to hit." And if you are going to be nice to somebody, the thought comes up, "I have to be nice, I have to be nice." If you have to eat something, the thought comes up, "I have to eat" and then you eat. If you drink, you have a thought come up, "I have to drink." Sleep, the thought comes up. Walk, the thought comes up.

So every action, physical, mental, emotional, all of them follow from thought. The same thought that makes the individual act also defines whether the action is going to be positive, negative, or neutral. So the action we take, positive or negative, comes because of an action-provoking thought. If that thought is one of kindness or compassion, then unless the act is negative by nature, more or less, the action becomes positive. If the thought is hatred, anger, obsession, or jealousy, then more or less, the action that follows will be negative. The nature of the action does make a difference, but the thought that brings on the action also makes a difference. We call that thought "motivation."

Motivation shapes events tremendously. It has a very strong influence on whether the action creates positive karma, negative karma, or neutral karma. Some great

teachers have said repeatedly, “It is nothing but the mind. Every action follows mind. Every phenomenon follows from mind. Therefore mind is most important.” These statements all arise from that reason. It is up to us to decide whether our actions are going to be positive or negative and that decision begins with motivation.

THE WORST KARMIC RESULT: DOING IT AGAIN

We are heavily addicted to negative actions. That is an important aspect of karma. If you kill someone, for example, you will get a couple of results: First there is the direct karmic result. You create killing karma, and as a direct result of that, you lose your life. Somehow or another, one life or another, this is what happens. That is the direct consequence. Then there is the indirect consequence. Killing creates a lot of negative experiences within that lifetime. Even though you may have a respectable life, it is shortened or interrupted, or it has more illnesses and more problems.

You may think that these results are bad, but they are not the worst. I kill, so I pay for it by losing my life. That is a direct, straightforward deal. But then there is a result that is not straightforward, what is called in Tibetan *jyap ah gyu du*. This means that you *like* repeating the action you have carried out. That is addiction, and it is always there.

What does this addiction do? I am giving you the example of killing karma. Addiction to that action makes the individual like killing again. We see innocent little

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kids, doing nothing but playing around. Some of them like to help insects or animals or little cats and dogs. And some of them like to hit them, or in the case of little insects, step on them and kill them, or chase them with sticks or even with a little fire. Where does that come from? It is the particular karmic result of picking up the addiction again, so that one likes to kill. It works very similarly with attachment and jealousy. Buddha said that this is the worst result of karma. The addiction of liking to do the same negative thing again is what creates constant, continual negative karma.

When you look at two brothers, two sisters, or even twins you will see the different characters they have. This difference is not coming from the father. It is not the fault of the mother. It is not the fault of the nanny, if there is one. Nor is it the fault of schoolteachers. It is simply an addiction that the individual has. And that is exactly what he or she is showing.

COMPLETE KARMA: MOTIVATION, ACTION, CONCLUSION

Whether an action creates a complete karma or an incomplete karma is a different story. I should give you an example. All killing karmas are bad, but in order to qualify as a “perfect” killing karma, you need a number of things.

First, you need the motivation, such as hatred, anger, hatred mixed with jealousy, or jealousy mixed with obsession. Or the motivation could be a self-serving ego control issue. The motivation will be one of those

negative emotions. If there is no motivation whatsoever and somebody just hits somebody, and that person falls and dies, we call that an accident. We don't call it murder. Even in normal society, under normal rules, it will be called an accident. Yes, you killed. You do have the karma of killing. However, it is not a complete killing karma because you don't have a motive.

Then comes the action, in this case, killing. That also depends. Some actions are more terrible, like killing by torturing a person, giving them tremendous pain just to pursue some personal interest. I can't help thinking about the actions we have taken in Iraq and in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba—all that torture. That is the worst action, one that creates terrible, strong killing karma. It is not just killing, but making sure the individual suffers as much as possible, doing whatever hurts them the most. That's the worst action. It makes the killing karma much stronger than simply shooting somebody.

In war you just shoot and somebody gets killed. It is much worse to capture the person and torture them as much as you can in order to extract information. Whatever the purpose may be, the end can never justify the means. That's where people go wrong. We think the end makes the action justifiable. We think we need to get the information [from suspected terrorists] because we don't want them to attack us, and that unless we torture them, they won't tell us. It's justifiable in one way, but from the karmic point of view, it's not. It just makes much stronger and more powerful killing karma.

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I must also give you an example on this. This is a funny example. Maybe the Tibetans torture, too. It's not that every Tibetan is innocent and great. People like to romanticize the Tibetans. Not true! Though everyday teachings may use torturing a person as an example, the example given in the traditional teachings is not about torturing a person, because that's very rare [in Tibet].

Say, you are falling asleep nicely and this little red bug comes into your bed and bites you. You get irritated and scratch a little bit and then go back to sleep. The moment you begin to fall asleep, it bites you again, and you get more irritated. That is repeated a couple of times, and at the end you say, "I'm going to get you!!" You get up and find a flashlight and go and search for that bedbug. You find it because it's a little red bug on a white bed sheet. It's very easy to find it, right?

So you catch the bug. In a way, the bug is a person, you know? Not a human being, but a living being. Then you say, "Now, look at you, you have become big and fat by drinking my blood. Now here you are." And you decide to hold the bug between your fingers and rub it. You are not going to kill it; you're just going to keep on rubbing it as much as you want until you're satisfied. So, you rub it and torture it, let it go a little bit, and catch it again. Finally, you put that little bug between your two thumbnails and squeeze it. When you squeeze it, a little drop of blood comes from its body. Then you say, "Ah, now I am fully satisfied."

That's the example given for a full negative karma. Why? Because you have the motivation of first being

irritated, then becoming angry, then torturing the bug and killing it, and finally feeling satisfied. That is considered a perfect karma consisting of motivation, action, and satisfaction. When you look back, you think, “I did it!” That makes the karma strong.

POSITIVE KARMA

Now let's say we want to create a positive karma. If your motivation is, “I'm going to help him so that he may help me later,” that is absolutely the wrong motivation. “I'm going to help him because he needs help,” period. That is a good motivation. Do you know why? Because “I'm going to help him so that he may help me later” becomes a “me, me, me” issue again. So it's self-cherishing motivation, ego-boosting motivation. Even though you're helping, the karma created is questionable. The action may be helpful, but it may or may not become good karma because of the motivation. Motivation is very important, number one.

With the mind of, “I wanted to help because it is needed. I have the opportunity to help,” any action you take will be good. Sometimes it is very difficult to help certain people. You may be trying your best, but they give you the worst attitude ever possible, show their temper and criticize you. They may get angry with you or accuse you—all those things happen. If you don't lose your motivation and continuously keep trying to help, then the more difficult the situation is, the stronger and better positive karma it becomes. But if you lose your

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temper in between, you lose the opportunity to create perfect positive karma. Although the result may not be bad, the efforts you put in have been distorted a little bit, and the positive karma will not be that strong.

Finally it is also important to look back, not with the concluding mind of “I did it,” but with rejoicing that you’ve been able to help and recognizing how wonderful that is. Rejoicing makes very strong karma of helping, especially if there is strong motivation and strong action and when the action has been taken in spite of great difficulties. These difficulties are actually a challenge. The challenge is whether you are going to utilize this opportunity as good karma or whether you are going to lose it in between, making it weak.

Rejoicing is important, appreciating being able to help. This applies to everything, everybody, everywhere! It doesn’t matter whether it’s someone who would like to give a dollar to a beggar in the street, or a philanthropist who would like to make use of their good karmic result, or a caregiver who would like to give care to a weak and sick person, the rejoicing is the same. With rejoicing, you have perfect motivation, action, and conclusion.

Dharma practitioners sometimes go through difficulties to develop their practice. We always experience difficulty getting to Ann Arbor for winter retreats because of the snow. If you look back, the snow was an opportunity, but whether we take advantage of the opportunity or not absolutely depends on us. If you have a nervous mind, get hesitant and angry, it causes a problem for your own

positive process. That's why the Bodhisattvas sometimes ask for more difficulties. Milarepa repeatedly said, "When there is more difficulty, I appreciate it, because my opportunity is stronger."

Coming to New York is easy for me. I just get on the plane and fall asleep. When I wake up, it is almost landing time. Because it's easy, I don't build much positive karma in coming here, honestly. I mean, there is not so much struggle.

KARMA AND COMPASSION: PARENTS AND CHILDREN

In short, if you have positive motivation such as good compassion, then the action that follows will be influenced by that compassion. You are willing to take on hardship and difficulties. You want to help that person, even if the person gives you a twisted answer or doesn't listen to you.

For instance, say that you are trying to tell a young teenager, "Don't do this," and they won't listen. The more you tell them not to do it, the more they want to do it. So you begin to get irritated and nervous and afraid. You begin to think, "Oh, this little kid is going to have a terrible life. He's going to be a bad person." Then your fear is exaggerated more. You think this little guy is going to land in jail. At the same time, while taking on this hardship, you never lose your compassion and love.

That really happens to so many parents. They never lose their love for the children, even though the children never listen. Children always think, "I know better than that." Think about yourself at age seventeen or eighteen.

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Remember how you used to think, what your parents used to tell you, and how you liked to find ways your parents could not discover what you were doing.

I saw an ad on television two days ago, in which a young little boy is stealing the drug that his grandmother is using. The boy is very sweet to the grandmother and gives her the medicine. While she is taking it, he pulls out a little amount and puts the pills into his pocket. So the bottle is not completely empty when he puts it back.

We all did something similar to that. We looked at our parents and thought, “They’re just making trouble for me, telling me to do this and not to do that.”

Then, when we become parents, the same thing happens, right? It’s nothing new. Your kids are not doing anything that we did not do. Honestly. The main thing is not to lose your love, affection, and care, even when you are taking on the hardship of helping that crazy sixteen or eighteen or nineteen or twenty year old—that wild crazy horse who would like to go to bed at five in the morning and get up three in the afternoon or something like that. And if you take on that hardship and try continuously to help that person, the action is very difficult, but it creates very strong, good karma. Finally, if you are able to help that kid, you feel happy that you could get through. He or she turns out to be good person, so you are fully satisfied and joyful. That is a very good conclusion, and it becomes perfect, good karma.

It’s not easy to create perfect, good karma because we break our compassion in between [the motivation and

the conclusion]. We may have good motivation; we may take action. But then the action becomes difficult. We say, “Yeah, I’m trying my best, but they won’t help me with it. All right!” So then you use the “F” word and say, “What’s the use? What do I care? Do whatever you want to. You’re grown up. If you’re going to land in jail, you are the one landing in there, not me. So get out of here,” and you kick them out and all that. These are the breaking points in your compassion.

In order to help a kid, sometimes you decide to ground them, to give them some consequences, or take away some privileges. Actions like that are justifiable because of your motivation. But if you hit your kids, I’m not sure if that’s justifiable or not—probably not, because it causes pain.

I’m told that a number of times I was hit terribly as a kid. I used to get lashes all the time. I must have been a very naughty boy, you know? So that’s what happens when the action is crossing over from just giving consequences to a step beyond—hitting. Yes, even the action of grounding will create pain. But it is a different pain than when you are lashing the kid with your belt. That is where you are crossing the boundary. Then you are creating terrible pain. But the Tibetans used to beat the kids all the time. They tried to justify it because apparently there was no anger or hatred involved whatsoever. But that is questionable. So you really have to recognize a line that you can go up to. And when you cross it, anything you do that hurts the person, by virtue of the act, becomes negative.

Anything you do to help, by virtue of the action,

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becomes positive. Even here, though, there are a lot of gray areas. If you give an addicted person alcohol, is it helping or hurting? Giving an addicted person an addictive substance is hurting the person, although the person may feel it's great. But in reality, it contributes to hurting the person, so it's not right. On the other hand, if the person has terrible withdrawal symptoms and you still insist on not giving them anything, they may die. In that case, giving them the drug again becomes a positive action.

KARMA: STRONG OR WEAK

So that is how it works. You know now what makes a powerful karma and what makes a weak karma. If you have motivation, action, and conclusion, and all three are strong, it makes a strong karma. If one is missing, the karma becomes weaker. If two are missing, it becomes even weaker. Let's say you hit somebody accidentally and that person dies. You had no motivation. The moment you see that person falling down dead, you regret it tremendously, rather than rejoicing, "Hey, I did it." If you regret, your action doesn't become strong karma. It has the action of killing, but not the factors of motivation and satisfaction. So it becomes weaker.

That's how you can judge whether a particular deed is good for you or bad for you. That is how you have to form your opinion. You all are grown up, educated, intelligent, wonderful people. You're not twelve years old. You are not a two-year-old who has to be told, "Now sit

down. Now stand up. Now sit down,” although a lot of American Buddhist centers do that! They treat you like little babies. That’s not right.

Everything is the result of karma. Every action that we take creates karma. There is no big karma-making factory. You don’t have to go there. Everywhere, when you sit, think, sleep, or sit on the throne, whatever you’re doing, every time you’re creating karma. Even if you’re sitting the wrong way on the throne, you’re creating karma, too. Honestly, that is how it works.

The higher up you are, the more people you control, the more karma you produce. Let me give you an example. This is according to the Buddha, not me.

What happens in the Iraq war when we kill people? The soldiers who are on the spot shoot people and kill them, but probably, they have to do it; otherwise they are going to lose their own lives. They have no choice. The individual soldier is going to have the karma of shooting one person or two, or however many they kill. They do have that karma, but that’s the limit.

But the commander in the field will have the karmas of all the different soldiers who have killed a number of people, because he is the one who issued the order. The commander-in chief is going to have all the karmas of everyone who has been killed over there. From the karmic point of view, that karma is very, very heavy.

There’s no comparison with the colonel of Kentucky Fried Chicken! Colonel Sanders will probably have the karma of all the chickens that have been killed, as well

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as those that will be killed in the future in the name of Kentucky Fried Chicken. But in the war you have not chickens, but human beings. See the difference?

The karmic system is very sophisticated, very profound. Buddha himself said that even if you develop perfect wisdom, it is hard to figure out. But that's how we get our own karma. Some people may think that when we pay our taxes, we may also get the karma of killing because we are contributing to the war. I thought about that a lot. My conclusion is no. We pay taxes for the betterment of humankind and the American people. We pay taxes for our development. We pay taxes for better roads. We pay taxes for better protection against what happened to New Orleans. We pay taxes for all this. We also pay taxes to help people outside this country. We don't pay taxes to kill people. We don't. If people use the money for that purpose, that's their karma, not our karma.

While I'm mentioning paying taxes, I can see one great opportunity. You have to pay your taxes, otherwise the IRS will get you. So you might as well pay it as generosity. Have the mind of generosity, thinking, "I am doing this to help humankind." Your taxes have the opportunity to help all people. We are a superpower, no doubt about it. If we use our superpower in a better way, we can be outstanding. If we use our superpower in the wrong way, we can be horrible. The choice is ours as people of the United States. We are part of it, because we are members of American society. Society is nothing but a collection of human beings, and American society

is nothing but the collection of American citizens, such as you and me.

So we do have an opportunity. We have a great opportunity to be good. And we have the great danger to be horrible. We have a huge responsibility. If we pay taxes with the mind that we are contributing and giving generously towards the betterment of humankind, it's going to be generosity activity. Don't think, "Whether I like it or not, I have to pay it." By thinking like that, we deprive ourselves of the opportunity to be generous. So contribute towards betterment, and if someone misuses that, it is that person's responsibility, not ours.

JUSTICE: KARMA IS DOING THE PUNISHING

Some people may think, "We have to punish criminals on God's behalf." We don't have to punish on behalf of God. If God cannot look after him or herself, then I'm sorry. He or she knows what to do. From the Buddhist point of view, there's karma standing there, and it is functioning by itself.

When karma does get the criminals, remember, we should not rejoice. We should develop compassion. Believe me, here we can go wrong. Never do it. When you see karma getting somebody, remember compassion, compassion, compassion. Not revenge. Not satisfaction. Nothing. Otherwise we are no better than they are. By developing compassion towards them, we create better karma, which will give us better results. But if we develop feelings of satisfaction at someone's suffering out of anger

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or hatred, it is called revenge.

Personally, I do have a problem when people say, “justice is being done.” Whether they bring justice to the criminals or bring the criminals to justice, I do have a problem with that. This is a very interesting view. A number of people think we have to punish the guilty and reward the great ones. But my opinion is: there is somebody called karma standing there, ready to do just that. We don’t have to do karma’s job. Why should we subject ourselves to creating suffering for ourselves by doing that?

We may think that by bringing justice, we become God’s instrument, but that is just our own thought. No God comes out and says, “Hey, you’re my instrument!” God doesn’t need poor human beings like us to help do his work. Neither does karma. Each and every karma will be standing there, and it will never let anyone skip. That is the Second Noble Truth.

TYPES OF KARMA AND ITS FOUR CHARACTERISTICS

Among the types of karma there are *positive karma*, *negative karma*, and something called *immovable karma*. Immovable karmas are normally thought of as part of positive karma. However, they do not help people to get out of cyclic existence. They are simply positive karma to take a good rebirth within *samsara*, the cycle of lives managed by the First and Second Noble Truths. Though you may have a good rebirth, immovable karma does not give you the karma to free yourself from suffering

completely. It does not bring *nirvana* to you. It does not bring total enlightenment. So immovable karma is part of positive karma, but it doesn't go towards the purpose of enlightenment or freedom from samsara.

That's why, whenever we begin to do something positive, we do the meditation to generate *bodhimind* or compassion. Compassion makes sure that every good work we do becomes a cause for enlightenment, or at least for nirvana. The influence of compassion blocks the karma from becoming immovable and makes it truly positive.

You now know basically what karma is. I don't want you to be expert, but you have to know a little bit. What is karma all about? What are the characteristics of karma? What makes something qualified to be karma? You have to know a little bit about all these things because that is how you conduct your life. Karma is not just about how to meditate, but how you think in everyday life, within your own home or out in the market or at work, how you function, how you do everything. If you know the karmic principles, you know exactly what to do and what not to do. The more details you know the better it is for you. You have to know how karma works.

There are four characteristics of karma:

1. Karma is definite.
2. Karma is fast growing.
3. One never meets the result if one does not create the cause.
4. If one creates the cause, no matter how much time

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passes, the result will happen when the conditions are right.

Karma is so important. It is controlling our life. We create it. Nobody else created it. I created all my karma. My karma controls me now. Since it's my creation, I can change it, but not immediately.

PURIFYING YOUR KARMA

Karma is not something that popped out of ground or fell from the sky. My karma is my own creation, good or bad; in both cases, I did it. It is not like politicians who sometimes say, "I'm responsible," and then forget about it. It doesn't work that way. When I'm responsible, when each and every one of us is responsible, our karma will follow us.

Unfortunately, it follows us just like the body and its shadow, or the body and the body's odor. You can also say that it follows like our toes and toe jam, if you like that example better. But you can wash your toes and have no toe jams. Just like that, you can purify your karma and get rid of the smell. Just like you are washing your foot and putting talcum powder on it, you can purify your negative karma.

Negative karma is negative karma. When you kill someone, even if you purify the negative karma, you can't undo the action itself. Once you've killed someone, you cannot bring that person back; that's the reality. But still, you can purify everything.

Although karma is definite, you can intervene in

both positive and negative karma. For positive karma, the intervention is hatred. According to the Buddha and his disciples, hatred burns positive karma. Chandrakirti says in the *Madhyamakavatara* (Entering the Middle Way):

*If you are angry towards a bodhisattva, the
generosity, morality, etc. that you have
accumulated for a hundred eons can be
burned up within a matter of seconds.
Therefore, Buddha says there is no heavier
negativity than hatred.*

It is easy to say, “I hate you,” but hatred is very, very expensive. There is no worse negativity. You may think, “What about killing a human being?” But hatred is involved in that. If you don’t hate, then how can you kill somebody? Unless you are a mercenary, hatred has to be involved.

For negative karma, the intervention is purification. Even such a heavy negativity as hatred can be purified. When Buddha talks about purifying, he says the higher ground can go under the water and the lower ground can rise up as high as possible. In other words, it can all turn around. Buddha will never tell a lie. He made that statement because we don’t know what karma is all about.

When Buddha first presented karma to people in a village, he said, “I know this karma business.” Somebody asked, “How can you prove that you know?” Buddha replied, “All right, each one of you go back to your own

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homes and get a kernel of grain. Put it in your own cloth or paper, bring it back, and put it over here.” Five hundred of them did so, and for each one, the Buddha picked up the correct piece of paper or cloth and said, “This belongs to you, this belongs to you, that belongs to you.” That is how Buddha demonstrated his direct knowledge of karma. Otherwise, talking about karma is like talking in the air. Nothing is really proved. So Buddha demonstrated his understanding in that way.

Buddha even went beyond that. His total knowledge was such that if you brought all kinds of tree branches from 100,000 different trees together and burned them to ashes, Buddha could select which part of the ash belonged to which tree and which branch. His knowledge is way beyond our imagination, though we can work and get some understanding.

So it is Buddha who said negativities are heavy; they have consequences. And it is that same Buddha who said you can purify. It is logical: purification works. Why? Because everything is impermanent, and that means that it's changeable. Negatives are impermanent, and positives are impermanent. Negatives can change into positives, and positives can go wrong and become negative. It's all possible.

THE FOUR POWERS OF PURIFICATION

Purification is basically the four powers. The first is **the power of the base**. You created negative actions. You take refuge in the enlightened beings and you generate

compassion for non-enlightened beings. That provides what is called the power of the base.

The second is **the power of regret**. If we don't regret our negative actions we're not going to be able to purify them at all. Why should we? If I did nothing wrong, why should I have to engage in purification? Last night on TV I saw the arrest of an accused pedophile who kept on saying, "I did nothing wrong." If you don't believe you did anything wrong, you have no reason to purify.

If there is no regret, there is no repentance. When you have regret, then you have to take physical, mental, and emotional action. [These are **the power of antidote action**.] Mental action is actually more important than physical. Mental action is regret and **the power of non-repeating**, promising not to do it again. Generating bodhimind and meditating on emptiness are also mental actions. They are the most recommended mental actions.

ANTIDOTE ACTIONS

In the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* (Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life), Shantideva said:

*What kind of virtuous action can overcome
such powerful negativities besides
bodhimind?*

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That is very important. *Bodhimind* is unlimited, unconditional love and compassion. It is pure love, not attachment. Pure love.

Emptiness also is definitely powerful. Nargajuna says:

*Even raising doubt alone on the nature of
reality tears samsara into pieces.*

Meditating on wisdom and bodhimind are the most powerful positive mental actions.

Then you also have mantra recitations, such as the 100 syllable recitations of Vajrasattava, because Vajrasattava specializes in purification.

Physical antidote actions include prostrations, circumambulations, and mandala offerings. All of those are physical actions to purify negativities. Most of you know about circumambulations and prostrations. Some might not be aware of it, but prostration is a very strong practice within Jewel Heart. There are people who have been doing 100,000 prostrations.

It began with a friend in Ann Arbor. A few years ago, he was supposed to fix something in Jewel Heart. I put an impossible deadline on the task. By the time the deadline had come, the job was not done yet, so I said, "I am going to punish you." The punishment was 100,000 prostrations, which he did very well, completely, with total dedication. He was joined by a number of people in Jewel Heart. So there are a lot of them doing 100,000

prostrations now. Now they're continuing; even the new ones continue.

I should tell you what the meaning of prostration is. In essence, it is always what we call *chak tsel* in Tibetan. *Chak* means that you admire the qualities of the person to whom you are prostrating. *Tsel* is saying: I want that same quality that you have. When you do 100,000 prostrations, the person to whom you are prostrating is Buddha. We admire the qualities of the Buddha, his mind qualities, physical qualities, and most importantly, his emotional qualities. And we say, please give these qualities to me.

Unlike Buddha, our emotions are normally colored by self-cherishing hatred and obsession. This is how our emotions are. Anything that can hit our sensitive spot makes us cry, laugh, experience hatred as well as obsession. We cry; we get angry. But one wonderful thing with the people in Jewel Heart is that even if they get angry for a short time, for some people it's immediately, for some people quite soon, for some people after a little while, they begin to realize, "Hey, I've been submitting myself to a negative emotion." There may be different reasons why, but then they realize, "Let us not hold that as a grudge."

That is a great quality I see with a lot of people. I admire and appreciate that a lot. In the long run that will give you happiness, that will give you joy. You will not have so much pain that you keep holding tight, and not only your mind holds tight, even your physical

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body gets twisted. People do that. You're not going to have that at all because of the information that you have, the dedications that you have made, and your love and affection for yourself and for others. Those will protect you.

Knowing how to take care of karma and then conducting your life according to these principles is the best way to help yourself. That's what Buddha said, that's what all Buddhist people do. Not only Buddhist people, all good people do that. Whether you are Buddhist or not Buddhist, it is almost the same for everyone. Whether you give this understanding a name or not does not make the difference.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Audience: Would you say that there's always an emotional component to an illness?

Rimpoche: Sure. Positively. But the problem is, we don't recognize it. Healing is so difficult. But no matter what it is, every illness is subject to some kind of healing. Some is done through chemicals. Mostly what doctors know is the balancing of chemicals. But some illnesses may have nothing to do with the balancing of chemicals. But each and every illness has a form of healing. The difficulty is what. That is our problem. And the cause of each and every illness and each and every healing is due to karma. And that karma is due to negative emotions and positive ones, too. Positive karmic

results are caused by positive emotions, and negative karmic consequences are caused by negative emotions. I believe that's a fact.

Audience: With your diabetes there seems to be, from what you've shared with us, a direct link between your sugar consumption and the diabetes. But there isn't always such a clear link. Could it be that an illness could come from karma developed in a past life?

Rimpoche: Yes. Karma is one's own creation. There is always a karmic link, always an emotional link there. Take cholesterol as an example. You can get cholesterol problems from two sources: food intake as well as hereditary predisposition. But both sources have a karmic link, and all these karmic links have an emotional link.

Audience: Rimpoche, you mentioned that in praying for someone who has passed away, we pray that their karmic links are somehow connected to the positive, that they are linked to their positive deeds for their future life.

The word "somehow" catches me every time. On the other hand, we learn that it is our personal responsibility in our own lives for our own karma. So how does that connection work, if we pray for someone else's karma to connect?

Rimpoche: You know, miracles work! Personal responsibility is there, and miracles work, too. I think you have

to give room for both. I think it is called an open mind, and if you go to one side only, then you have to say, “It’s only personal responsibility, nothing else.” Then nobody can pray, nobody can do anything, and there’s no such thing as a miracle! There definitely is room for prayer and miracles and both are linked, for sure.

Audience: Can you say a little more about group karma?

Rimpoche: There’s definitely something called group karma that is created by a group of people who work together and do something influenced by negative emotions or positive emotions. You do something together and that creates group karma.

The question arises, “Is group karma more powerful than individual karma?” In our normal sense, group karma should be more powerful than individual karma, but I don’t think that’s true. I think group and individual karmas are equally powerful because the negative consequences or good results will be suffered or enjoyed equally by a group or by an individual. Therefore group karma is not necessarily more powerful than individual karma.

Audience: Sometimes I wonder if you help because you want to enhance your spiritual practice. Is there a danger of ego getting in the way?

Rimpoche: The motivation to help because helping

helps me is the wrong motivation, isn't it? Because it's twisted. You know when we were kids, we were taught a twist of logic. When you say something positive, the opposite of it becomes negative, and the opposite of that opposite becomes positive, and the opposite of that opposite of that opposite becomes negative. This was some funny little tricky thing they teach you in the monastery. I don't know what for, but that is what they teach you there.

So that tells you that when you have the motivation of helping "because that is my accumulation of merit," it goes from being one thing to another thing to another thing. You think "helping me" brings me "my merit," so the motivation becomes weak. It doesn't become negative motivation, however "me" comes in. "Why am I helping that person? Because helping that person is accumulation of merit for me." So, if you do that, the purpose jumps from one thing to the other.

But simply, as I said earlier, the best thought is, "This person needs help, and I can give it." Period. That is pure motivation. Thinking, "If I'm doing this, it will help me to build merit" is the beginning of self-interest coming in. It is very tricky.

Audience: Once I was helping out in a dharma organization and one of the people answering the phone was saying, "Now you can accumulate all this merit. So please give us more money . . ."

Rimpoche: People use that for all kinds of reasons.

You know fundraisers do that all the time. That is their tactic, and it doesn't matter to me. What I want from my side is a personal practical point of view: clear-cut motivation, clear-cut action. Then you know it's not bouncing around. We always love to do that, because we like to kill two birds with one stone. That may or may not work, I don't know.

You can have good karma, good deeds, wonderful deeds, but if they don't lead you to liberation from samsara or reaching nirvana or enlightenment then it is called **lucky karma**. Why is it called lucky karma? Because it is good karma, it will give you a good result, but the result is only going to be within samsara. It is not the best. You did indeed do a good job, no doubt about it, very good work, but the result is not going to be great because it becomes just lucky karma.

Then there is **immovable karma** as well, which gives you rebirth in the formless realms, and that is better than the karma of samsaric gods. That's not very relevant for us. It comes as a result of very strong concentration, beyond the level of shamata.

Relevant to us is really true positive karma and lucky karma. If you are deeply involved in helping yourself, then you have to understand the karmic result, also the result of positive karma

Audience: How does the imprint of the karma that goes with you from life to life and goes into your rebirth in connection with the type of person you are going to be affect your next life? And if a lot of people are trying to

do that, how does that affect all of society? If you can't get out of samsara and you're going through the cycles of life . . .

Rimpoche: That's lucky karma.

Audience: Right, right. But let's say you come back, you become a bodhisattva and then you come back to the next life.

Rimpoche: That's a different story. Bodhisattvas do not come back because of karma; they come back because of compassion and prayer.

I was saying earlier that we have millions of karmas of dying and living; this is what I was talking about, those imprints. Each one of them is be able to materialize if we provide the conditions. That's why it is said so often that at the time of death, make sure that you don't die with anger. The teachings say that so much. This is considered very, very important. Because even though you may be doing wonderful things throughout your life, a minute of anger just before you die can create a negative karmic condition which will result in wasting your life. I mean, the life's efforts are not wasted, but you are canceling the positive results and building the negative ones first instead.

Every action we carry out makes an imprint, and that imprint waits to meet with the conditions. When we talk about dharma practice, what do dharma practitioners do? They both create the cause and provide the conditions.

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I think that is really what dharma practice is all about. You are always creating the right conditions and the right causes—both together.

Audience: I would like some suggestions on getting through with a day, a day maybe like today or tomorrow, with less anger about things that are irritating—just getting through a day with less anger and in a more peaceful way. Any suggestions?

Rimpoche: You know, compassion and love brings you that. That's why we always pray, "May all beings have happiness, and may they all be free of suffering." One of the best motivations is compassion and love. That will really get you through the day. Even if it brings you halfway through the day, in the afternoon you can generate compassion once more. So then late afternoon goes along with compassion and so does the next morning. That's what it is.

I must tell you that when I was a kid in the monastery they would teach you that the moment you get up you have to think two things: "I will not waste my time" is one, and the second is "I will make this day useful and good for all." That is the compassion you bring in. Those two thoughts bring compassion to you day-by-day.

Audience: This morning on *The Today Show* a new self-help guru was saying that we are responsible for our actions and the show's staff psychologist answered that you're creating blame for victims who are ill or what-

ever [when you say that]. I would just like to hear your answer.

Rimpoche: I've been through that because when my book *Good Life, Good Death* came out, I was sent by the publisher for promotion and it was a little after 9/11, so every question everywhere was on that issue. It's not blaming the victim, definitely not. But we also can't experience anything if we did not create the cause.

When you experience something like 9/11, it happens to be a case of the person at the wrong time at the wrong place, no question. Each and every one of us have a tremendous amount of karma, both positive and negative. When you happen to be at the wrong place at the wrong time, your negative karma links up. The karma functions because the conditions are right.

It is the interdependent nature of existence. Things are really dependent arisings. When the conditions are right, the result is bound to come. When you get into the wrong place at the wrong time, the wrong conditions become right. That's why you have those consequences, no doubt about it. Each and every one of us carries karma that will cause us to die in fire, in water, in falling from the sky, or whatever. No one exists who doesn't have such karma. When the conditions are right, the karma materializes because it is interdependent nature. That's how it works.

Remember, we spent a lot of time talking about interdependence and how it works exactly. So the wrong time, wrong place, wrong thing, makes the wrong conditions meet together, and that's what happens.

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Victims are not to be blamed, but no one can say it's not karma. No one can say it's not the collective karma for over 3,000 people who lost their lives there. No one can say that the individuals did not have the karma to lose their lives there. But they are not to be blamed for that, because the karma of losing their life in that situation, and the karma of making it through, and the karma of not even meeting that situation at all—all are available with us. The circumstances that linked up made the whole difference. That is what interdependence of karmic functioning is all about.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION/MEDITATION

1. Do you agree that: “Life is in our own hands, under our own control. If there is something to be praised, it is your deeds, and you deserve it. If there is something to be blamed, it is your doing, and you deserve to be blamed.” Why or why not? What life experiences led you to form your beliefs on this point?
2. What is necessary for a “perfect” or complete negative karma and a perfect or complete good karma? Can you think of examples of each in your life, today or this week or this year? Can you think of examples when your good karma was weakened in some way?
3. What does it mean that karma is “impermanent”? What does it mean that karma is “interdependent”? Why are these points important?

VI

THE THIRD NOBLE TRUTH: CESSATION OF SUFFERING

WHY THE THIRD TRUTH IS CALLED “NOBLE”

First, I would like to draw your attention to why the Third Noble Truth of the cessation of suffering is called a “noble” truth.

Until we see actual reality, what we see is not necessarily true. Buddha divides spiritual practitioners into two categories: normal, ordinary, usual human beings, and special, extraordinary beings or *aryas*. The Sanskrit word *arya* is translated as “special person.” It’s not that one person is better by birth or right, and another person is worse. The term simply indicates the spiritual stage of the person. Normally, “ordinary” or “usual” refers to laypeople like us. I don’t mean “lay” in the sense of not being a monk or nun, but in the sense of not being an expert. People who are not experts, who are not masters of their trade, can be called laypeople. I think that’s what Buddha is talking about.

So, where does the “special” business come in? It comes in when you reach the third spiritual stage, the Path of Seeing the truth, seeing reality—emptiness. At

that level, we call you a special person. The third path, the third of the five paths, is also divided into three categories: beginning, actual, and conclusion.

At the actual level of the third path, the person sees the true reality of emptiness just like we ordinary people see another person with our eyes, rather than mentally making adjustments, generating an understanding, and holding it by meditation. This direct vision of emptiness is called the Path of Seeing.

THE FIVE PATHS

When you enter the Buddhist path, there are always five paths: the Path of Accumulation, the Path of Action, the Path of Seeing, the Path of Meditation, and the Path of No More Learning. Both the Theravada or self-liberation level and the Mahayana level have these five paths. The same names may have slightly different definitions, but other than that, there are always the same five paths.

On the **Path of Accumulation**, our major purpose is to accumulate merit. Merit is obscure language, however. We can understand it better in terms of positive karma, though technically merit and positive karma are different. Without having accumulated merit or positive karma you cannot take strong action because you don't have capital to invest; you have nothing. Just as in ordinary life, if you don't have money, you cannot make money; if you want to make an investment, you cannot just put down your finger, you know. For that reason, the accumulation of

merit is important.

Once you have accumulated enough merit, you go on to the **Path of Action**. The path of action is all about doing something. It is often divided into four categories. The first one is called *heat*. The traditional example is making a fire out of twigs without using matches or a lighter. How do you do that? You keep on rubbing two twigs together. After a while, the twigs will get warmer and warmer, and you're going to get heat, right?

The level of *heat* is called *tur* in Tibetan. This is a metaphor. It's not telling the practitioners to pick up twigs and rub them together! But the picking up of the twigs is like taking that accumulated merit, and the rubbing is applying it, working on it. You keep on rubbing, you begin to get some heat, and it begins to work. Whatever virtue you accumulate, whether through meditation or saying mantras or concentration or circumambulation or prostration or whatever, you do it and it begins to work. It begins to find ground; it begins to generate heat. Then the heat gets bigger and stronger, reaching a peak level. That's why they call the next stage *peak*.

Then the following stage is called *patience*, even though the heat is still at a peak level. It's very hot, but you still have to keep rubbing it; otherwise, it's not going to catch fire. It becomes very hot, but if you have no patience, it drops again. Again you have to rub, starting all over again. If you apply patience and keep on rubbing continuously, then you reach the stage called *best of dharma*. It means that you actually "catch fire." Then

you apply that fire and move to the third path, the Path of Seeing.

On the **Path of Seeing**, you begin to see true reality, and the path changes from action into seeing. The individual transfers from the second to the third stage of the path. It's not that a teacher will tell you, "Now you are on the third stage." When you practice, you get to the level where you begin to see true reality. The Buddhist true reality refers to emptiness, the nature of reality—seeing it directly, like I see you with my own eyes with your big nose and small ears. At the time when you see true reality, you automatically become an *arya*, a special person.

Up to that level, it is called "being like a child who can't see." Whatever you see may not necessarily be true. Whatever you perceive could be dualistic or it could be not straightforward. But after reaching the Path of Seeing, everything you see is reality. That's why when you see true reality, not only have you obtained the first of the ten stages (*bhumis*), but you are also called an *arya* or special person

The truth for those who have reached the Path of Seeing is not necessarily true for ordinary people, so that's why those who see it are called *aryas* or "noble ones." This doesn't mean you are like the lords and nobles in Britain, not nobles in that way, but noble in the sense of being "worthy of respect." And that is why the truth of cessation is a Noble Truth. It is the truth that the *aryas* see, which is difficult for non-*aryas* to see. That's why they call the cessation of suffering not only a truth, but

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a “noble” truth.

THE TRUTH OF CESSATION

Out of the Four Noble Truths, we consider the first two the truths about the negative aspects of our life, suffering and how it has been generated. The first truth introduces suffering and the second goes into where suffering comes from. It doesn't come from nowhere.

Now we're reaching the last two truths, the positive truths. Buddha could have introduced the cause of suffering first and then introduced suffering as the result, but he didn't. He introduced suffering first and then where it comes from. That's how the system works. Similarly here, the third truth is cessation and the fourth is the path that explains where the cessation comes from. Just as suffering is introduced first and then the cause of suffering, here the cessation of suffering comes first and then the cause of the cessation.

Why do we use the word *cessation*? Cessation means that something is finished, right? So, what is finished? What is exhausted? What has ceased? The First Noble Truth, the truth of suffering, is finished. So, what is left, then? Joy—the joy that has never known suffering, which is what we pray for. That joy is the cessation of suffering because what ceases to exist are both suffering and its cause. When both suffering and its cause are no longer present, that is cessation. That's what we're really talking about.

When suffering is completely exhausted, finished,

when there is no more left, something else has to take its place, because we're not going to disappear completely. We are not going to evaporate, like air blowing out. That doesn't happen.

Actually, certain Buddhist schools do say that cessation means that there is no more existence. This is a difference here between the Mahayana and the Theravada schools of thought. Theravada thought will say that cessation means no more existence. They divide cessation into two: *cessation with leftover* and *cessation without leftover*. Cessation with leftover is an individual human being who has obtained the stage of cessation. At that time the person still has a physical body left, and that's why they say "with leftover." Once that body is gone, they say there is nothing left—cessation "without leftover."

They say:

*Ma me shi wor gyu wa jin ka na lu shin du
shin kha, so wa tom jey tag gyu jin du
jey ngyen wad she wan na, nam par she
wha ngo wey gyurs ma me shi wor gyu
wa jin ka na lu shin du shin kha . . .*

*... just as a candle's light goes out when the
candle wax is completely exhausted, the
five skandhas (aggregates) will completely
dissolve one after another.*

They dissolve in the sense of being dismantled.

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*ka na lu shin du shin kha, so wa tom jey tag
gyu jin du jey ngyen wad she wan na*

The five skandhas go one after another. By losing the form skandha, recognition is lost. When recognition is lost, feeling is lost. When feeling is lost, acknowledgement is lost. When acknowledgement is lost, the mind or consciousness is lost. When that happens, the being himself or herself no longer exists. This equates to a completely nihilistic point of view, but that is the view of some of the schools, especially the Theravada schools. They accept nirvana in that form.

Mahayana schools do not accept that, quoting many of Buddha's teachings that tell you that if the final result is nihilistic, that's not what we're working for. That would be absolutely useless. It would no longer be helpful to you or to others. What would be the purpose of that? Mahayana teachings make that point. So in Mahayana, cessation is accepted, but the way the cessation is understood is that after the exhaustion of all suffering, one develops *the joy that has never known suffering*. Persons on that level are considered happy, joyful persons. *Arya Bodhisattvas* are referred to as "people of joy," living in a city of joy, and so on.

Cessation means the total exhaustion of mental, physical, and emotional sufferings. At that point, are you a Buddha? No! You are only halfway through. When you have finished off all suffering, you have to replace it with something else. You replace it with joy. This doesn't mean that the individual person has to die. It doesn't mean that

the person has to dismantle his or her physical body. Rather, it means that he or she has obtained freedom from suffering. That is called cessation.

So what is that exactly?

Sometimes philosophical definitions are very funny. You need more commentary on the definition than the definition itself tells you!

The cause of cessation, the path, cuts negativities and negative results. The pure state achieved by that is called "cessation."

That's the definition. The cause of cessation is the practice and the path, in other words, the Fourth Noble Truth. The path and the work that we do, our spiritual practice, is normally called the Noble Eightfold Path or the Five Paths or something similar. Each and every practice that you engage in on the path cuts certain aspects of suffering. You keep on cutting and cutting and there will come a time when the practice completely cuts all sufferings. When those sufferings are cut, that individual reaches the spiritual stage or level called cessation.

In the definition, the term *pung ja* is something that you want to get rid of: negativities. Every time we practice, we cut some negativity. Practice is not necessarily just saying *sadhanas* but everything we do. That's why the definition of cessation is cessation's cause, the Fourth Noble Truth. It is by exhausting suffering that you gain

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whatever you gain. They use the word *tah wah*. What you gain has no form but is a spiritual gain. Spiritual gain within the individual is formless; it is a mental aspect. It is cessation, and it is spiritual development.

MOTIVATION, ACTION, AND CONCLUSION

The more positive your motivation is, the better such spiritual development works. Whatever you do with a positive motivation, whatever positive actions and positive conclusions you engage in, becomes spiritual practice. When we talked the other day about the negative karma created by killing bedbugs, we talked about motivation, action, and conclusion. Similarly here, in terms of the path, it is motivation, action, and conclusion in a virtuous sense.

Therefore, our motivation should be profound compassion, love, or faith. These are good motivations. Even if you are doing positive work, if it is influenced by ego-boosting, ego-servicing, or any self-serving motivation, then that positive work is not the best. It's damaged by the motivation of self-serving. If you have a self-serving motivation, then whatever you do, even meditating for twenty years in total solitude in a mountain cave, is just wasting those twenty years. You could have done better, much better. With a self-serving motivation, whatever good you do is wasted.

There is an example:

When Atisha, the great Indian master who brought Buddhism into Tibet, had passed away, Drom Rinpoche,

his second in command, took over and went to visit all of Atisha's followers. Unlike Atisha, Drom Rinpoche was a native Tibetan. When Drom Rinpoche walked in to visit a Kadampa Geshe who had been meditating a lot, the meditator literally jumped up from his meditation seat and started prostrating to Drom Rinpoche. Drom Rinpoche looked around and noticed that the Geshe's mandala set was covered with dust. Obviously the Geshe had not done the mandala offering for a while because, while Tibet is full of dust, so much could not have settled in one day. So Drom Rinpoche asked, "What happened to this mandala? It's covered with dust!" The meditator replied, "Oh, I've been thinking for a while and I forgot." In other words, he had been meditating and forgot about making the mandala offering. Drom Rinpoche laughed and said, "Atisha can meditate much more than you, but he never forgets to make mandala offerings."

Although this particular meditator may not necessarily have had the wrong motivation, his action was wrong action. Because he cared too much about meditation, he did not do physical offerings. That's why Drom Rinpoche said, "Atisha has better capacity to meditate than you, but he never misses making mandala offerings."

With every positive action that we do, the motivation, the action itself, and the conclusion all have to be good to create good positive karma. Just like with negative karma, if we have a wrong motivation, wrong action, and wrong conclusion, it makes perfect strong negative karma. Likewise here, right motivation, right action, and right conclusion will make perfect positive karma.

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When we talk about cessation, the practice of cutting negativity has to be perfect from the motivation point of view, from the action point of view, and from the conclusion point of view. When you have those things together, each one of those practices, whether you spend five minutes or fifty minutes on them, will keep cutting certain negativities within yourself. Finally the negativities are exhausted, and by that you gain positive results.

THE MOST IMPORTANT MOTIVATION: BODHIMIND

The most important motivation is what Buddha called *bodhimind*: ultimate, unlimited, unconditional love and compassion. We all have love, we all have compassion, but ours is limited to one or two persons, honestly! If you think, “For me or mine only,” with our limitations, that’s a condition. If you think, “All right, I’ll do this, but what’s in it for me?” that’s a condition. Compassion does not create conditions or place limitations, so Buddha recommends bodhimind as the best motivation.

Not only does Buddha recommend it, the tradition in Tibet is such that when you are receiving teachings, you always generate bodhimind at the beginning. At every single point, whenever you receive teachings, the teacher’s first words are to remind the person of the motivation by saying, for example:

*For the benefit of all mother sentient beings
one would like to attain the state of a
Buddha for which one would like to*

listen to and practice this teaching, etc.

Moreover, in Tibetan Buddhism, the first thing to say is:

*I take refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and
Sangha
By practicing generosity and the other
perfections
May I obtain enlightenment for the benefit
of all beings.*

Straightaway you are pushing motivation here. It comes everywhere, wherever you look, at every single point. Just a single OM MANI PADME HUM pushes that. It is key for us to have bodhimind as motivation in whatever we do. If you can't do that, then it's very difficult to achieve anything.

Shantideva said:

*Powerful negativities such as that, which
other virtue can cut that besides
bodhimind?*

This is huge. Anything whatsoever that we do with the influence of bodhimind, even if we just sit and do nothing and be a couch potato, creates virtue. Shantideva further said that if you have bodhimind, even if you do nothing, the accumulation of merit and the purification of negativities are done by that motivation alone. It is that powerful.

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If one person has bodhimind as motivation and says OM MANI PADME HUM once and another person doesn't have bodhimind as motivation but simply has good thoughts and says OM MANI PADME HUM a million times, which one gets the better yield? Saying the mantra one time with bodhimind has a zillion times more yield than saying it a million times without bodhimind!

These are very important points. Buddha himself has said that if someone gives a piece of food to a dog with bodhimind and someone without bodhimind gives a feast to the whole universe, then feeding the dog has more good effect of generosity than feeding the whole universe. It's in the sutras. This is our advantage, and we have to take it.

The purpose of practice is to cut through negativity and the cause of negativity. By cutting that, you gain cessation and that cessation is your spiritual development. Really, truly speaking, that's the important point. If you don't have positive motivation and you keep on saying 100,000 of this and 100,000 of that, it's 100,000 and that's it! So, everything, whatever we do, changes with the motivation.

What one should definitely not have in motivation is selfishness. Even if you don't have selflessness, you should never be entertaining "me, me, me." It is already everywhere, in every part of our mind and body. Every bone in our body will scream "me, me, me" because we have that addiction. And "me, me, me" will cut down our positive bodhimind motivation, because whatever we do

is for the benefit of “me, me, me.”

Sometimes our positive motivation is cut down by a lack of understanding, too. What is a good thing to do? Helping others. How can I best help myself? The way I help myself is helping others. If I try to help just myself, I will get nowhere. Yes, we need to help ourselves. But the way to help me is by me helping others. That tells you how important bodhimind is.

STRONG ACTION

Second is action. Whatever action you take, even just saying OM MANI PADME HUM or OM TARE TUTARE TURE SOHA, it has to be strong action. What makes it strong? Not only the motivation, but also the actual action.

You remember the aspects of a completely strong negative action? I talked to you about catching a bedbug and torturing it. The equivalent here is focusing strongly, not half-heartedly saying it or half-thinking. There are three things going on, right? We have to say OM MANI PADME HUM. If at the same time we are looking at our e-mail or taking notes here together, then saying the mantra is not only half-hearted but it has almost no focus. What we need is very strong focus—not only on the sound, but on the meaning of AH-OH-M and MANI and PADME and HUNG and the union of these two. When you say OM TARE TUTARE TURE SOHA, you have think about the First Noble Truth, Second Noble Truth, Third Noble Truth, and Fourth Noble Truth,

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because that mantra carries the meaning of the Four Noble Truths.

Focusing is important. Otherwise, any parrot can say OM MANI PADME HUM and OM TARE TUTARE TURE SOHA. There should be a difference between a parrot and a human being with understanding saying OM MANI PADME HUM. That effort cuts negativity and the cause of negativity. That is cessation building the definition of cessation itself.

Lets say we are doing prostrations. One prostration with positive motivation and positive action will cut a certain amount of negativity, which is replaced by positive gain. That is the beginning of cessation. And that is how an individual builds up and finally obtains total cessation of all suffering—the truth of cessation. Get it? In other words that is your spiritual development.

A lot of people think that spiritual development is something that is going to hit you on your head all of a sudden and shake you and circle you around so that you see a few stars. After that, you sit down and begin to become normal, and you think that is cessation, but that is absolutely wrong! People do that, but trying to practice like that can bring physical, mental, and emotional problems. I do know a number of people who went through this, who had such a thing happen, and they're not good; they're not right.

For example, in 1985 or 1986 when I went to Singapore, I was giving little talks here and there. And there was a very well known and famous kundalini teacher

who had thousands of followers in Singapore. This teacher wanted to see me. Everybody told me he was very famous and blah, blah, blah, and you have to go to him. I said, “No, I’m not going to go to him.” The people who brought me to Singapore said, “You have to go,” and I said, “No, I’m not going, no way!” Then, finally, he wanted to come and see me. But he would only come at midnight; he didn’t want to come in the daytime. I think he didn’t want anyone to see him there. So he came at midnight, wearing dark glasses and a hat.

The poor guy had a tremendous problem of burning kundalini. He had been teaching kundalini and bringing kundalini up to the head chakra. Then something started happening, and he didn’t know what to do. The kundalini developed and he started shaking and all this. It went throughout his body and burned him literally, physically. He got red hot. You know, that kundalini was wrong. For the first one or two times, the shaking sensation is very nice, very enjoyable, but then you go more and more, and in the end, become cuckoo. Just becoming cuckoo is not bad, but honestly, you can die!

Unfortunately, this wrong kundalini burning is terrible for the person going through it, and you can’t do much because certain techniques have been misused. The only thing I could do was to visualize certain kinds of light and liquid from Avalokiteshvara. In the Chinese tradition, Avalokiteshvara is the bodhisattva Kuan Yin or Kuan Yin Pu Sa. So that’s what I did. I visualized that through Kuan Yin, some cool light and liquid poured over him. I created a little practice for him, and he kept

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on acknowledging, saying in his letters that it was helping him. Whether it helped him or not, unfortunately he died. Honestly, this sort of thing happens. Dying is not necessarily bad, but dying through a wrong process of practice is bad.

Besides that, in that area, we see a lot of people who come into funny little trances. They're harmless; they're OK. They call [the spirits who come into the trances] deities. Sometimes there is one who says he is Maitreya Buddha. Somebody else who calls himself Laughing Buddha comes into trance and keeps on laughing. These spirits are not harmful at all. They're OK. The spirits themselves are looking for ways to gain a little positive karma, and that's how they show themselves. They're not Maitreya Buddha; they're not Avalokiteshvara; they're not the Buddha of Compassion. They are spiritual side effects, not spiritual development. Some of the people who come into trace are very helpful. They do a lot of healing and help a little bit, too. But then there are certain [spirit] beings that would like to be a little harmful. There are a lot of those types, and they're not a spiritual result at all. They're not cessation at all. Shaking your head and shaking your body and turning your eyes around and slurring your mouth and drooling—those are not an indication of cessation. Those are side effects. For most of those people, in actual practice there will be problems. That's the truth.

Otherwise spiritual practice would be some “shaking business” that anybody could do. You can be given an electrical shock and that will shake you, too. Honestly, it

doesn't do any good. You can take drugs, and you can get all kinds of experiences. It may help to a certain extent. Maybe you'll be able to visualize better; maybe it brings a little bit of clarity. It is possible; it depends. You people know more than I do, I hope. I had that experience only once.

One time I had a joint, and it was not good. I started throwing up, terrible! Another time, an Indian businessman, actually the owner of the Yak and Yeti Hotel, gave me a breakfast of Indian sweets. He kept on saying, "It is the blessings of bhagavan." That means the blessings of god or Buddha or something was in the Indian sweets. We had breakfast with two Indian central government ministers, and they both got up and ran away. I didn't know what was going on. A Tibetan doctor was with me, and they gave me the sweets. I love Indian sweets, so I took them, and they gave me more. The host said, "Don't give any to the doctor, because he has to see patients." Then I began to wonder what it was.

An hour or hour and a half later, everything was so clear. The whites were so white, and the blues so blue! The funny thing was, I could hear the people who were talking in the second and third rooms. I could hear them as though they were talking inside my ear, honestly. I could hear everything so clearly. Unfortunately somebody went to the toilet and flushed, and I had to cover up [my ears]!

By that time I realized that this was due to the effect of the drugs and I started using the experience to see how the inner central channel works and how the chakras look

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there. I began to focus and sort of got it. I thought, “Oh, yeah, I’m doing this. OK, why not?” That’s when I saw that the channels are not really red, as described by the books. Inside they are red, but on the outside they are green. That’s what I know. Maybe it’s a delusion. But then, you know, the description given in the books, as well as the actual stages, is what I saw, except for the colors.

Of course, you can’t rely on drugs to give you the experience. They are very limited and don’t last anyway. The truth is that when the Path of Seeing is reached non-chemically, through spiritual development, we are able to see reality and everything clearly.

The teachings on *Gom*, shamata meditation, tell you that when you meditate at an advanced level, sometimes you can look at a pillar and see every particle within the pillar, hundreds of thousands. You can see each and every one of them clearly. That is what I’m talking about. That is a meditative effect, not a drug effect. At that level, you enter the Path of Seeing. You really see it, so then you know it is the truth.

TRUE CESSATION

The Four Noble Truths are called “noble” because the noble ones see them. Past, present, and future, they see all of them. It’s gone, go, going—you know, all three.

You don’t know that story? Gone, go, going—the bus. A Geshe-la lives now in a nice scenic place in Los Angeles. I call him the L.A. Lama, Geshe Tsultrim Gyaltzen.

About 30 years ago, he was in Sussex, England, looking after Tibetan kids, trying to teach them Buddhism. He went from Sussex to meet a friend in London. When he had to go back, he wanted to take the bus. I think he was wearing robes. He wasn't sure whether the bus was gone yet or not, so he thought: past, present, and future, three of them, gone, go, going. So there was only a very snobbish British lady at the bus stop, and Geshe-la wanted to ask that lady whether the bus had already gone or not. So Geshe-la moved a little closer to the lady, and the lady moved back a little bit. Then he moved up a little bit more, and the lady moved further back and started looking at him. Then he suddenly said, "Busses to the Sussex, gone, go, going?" He was asking whether the bus had gone or not. The lady ran away! So that's the gone, go, going business.

True cessation improves the individual person. It means not entertaining "me, me, me"—"I am great, I've been this, I've been that, I'm this, I'm that, I've not been acknowledged, I've not been recognized, me, me, me, I've been looked down on, me, me, me!" That is what has to be reduced and that's what you need to cut off, because "me, me, me" is self-cherishing. It is ego boosting. "Me, me, me" is blowing your own horn when nobody would like to listen. These are negative, wrong motivations.

Besides that, if any action that you take hurts anybody—not only hurting them physically but hurting them emotionally—it is also wrong. There are two kinds of being hurt. If an individual feels hurt emotionally because it hurts his or her ego, then it's a good and positive

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thing. However, if the individual is truly hurt, not just the ego being hurt, then that is a bad thing. When you truly hurt an individual, that action is called violence. The difference between violence and non-violence is another very important point here. The teaching comes from Buddha. There should not be any violent action at all, any type, any kind. If it's violence, then more or less by virtue of the act itself, it becomes negative.

Last weekend I was in New York and it was the 10th of March, the anniversary of the Tibetan Uprising. They had a lot of demonstrations. I didn't go for that, but on Sunday the 11th there was a meeting where the Dalai Lama's brother came and spoke about what had happened in Tibet in the past. He didn't say what will or should happen, but just what had happened. A lot of Tibetans were there. One new young Tibetan poet from Dharamsala tried to give a definition of violence and non-violence that I thought was so funny. He was urging people to destroy the railway tracks in Tibet and was saying that that's not violence. He said, "If you kill anybody, then it becomes violence." That was his definition. He said that he always goes to the demonstrations against the Chinese in India, and every time, the Indian police catch the demonstrators and beat them up with sticks. He said, "So far, we have been taking all the stick beatings and we don't fight back against the police because we consider that violence. But when the police are beating you, you have to grab the stick from the hands of the police. You don't hit them back; instead, you break the stick." He

said that is non-violence.

If you hit the police with the stick, that is definitely violence. But if you grab the stick from the police, even if you don't hit back, you're fighting against the law. The normal system and normal language says, "I fought the law and the law won." I don't think that is really right.

People have the idea of making a boundary between violence and non-violence. But actually, when you hurt anyone physically or verbally or mentally or emotionally, I think it is violence. Yet, if you are hurting the ego of the individual, I don't think it is violence. I think it's one of the best positive virtues, because it helps the person. It helps you, and it particularly helps that person, even when that individual doesn't recognize the help. As long as the individual does not recognize, he or she will feel hurt. But that hurt is not negative; it is positive because it's going against the ego.

THE CONCLUSION IS REJOICING

So any action that we take physically or verbally has to be positive and non-violent. And the conclusion of that action should be rejoicing. When you do that, it becomes positive action. The result of every positive action is cutting a chunk of negativity within us.

Whenever you cut negativity, you gain something positive, just like a seesaw that children play on. When this side is heavy, that side goes up, and when that side is heavy, this side goes up. It is exactly like that. The instant you cut negativity, the positive starts going up and up

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and up. Finally, when all of the negativity is completely exhausted, then *rang tob je khi la meng khi pung ja pung ba ta wa che la jo wey chos so*—that particular stage of purity has been obtained and that purity is called cessation.

Basically that gives you a rough idea about the objective of our spiritual practice. The purpose of our spiritual practice is that. That's what we're looking for. That's what we're working for. That's what we've been building day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute. That's what we've been doing. That's basically what cessation is all about.

DIVISIONS WITHIN CESSATION

There are divisions within cessation. If I don't mention them, it's not right. Basically in Buddhist teaching, we talk about three *yanas*. Many of you probably think that the three *yanas* are Theravada *yana*, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. That's what is known in America, and it is true in one way. But normally, when Buddhists talk about the three *yanas*, they don't talk about Vajrayana; they talk about *Shravakayana*, *Pratyekayana*, and *Buddhayana* (or Mahayana).

Shravakayanins (followers of *Shravakayana* or Hearers) are those who listen; they have heard Buddha's teaching and are practicing that. Pratyekayanins (followers of *Pratyekayana* or Solitary Realizers) are self-liberating practitioners. They don't necessarily have a teacher.

Then there is the Mahayana. *Maha* means "big"; *yana* is "vehicle." The person who follows the great vehicle is

called a Mahayanin. The Mahayana is the vehicle that takes you to cessation; it's not going nowhere! You know those exercise bicycles where you keep on going, going, going and you get nowhere? That's not a vehicle; it doesn't deliver you anywhere. No matter how many days, how many hours you ride, you'll be still in the same place doing the same thing. It's a non-vehicle, a non-yana. That's what we do in our life! But those who know how to ride a bicycle, they're on the road, they're on the path, they're going somewhere. Whether they're going up to cessation or down to the bottom of hell—wherever they go, they are going somewhere! So that's what it is.

Each of these three vehicles has five paths. I talked to you earlier about the five paths. At the end of each of the five paths, there is a stage called **No More Learning**. That is the ultimate stage. When you reach it, they call you an *arhat*.

An arhat is a person who has not only become special (an *arya* or “noble” person) but has achieved nirvana—a person who has made it through. Each of the three yanas has different levels of cessation. All are cessation, but their qualities differ. All Seikos are watches but they have different qualities. There are various kinds of Omega watches and Rolex watches, but they have different qualities. Just like that, all cessations are cessation, but they have different qualities. The first two levels of cessation are Theravadan. The last cessation of the Mahayana level is called Buddhahood.

The first level of cessation I told you about carries the total exhaustion of the cause of suffering and of suffering

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itself. That is halfway through to the Buddha level. The Path of Seeing is halfway through. Then you have the **Path of Meditation** and that leads you to the Path of No More Learning. Even that is only three-quarters of the way. It is still limited. One's knowledge is limited, and everything else has limitations. Only total Buddhahood, total enlightenment, is unlimited. There's nothing that the enlightened do not know, nothing.

Many of you have heard the verse from the Ganden Lha Gyema:

*Your minds have the intellect that
comprehends the full extent of what can
be known*

When you are giving teachings on this verse, the commentaries say it's like a measurement. If you take a measuring tape, its whole length would equal what there is to be known. There is nothing left, nothing extra, nothing short, so that is total knowledge. That is what the last quarter of the path will give you.

Up to the arhat level, what are you cutting? You are cutting the gross level of all negativities. But what is not cut? The imprints of those negativities. The example given here is garlic and the smell of garlic. If you're chopping garlic, the garlic smells, right? So then you clean up the garlic, throw all the garlic away, so there is no more garlic left, but still the garlic smell will be there, unless you wash nicely with soap or lemon. Until then it remains. This garlic smell is what we call the imprint. (Don't take

me literally, you know.)

Like the garlic smell, we have the imprint of negativities. When you cut and finish off those negativities, what you gain is total knowledge. If you don't wash away the imprints, what happens? The negativities don't grow back—they can't grow back—but even then, something remains that has the effect of preventing total knowledge. Limitations still remain.

Buddhahood means total knowledge. It is the ultimate cessation. We call it omniscience or all knowing. In Tibetan, “Buddha” is *sang gye*. *Sang* means “clearing of all obstacles.” *Gye* means “totally developed”—no place to go; no more learning; total comprehensive, ultimate, complete development; nothing left out; nothing more to get. That is Mahayana cessation.

Buddhahood is also full of qualities and has no faults. Because of total knowledge, you have total quality. Knowledge and information is power, not only in the material world, but also in the spiritual world. If you don't have information and knowledge, you have no power. If there's no power, your electric toothbrush won't work; it stays stuck there, so you have to put in effort. Your shaver won't shave no matter how much you drag it up and down. So power on the spiritual path is information and knowledge.

The Buddha's body has tremendous quality, tremendous. Normally, they talk about the body, mind, and speech levels. However, if a person would appear today looking like the drawing of the Buddha, with those physical attributes, we

would probably be afraid and run away because there's the extra lump here [on top of the head] and all kinds of different marks.

However, one of the qualities of the Buddha's body is its pleasant appearance. When you see the Buddha's body, there is nothing that doesn't suit. It is completely soothing and wonderful. When people see the Dalai Lama, they like him. That's just an indication. Soothing means that. So does that mean that the Buddha has nothing as compared with the Dalai Lama? Or, maybe that the Dalai Lama is a Buddha? I don't know. But his is a normal human being's physical form. Fully enlightened ones have a totally different capability and quality of body.

The quality of a Buddha's speech is also totally different. They may be speaking in one dialect, but everybody will hear the words in their own native tongue or dialect.

The quality of the Buddha's mind is total knowledge. Remember the verse in the Ganden Lha Gyema: your mind quality is that it *comprehends all that is to be known*. That indicates what total knowledge means; in other words, if there is something to be known in the past, present, or future, you will know it, all together. The Buddha's knowledge has no limits. The past is easy to know. The present is more difficult to know than the past. And the future is much more difficult to know than the past or the present. But Buddha has no limit; past, present, or future, including all the changes that take place, and what will be at any time or any place. That's what the

verse means when it says *your knowledge comprehends all there is to be known*. That is, briefly speaking, the quality of cessation that we can obtain. That is our goal.

Our spiritual goal is to become fully enlightened. Why is being enlightened so important? Enlightenment is total knowledge. Knowledge and information is power for us to defeat our negativities. To get rid of negativity, knowledge and information is the power that you are looking for. It is the know-how. That is why total knowledge is so important. That is what Buddha is all about, and it is open to every one. You can run for the Buddha stage, and you don't have to be born in America. Even Arnold Schwarzenegger can run!¹

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Audience: Earlier, in talking about karma and the different types of karma, you gave an example of imprints in a situation in which somebody engages in killing and then that action becomes habitual. The question was, why do some little kids enjoy torturing insects and others don't? That's one kind of imprint, and now you are talking about the imprints that remain at the early stages of nirvana that are obscurations to total enlightenment. Are those two different kinds of imprints that we're talking about?

Rimpoche: Yes, for sure. You know, we have two obstacles—delusions and karma. The delusional obstacle

and its imprints, that's what I'm talking about now. But earlier, I was talking about the karmic imprint, which is like an experiential result. The experiential result is like a wild tiger or leopard that tastes human blood and then likes to have it and to jump where human beings are. It's just like that. The experiential result is addiction. Then you like to repeat, like to repeat, like to repeat. That is a worse result than a direct consequence. You kill me, I kill you; I kill you, you kill me—that is straightforward. But the experiential result, when you like to do it, is considered the worst karmic consequence, worse than a direct result.

Audience: Could you explain the distinction between the experiential kind of karma that you're talking about and the delusions and this imprint business that blocks enlightenment?

Rimpoche: The earlier one affects the individual because it can grow. In other words, it can create the negative karma again. The second kind of imprint may not be able to create karma again, but it obstructs one from reaching total knowledge. Once you have obtained the ultimate cessation, which is Buddhahood, those imprints are gone for good.

The long food offering prayer includes several names for Buddha. *De zhin sheg pa* means “well traveled.” *Drag chom pa* is “one who has defeated all enemies,” not human enemies but rather the negativities called enemies. *Yang dag par* means “completely pure.” *Dzok pay sang gye* means

“completion of total clearing and total knowledge.” *Rig pa ten chobs sun den pa ter wa ri chen pa jig ten jem*, that is “all knowing.” We also call Buddha *tam che kyen pa*, “knowing everything.” That is cessation. These are the qualities we look for.

Buddha not only has all knowledge but all capabilities, every capability wherever, whatever is possible to have. That doesn't mean Buddha can liberate us. He can't. Buddha liberated himself and can help us to liberate ourselves, but he can't liberate us. Buddha himself said:

*The Buddhas cannot wash away the
negativities of other people by pouring
water over them.*

You can wash yourself in holy water, but the holy water doesn't cleanse you. The sufferings of an individual cannot be removed by hand, with fingers or tweezers. And spiritual development is non-transferable, like an American Express card! The only way the Enlightened Ones can help us is by telling the truth, by giving teachings, by explaining the nature of reality, the noble truths: that helps us. Whatever we've been talking about here, whatever you're listening to here is building information for you, building knowledge for you, helping you gain power within the spiritual path.

This is not the Johnny Carson show. Johnny Carson's gone, remember? Not even David Letterman, or Jay Leno. This is not the Jay Leno Show!

The spiritual path only works by knowing, by

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understanding. We don't tell you to meditate. We give you the information. If you want to meditate, you have to meditate by yourself. We are not like Zen people here. No one will come by with that stick if you're falling asleep, and bong! Hit you from the back. Some people will ask to be hit. We don't do that. Nor do we organize you. We don't want to put discipline on you. You have to have discipline by yourself on the basis of the information that you pick up.

If you're doing great, we will not tell you that you are great. It doesn't help you. Sometimes it even harms you because it will boost your ego. We won't do that. If you're doing bad, we won't tell you you're bad, but we'll tell you, "Don't you think you should do something differently? What do you think about it?" That's because we don't want to hurt you, honestly. But your discipline is your own deeds, and we are all grownups. We are all educated, intelligent, actually wonderful, brilliant people here. And if you don't know how to discipline yourselves, it's too bad. We are not in a monastery. In the monastery, a disciplinary person puffs up his dress like this and has a stick in his hand and walks up and down. We don't do that.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION/MEDITATION

1. What is cessation? What will cease when I achieve it?
Do I want this?
2. How can I distinguish between good actions done with good motivation and good actions that are motivated by self-serving or ego-boosting motivation?
3. What is my definition of non-violent action? How can I tell whether I've "really hurt" someone or just "hurt the ego"?
4. What are the Five Paths? How do I feel about my capability to accomplish them?

VII

THE FOURTH NOBLE TRUTH: THE PATH

The first two of the Four Noble Truths, the negative aspects, explain the process through which we develop our sufferings and pains. They explain suffering and the causes of suffering, karma and delusions. One leads to the other; karma is created by nothing but delusions.

The two positive aspects, cessation and cause of cessation, are a wonderful thing. They are the basic structure through which our life functions, whether we like it or not. Knowing this, putting our efforts into this and making it work the way it should, is what we call “practice.” Practice doesn’t just mean that you sit for a while in silence, or that you say your sadhanas and mantras, while the rest of your life is not called practice. Keeping silence, meditating, saying sadhanas, and doing analytical meditations are all within the process of developing the cessation of suffering through the Fourth Noble Truth, the truth of the path to cessation.

HOW THE PATH BECOMES CAPABLE OF DELIVERING
CESSATION

The path, the Fourth Noble Truth, is capable of delivering the goods. But the question arises: Will every virtue be capable of delivering the total result of cessation? No. We know that very well, not only after our usual studies, but also after studying karma as part of the Second Noble Truth. Within karma, we talked about positive, negative, and immovable karma. Immovable karma is positive karma, good virtue, but it is not capable of delivering cessation. It is capable of delivering a good result in our future life, but not cessation.

Similarly, even though positive karma is capable of delivering normal learning on any of the [first] three stages of the path, there is a division between the ordinary path and ordinary practice of ordinary persons and the special path and special practice of special persons. The path that is practiced by ordinary persons is more or less the practice that we do rather than the path that is practiced by special persons. A special person means a person who has seen true reality. We are not there.

Out of the five paths, we are on the Path of Accumulation, most of us. If you're on the path at all, it will be the Path of Accumulation. On the Path of Accumulation, what's most important is the accumulation of merit. This means that even if we get on the Path of Accumulation, we have not yet reached the level of doing anything *except* accumulating merit. This may sound depressing.

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Remember when Locho Rinpoche was here one time? He kept on saying we're not yet at the Buddha stage, and maybe, we are just in the chapter where Buddhism becomes the only route, nothing else. Remember, he kept on saying that there is the period of the result level, the period of the *arya* level, the period of the ordinary level, the period of the practice level, and the period of simply holding the rope. And he kept on saying that most of us are in the period of just holding the rope, remember? It was quite depressing that night. When you are looking into the five paths and find out where you are, it is very depressing!

Anyway, the main goal of the Path of Accumulation is purification and collecting merit. The two of them take on major importance over anything else. So it is no wonder that people want to say so many Vajrasattava recitations, do mandala offerings, make prostrations, and things like that. People are interested, and not only interested, they like to do something simple and easy, like doing good exercise. Sometimes it may also have some message of understanding in there.

In order to create the cause to deliver the Third Noble Truth, one has to have wisdom, or at least be wisdom-connected. We know what kind of wisdom we have, but one advantage for us is motivation. This is something extraordinary that the Tibetan tradition carries. Wherever and whatever you do, however tiny it might be, even simply giving a piece of food to a dog or animal or fish, can be transformed into a great thing by

motivation. We have a tremendous advantage because of the specific motivation that we call bodhimind: unlimited, unconditioned love and compassion.

That motivation demands of us that every effort we put in is for the purpose of seeking total enlightenment. Even if it's just saying one simple OM MANI PADME HUM or just giving a little piece of food to an animal, or maybe helping someone who has difficulties on the road. If someone on the road is helpless and you try to help a little bit, even that is worthwhile, especially with bodhimind.

This is my honest feeling: Somehow we've been fortunate enough to be told: In the morning when you get up, generate bodhimind and that will help. Then whatever you do to help during the day, every good work, whatever you do, becomes the cause to obtain enlightenment. It doesn't leave much room to create positive karma that gives you only a good result in samsaric life, or the positive life that is caused by immovable karma. Because of bodhimind motivation, we don't have much opportunity for our positive karma to go in the direction of samsaric results.

This is the great gift that the Mahayana carries. We know quite clearly that motivation is the first thing in the line that will lead you wherever it is going. You know how when groups of animals are traveling across the land, one animal is the leader and every one else follows? Like that, motivation leads every good thing we do in the direction of enlightenment, even if we don't think about it. Maybe we are blind, but the blind are lead by someone who is

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wise, someone who has eyes, someone who sees and can lead them to the city of liberation.

So I think in that way we have an advantage. Otherwise without having the wisdom aspects of the path, every single positive karma doesn't go very far. Either we don't do anything positive. Or, whenever we do brings some kind of a cheap result. We just get good fortune, or some success in life, or have no illnesses, or have longevity, or not fall into the lower realms in the future. [Without bodhimind as motivation or wisdom] every positive karma, whatever we do, will go to those purposes. It doesn't go to the purpose of clearing or exhausting or rejecting samsara and not even to the eradication of suffering. It doesn't go for that.

I think this is where the line is drawn on whether something is dharma or not dharma. Not every positive thing is necessarily dharma. A positive deed, a wonderful deed, might not be dharma, because there is no influence of the first principle of the path, the principle that renounces everything within samsara, within the continuation of life without our control. Of course, positive karma, good karma, gives you a good result, no doubt. It makes the person a good person and all that, but maybe it's not the path that is capable of delivering total exhaustion of suffering. It might not be capable of it.

People like those of us who spend a long time in dharma practice may have to think about that carefully. When you are first joining, first working, first thinking, it might not be that important. The first thing is to

overcome all wrong things, and these good positive things are great. But our goal is not just simple joy or simple happiness. Every positive karma can give you the result of joy or happiness, but not every karma is capable of giving the joy that has never known suffering! For that, you probably need wisdom or a powerful motivation like bodhimind. Simple goodness may not be able to do that.

IMPERMANENCE AND WISDOM

To be part of the Fourth Noble Truth, something needs to be able to deliver the goods. Not every virtue is capable of delivering the goods. If you have wisdom, then everything, whatever you do, becomes part of it, because that is the power of wisdom. If you don't have wisdom, a very strong understanding of impermanence can lead to it. Impermanence is not emptiness; however, impermanence cuts the tremendously strong influence of ego. Ego looks for the status quo, and impermanence contradicts that because it shows that everything is changing in nature. That helps a lot.

Normally when you talk about the path, you hear about the Noble Eightfold Path or the Twelve Interdependent Links or something like that, but the real truth is that every effort we put in, whatever we do, particularly those of us who have daily commitments, are working in the right direction. It may look like, "Oh, it is a sadhana commitment. It is something to do with a deity." But in true reality, the sadhana is actually leading

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to total enlightenment, and that is the reason why we do that commitment. That is the reason why we have a positive motivation. That is the reason why we're looking into the wisdom of whatever we're going to bite or chew on. That's why we deal with impermanence.

As we say very often when we talk about impermanence, it's very difficult to "get" subtle impermanence. However, gross impermanence is not that difficult; it is quite obvious. Gross impermanence alone will shake a lot of ideas about remaining in the status quo and not changing, because everything changes. Not only does everything change, but we also change all the time, every minute. Not only every minute, but in each minute, everything changes 365 times. By knowing that, we shake that feeling of the permanent "me" and "self" and "I," and when that is shaken, it really damages samsara. Just simply shaking the idea of the status quo brings us to the level where Nargajuna says:

*tse un seh vah sem gye seh vah sur gem ven
ju*

*Just by raising a doubt alone you destroy
samsara.*

AN UNCONVENTIONAL FOURTH NOBLE TRUTH

What I'd like to give you here is another unconventional Fourth Noble Truth. The conventional truth as I said earlier is impermanence. Actually impermanence will

ultimately give you wisdom and all that follows, but the real practice that we can get into from the beginning is guru devotional practice. That can help us overcome the dualistic viewpoint in everything we do, and that is the essence of our practice. That is also the essence of our sadhana practice—not the sadhana in the sense of thinking “I am Yamantaka,” “I am Vajrayogini,” “I am Tara.” Thinking that is not the essence of sadhana practice at all. The essence of the sadhana is really getting to the level [of the non-dualistic viewpoint]. When I say “non-dualistic,” it means the level of seeing emptiness. Though in the middle of the sadhana, you are generating yourself in yidam form, that is part of leading the individual to the [non-dualistic] stage.

Vajrayana gives you the result level at the beginning, even if we know nothing about it. We don't even know the ABCs of dharma, but still they give you the result level as it is, because Vajrayana is the result-yana. Sometimes the gap between where I am and what I meditate and read seems to be gigantic and huge. It seems to be a huge gap, but it is not. Actually Vajrayana is a much faster way to get to that level of understanding. It is like forcing somebody into a very difficult school where they almost cannot manage, almost pushing the person through. As long as they don't break, they go through, and when they come out, they come out a very good one. It may not be so gentle and so kind, but the essence of the sadhana, if you really look very carefully, has nothing else.

Everything, whatever you're doing, can be done that way. Your daily practice may be a sadhana, or Ganden

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Lha Gyema, or Lama Chopa, or whatever it is. I do not know whether our Jewel Heart Prayers can deliver [the non-dualistic level], but to a certain extent they can, because we have strong motivation and the Seven Limbs and certain mantras in there, so to a certain extent it can happen.

THE FOURTH NOBLE TRUTH AND DAILY PRACTICE

The Seven Limbs is the major practice on the Path of Accumulation. Each and every one of the seven limbs has very important points for accumulating merit as well as for purification. That quite clearly shows what we're doing. It is one thing to talk about the Eightfold Path or the Five Paths of this and that. But what we really need to do is our daily thing. Every day, whatever we're doing, has to be the Fourth Noble Truth.

If it's not, if we practice something else and leave out the Fourth Noble Truth, then the path is going somewhere else. Something comes between us and dharma practice. The gap is so big that a horse can run in between. That's what it is. So practice is left to one side, the Fourth Noble Truth is somewhere else, the interdependent system is somewhere else, emptiness is somewhere else, and bodhimind is somewhere else. When you have that, then the horse is running between the individual and dharma practice. That's the problem.

So we have to look at our daily practice. Officially they tell you that the Fourth Noble Truth, bottom line, is

emptiness, nothing more, nothing less. You can also say that it's wisdom and compassion, but the bottom line is, you cannot leave wisdom out. Wisdom is the path, nothing else. When you review how you are doing your practice, recognize that simply saying the words alone won't do. You have to think about whether they are going toward the definition of the path that is capable of delivering cessation.

You know, in Jewel Heart, we don't have any homework. If you go to school, you have to do homework. If you go to university, you have to do homework. You have to write your thesis and that will show you what you know and what you don't know. Here we don't do that. To substitute for that, as part of your practice, you have to talk to people, particularly people who know more than you do. I always think everybody knows more than I do, honestly. I'm not joking. I always think that. I'm lucky to have that thought. I've been trained to think that way.

Sometimes you get to the level of, "Well, I know nothing," but that is better than arrogance. I always used to say "pride," but when you look at the detailed definition, it is arrogance that's the problem, rather than pride. If you have arrogance, you will never learn anything, because your arrogance will think, "I know everything." "I know nothing" is better than arrogance because you have room to learn. You give yourself the opportunity to learn whatever is there.

So, for daily practice, whatever you do, even if you're saying a simple OM MANI PADME HUM, even then, that should be able to become the Fourth Noble Truth.

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For us, the best opportunity is to bring in the motivation [of bodhimind]. The second opportunity is to bring in wisdom or at least to think about impermanence. Impermanence is tremendously effective, because when you know that everything is changing, it cuts the status quo and ego grasping.

Ego never thinks of changing. That is why we never think about dying. Our culture will tell you not to think of dying, because if you think of dying, you will die, and if you don't think of dying, you won't die. But that is not true. Everybody dies anyway, whether you think of it or not. Some coach yesterday died while they were playing—was it basketball or football? I don't think he kept on thinking about dying while they were playing football, so it proves that death happens anyway. It is reality, and it is always changing, that is why.

You know Buddha himself said:

*jeh tam je gey ton de chok pah lan gey che
tam du che tam de gey nah ney cho me tab
beh du chi*

*The most important imprint is the elephant
imprint.*

When people walk in the mud they leave footprints. The elephant leaves the biggest footprint because it has a big foot. Out of all our practices, remembering impermanence leaves the biggest impact on us. Impermanence causes us to think, “Whatever we may be thinking, at the end,

this thing [death] is going to happen, right?” Thinking that makes us slightly uncomfortable, and normally this culture of ours that we created to make life comfortable doesn’t want you to think about that. But being slightly uncomfortable helps us not to have a strong attachment for or obsession about the material world. Not only that, the feeling of being slightly uncomfortable helps us to think that this life is not the end, honestly.

Do we think the ultimate thing is a material thing? We always say, “No, certainly not.” Maybe one or two persons will say, “Yes,” but most of us will say, “No.” Then go ask them, “What do you think is the best thing possible?” Maybe you will hear “goodness” or “virtue” or “open-mindedness” or something else. Each is better than “money” or any other material answer, but it is still not good enough, because we have no idea about uncontaminated joy.

What is uncontaminated joy? It is *the joy that has never known suffering*, the joy that has no fallback, the joy that has total knowledge, the joy that never entertains pain and that has never known suffering or pain. When you think along those lines, you will understand that some little material gain or some kind of status that we create within our minds and that we consider to be comfort and hold on to may be just our individual samsara!

The definition of *samsara* is “continuation of suffering.” That is a philosophical definition, but technically we label certain things as joy and happiness and remain there with a little satisfaction. Remaining

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there might be samsara to some people. But other people may think of it the opposite way. They have a continuation of “this is not right” and “that is not right,” “this is struggle” and “that is struggle.” They say, “So what? That’s my life, and that’s what it is.” But maybe, that is the samsara of that individual. When you get out of the norms of what you know, a little discomfort is always considered good. Even the Buddha gives a little discomfort as a plus, because you’re not going to be stuck in that “satisfactory” samsara. General samsara is general samsara, but individual people have their own samsara’s. Maybe, if you have a little discomfort and you are not getting stuck in there, it is better. A little discomfort always has advantages.

We are fortunate enough that the motivation to get out of samsara and to work for the benefit of all beings is attached to every text that we read and every prayer we say. Whatever you do, the words will describe that motivation, whether it is the Seven Limbs or a sadhana or something else. Then, the major second force we have to get in there is something to substitute for the wisdom that we don’t have yet. That is thinking about impermanence. Impermanence makes you uncomfortable, but being a little uncomfortable is worth it because you don’t get stuck there. One of the reasons they say the samsaric gods realm has no spiritual development is because it’s too comfortable there. Since it is too comfortable, the samsaric gods are out of touch. They’ve been on holiday too long—too long in the Bahamas!

Then, you need constant focus and constant continuing effort. Constant does not necessarily have to be twenty-four hours of focusing or eight hours of focusing or six hours of focusing, but somehow you have to maintain the effort, even if it is a tiny little time. Half an hour, forty-five minutes, one hour, one and a half hours, or maybe two hours, that you may be able to put in. Whatever time you put in, focus. Make sure the time is not without focusing. Somehow that little thing has an influence, whatever you do. It is sort of like a smell, something continuing within the mindstream, so that whatever you do every day has that slight influence of bodhimind. Whenever it's starting to go away, recharge your motivation a little bit. Every twenty-four hours, you recharge again. Keep on doing that, and it is probably a way to get whatever we do to become real practice, to become the Fourth Noble Truth.

If your practice is Tara, maybe it is for health, healing, and rejuvenation, but even then bodhimind is the reason you need healing. Not because you want to feel comfortable and healthy, but with health and comfort, you can obtain the bigger goal: "I have the opportunity to be able to obtain enlightenment to benefit all others." Somehow bringing in the motivation of ultimate compassion makes this thing work.

It is funny, although we carry the mind that I must help myself, that I must do this and do that, even though we carry the message of self-compassion so much, when it comes down to the main point of how to help myself, the answer is by helping others. Helping others is the way

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to help me. In the middle of the Lama Chopa we have:

MA NAM CHE ZUNG DHE LA GÖ PEI LO
THA YEI YÖN TEN JUNG WEI GOR THONG
NAY
DRO WA DHI DHA DHA GI DRAR LANG
KYANG
SOH LAY CHEI PAR DZIN PAR JIN GYI LOP

Cherishing beings and securing their happiness
Is the gateway that leads to infinite excellence.
Inspire me to hold others more dear than my life,
Even when I see them as enemies.

and:

RANG NYI CHEI DZIN GÜ PA KUN GYI GO
MA NAM CHEI DZIN YÖN TEN KÜN GYI
ZHI
DHE CHIR DAG ZHAN JE WEI NEL JOR LA
NYAM LEN NYING POR JEY PAR JIN GYI LOP

Since cherishing myself is the doorway to all
downfalls,
And cherishing others is the foundation of
everything good,
Inspire me to practice from my heart
The yoga of exchanging self and others.

So self-cherishing is the cause of all suffering and undesirable

things. This tells you that although we want “me” to have happiness and joy, the way to bring “me” to happiness and joy is by serving and helping others. This is a very, very important point. Yes, I seek enlightenment, but how? By generating bodhimind: then all my practice becomes helping others.

So keep this in mind, not only on the motivation level but also during the actual practice. Serving others and helping others is the way to help your self. The way to help “me” is helping others. Helping others is helping me.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Audience: Can you address motivation again in the sense you were just talking about: How I help myself by helping others? If motivation is really the critical element, how does that work?

Rimpoche: What do you mean, how does that work?

Audience: Well, isn't my motivation supposed to be helping others, not helping myself?

Rimpoche: Yeah.

Audience: But . . . so the question . . .

Rimpoche: Motivation, as I've been telling you, is the thing. We are so fortunate; every text that we read or

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prayer we say has generating bodhimind somehow attached there. We do it so often so that it will become part and parcel of us. You know, like, “I take refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha until I obtain enlightenment . . . for the benefit of all beings.” So, obtaining enlightenment is the goal and then there’s bodhimind as the motivation. It’s completely attached there. Every time, wherever you go, whatever you do, somehow it’s there, and that is very fortunate. That’s what gives us strong motivation, which is the Mahayana special quality.

Audience: I guess I’m still a little bit confused. If I get up in the morning and generate bodhimind, and then I go out the door and I’m trying to think about how I can get to wherever I’m trying to get to as quickly as possible, that’s going to help me, right?

Rimpoche: Well, thinking that doesn’t go against bodhimind.

Audience: No, but suppose I had one token left for one ride on my metro card and there’s someone who really needs it more than I do and I give it to them. That’s doing something generous. Well, I’m just talking myself out of what I just said . . .

Audience: Sometimes it seems that it’s very hard to help other people if you are unhappy or miserable yourself. I’ve had this experience sometimes. If you are unhappy,

it is difficult to generate real *bodhichitta* [bodhimind] or bodhichitta that will be effective. Also, sometimes people don't really want your help.

Rimpoche: You are absolutely right. You generate that mind, but can you really do everything in accordance with what you generated? I think we would like to, for sure. But just liking to do it neither makes our bodhisattva mind go away, nor breaks a bodhisattva vow.

The other point is also true. It is impossible to help some people because they just don't want it, aren't interested in it. When they're not interested, you cannot force them or do anything. They will never give you the room; they will never give you the opportunity. Plus, if the individual is a little stubborn, it makes it even more difficult.

Bodhimind cannot do everything we want to, and that is reality. But that doesn't make us lose bodhimind either. Sometimes you have to take the metro token and just go yourself. That doesn't make you lose bodhimind. So, are you just giving lip service? I don't know. You have to think about it. That's why this bodhimind business is extremely difficult. You cannot just think about it logically and say for sure "this is this." It's very hard, very difficult.

Audience: Rimpoche, I think this is along the same lines. I was reading a book recently in which the Dalai Lama was making the distinction between two kinds of compassion. One kind of compassion that you generate

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is more that you “wish”—you feel someone’s discomfort and you just wish within yourself to get rid it. The other kind of compassion, I guess, is the more complete compassion where you really want to do something to help somebody else who is in distress. How do you get from that first kind of compassion to the second kind?

Rimpoche: First is wishing, praying for; second is action. It’s even named that way. So first wish; second actually do it.

Audience: So you keep wishing and then eventually it turns into action?

Rimpoche: Wishing alone does not turn into action. First through wishing, your mind becomes comfortable with it. Then you’ll be able to take real action.

Audience: Is it important to dedicate every good deed that you do in order for it to gain you merit?

Rimpoche: Yes, but not immediately. You can do the whole thing, and if you don’t get mad in between, then you can dedicate in the evening. If you get mad, then it’s gone.

Audience: So you better dedicate right away.

Rimpoche: Better, before you get mad.

Audience: Rimpoché, let's say you want to help someone in distress and that person becomes very angry with you because you're doing it. Now you're coping with your own anger. So how do you cope with that anger? You tried to help, and then you get that thrown right back in your face. You are left saying, "What have I done?"

Rimpoché: Well, we cope with all kinds of anger within ourselves the same way. You tried to help somebody else, and that somebody else got angry. Somehow we have to learn not to get angry back: just close the door and leave that person alone and don't get angry. If you get angry, you have to deal with your anger as you do with usual anger because this is nothing special. Anger may become special: "I'm doing nothing. I tried to help you, but you're going to hit me back." You get something maybe a little harder to deal with, maybe you have a little more hot air in there, but I think it is just normal anger so you have to just deal with it like every other kind of anger.

Audience: And then you go on doing it?

Rimpoché: No. Because this other person doesn't want it.

Audience: I mean helping someone else . . .

Rimpoché: Not necessarily. Sometimes trying to help others is not necessarily the right thing to do. Because

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we are quite strong and powerful, we are very good at imposing our ideas and our perceptions on others and saying, “This is the right way to do it.” The more educated we are, the stronger we become in imposing our own ideas on others. Even uneducated people can do the same thing, like George Bush. He’s good at imposing his ideas, you know? So, sometimes it is better not to do that. At least you can pray, and that will be able to help. Because remember that from praying for bodhimind, the actual bodhimind comes for you.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION/MEDITATION

1. How does my motivation affect my actions, both in the ordinary sense and as an aspect of my spiritual practice?
2. Do I agree that experiencing a little discomfort can be a plus? Can I think of times in my life when I experienced the spiritual advantages of a little discomfort?
3. What practical things can I do to make my daily activities part of the Fourth Noble Truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering?

VIII

THE FOURTH NOBLE TRUTH AND THREE HIGHER TRAININGS

The traditional teachings tell us that the results we are looking for are two things: *nyun du dang gehlek*, which means the temporary result and the permanent result. *Nyun du*, the temporary result, refers to the life we will take in the near future, or from tomorrow onwards. The temporary result we seek is a good life, within this lifetime as well as in our immediate future lives. And *gehlek* is the ultimate goal—total and permanent liberation or freedom. These are the two main goals that we have. Our goal is not to become multi-millionaires. Nor is our goal to become hippies or yuppies. Our goal is to have permanent liberation or a good life this time or in future lives. These are our two main cessations.

How are we going to get there? There are many ways. One way of looking at the path to these goals is through the three most important things:

1. Morality
2. Concentration
3. Wisdom

These three are called the “three basket teachings” of the Buddha, or three fundamentals, or Three Higher Trainings. People will give you all kinds of names, but just remember these three things. The path that leads to those two goals consists of these three, okay?

MORALITY

Number one is morality, which is absolutely important. Morality is the fundamental basis of functioning. If your morality is totally wrong or out the window, and you think you’re a great meditator, you might as well follow your morality and jump out of the window, too. That’s very important. Buddha himself said:

Gelong da song da che long do sho do long.

*It is easy to die while protecting your
morality. It is not easy to live with
broken morality.*

Why? If you die to protect your morality, that will simply end this life, but it will be the beginning of your good future lives. But to die with broken morality is the beginning of hundreds of thousands of lives of suffering.

The ways we understand morality may differ. That is a totally different issue. But thinking that morality is not important and that wisdom and compassion are more important than morality is very wrong. Absolutely wrong! In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, any vow is

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based on the refuge vow. Without the refuge vow, no one can obtain any other vow at all. So refuge is the basis of all vows. And vows are the basis of morality. Morality is basically keeping our vows.

Today, everybody would like to write their own vows, but originally, vows were given by Buddha, though he did not pick up the pen and paper and write them down. The vows came from Buddha because of incidents that took place. Buddha did not sit down and get a pencil in hand and start shaking his leg and thinking, “What do I write next?” Buddha didn’t do that. It is not like you people crossing your legs and shaking your legs and putting the pencil in your mouth and taking notes. Buddha didn’t do that.

Every vow that came up in the Buddhist tradition is based on incidents that took place. Buddha gave commitments. Some crazy, naughty guy would do something strange, and everybody would think, “What is that funny behavior? Can we do this? Is that okay?” And then Buddha would say “yes” or “no” and give explanations why. That is how the vows have built up. For example, if you are a fully ordained *bikshu* (fully ordained monk) you have two hundred and fifty-three vows. And if you are novice, you have thirty-six. If you are an *upasaka* (holder of lay vows) you have five, or four, or three, or two, or one.

All these vows have come up because of incidents that took place. Each time a vow came up, they would say, “If you do this, it will be a downfall of this category or that category.” For example, there is a category of downfalls

that are not so bad; it is sort of the lowest category and includes quite a lot. And then, the next category is a little more serious, and so on. It goes like: “Well, this is of the second category from the top, and the twelve of those come into it. We’re not supposed to do five of this and twelve of that.”

And then comes the category of the four things that you absolutely cannot do. This is the dangerous area. “*Thou shall not kill*” is a commandment even in the Western, Judeo-Christian tradition. I don’t mean “even” in the sense of looking down, just that the Buddha says the same thing. He also says: “*Thou shall not lie.*” That refers to telling a black lie. Also, *you can’t engage in sexual misconduct.* And *you can’t take away things that don’t belong to you.* Those four are the fundamental basis of morality.

Killing in this case probably refers only to human beings. Animal killings are not in the category of those four, but come down a little bit lower—not because human beings are more important than animals, but because human life may have more value than animal life. Some people may not like this, but I think it is reality. A number of people used to tell me, “My pets are very intelligent, more intelligent than me.” I say, “Fine! Then give your cat your car keys and send it to buy cat food at the supermarket!” Although our pets are very intelligent and wonderful, and all lives basically have equal value, there is a slight difference here.

Why is a human life more important than a pet’s life? People will raise objections to that and their objections

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are valid and well taken. But we cannot make a pet's life equal to a human life. It's as simple as that. Political parties can do it. That doesn't matter. They can get a couple more votes, or they may lose fewer votes if they say that. That's their goal. Our goal is ultimate joy, the joy that has never known suffering, or at least a good life this time and in the next future life. It doesn't matter whether you lose a few votes; it absolutely doesn't matter. Here killing means killing a human being. So, those four are the basic principles.

Then, there is another vow against intoxication. Intoxication is good language; it covers everything from alcohol to drugs. Whatever you can think of is covered within that rule. Traditionally, if you read it literally, you hear about alcohol, not drugs, because there may not have been drugs at that time. See, I told you, all those vows developed because of incidents. During the Buddha's period, there must have been mushrooms. But maybe the mushroom didn't bother them. We're not making new rules here. They sure didn't have those mind-altering drugs, like those little pills, Ecstasy and LSD and so on. I'm sure they didn't have those. If an incident had taken place with those, Buddha would have spoken.

But just before Buddha died, he took off his clothes and called everybody and said, "Look at the body of the Tathagata, the One Gone Beyond." And he said, "This is your last chance to look. You won't see it again." Then he said, "So far, you people have been asking me. I have given you guidance. From now on, he said *kashi rol a dup te . . .*"

If there is something you don't know what to do about that we have not spoken of, then if it goes closer to those cases about which we have said, "one can do it," and does not go against those we have agreed, "one cannot do it," then consider it as "one can do it" and put it under the category of "can do." And visa versa, the other way around: If it goes closer to those cases about which we have said "one cannot do it" and goes against those about which we said, "one can do it," then consider it as "one cannot do it."

That is how Buddha left it for us to use our great intelligence to make our own decisions.

In that way he actually gives us the room to write our own vows, too. That's why I do not object to people writing their own marriage vows. Not only do I not object, I welcome them writing their own vows. We do have that. That is because Buddha gives the room, and no one is going to say in their vows, "I'm going to hurt you. I take the vow to hurt you." The other will say, "I will do the same!" They're never going to say that; there's no doubt about it. So you can let people write whatever they want to, and it's their own vow anyway.

Basically, that's how the Buddha gives us directions. Looking in that way, you will see that Ecstasy or LSD fall in the same category as alcohol because they alter your

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mind. And so that's how we have to understand and take the vows. The *vinaya* (monks' rules) will tell you, "Don't take even a drop of alcohol on the tip of a blade of grass." But that rule is followed very strictly only by people who have taken the vinaya vows, like monks and nuns. Apart from that, the objection to intoxicants really rises when they alter your mind. That is the real objection to major alcohol intake. So if you take alcohol and it doesn't alter your mind, fine. But if you still think, "I'm fine!" when you are dead drunk, then that is not okay. We must draw a line over there, honestly.

Basically, for us, there are the ten moralities or ten virtues. We're going to talk in detail about these in our series *The Inner World of Mind*. The ten virtues are the opposite, or antidote, of the ten negativities. These ten negativities are the ones you really have to be careful of in terms of morality. That's what we're talking about. As Tibetan Buddhist practitioners, we always say "Three by body, four by speech, three by mind." [body: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct; speech: lying, slandering, harsh speech, idle gossip; mind: coveting, hatred, and wrong views] We always confess and purify. We've been taught that as kids. We can say it from our tongue all the time. These are the ten negativities, and their opposites, the ten virtues. From the positive point of view and from the negative point of view, basic morality is this.

CONCENTRATION

The second of the Three Higher Trainings is concentration.

Concentration means focusing, meditating. If you don't concentrate, nothing works well. Even at an ordinary level, if your mind is very well trained, you can do three or four or ten different things together. Sometimes if you are with a well-trained lawyer, it looks like things are not coming together. They seem all messed up. The lawyer is talking this, talking that, doing this, doing that, taking notes. But when they have a minute, they put things together and present a very well set-up case. A trained mind can do that. With an untrained mind, if you concentrate on this, you cannot think that. If you concentrate on that, you cannot think this.

Meditation is not only available on the spiritual path, but also in our normal Western education. They don't call it "meditation"; they call it "studying." How many subjects do you take? What about algebra, languages, geography, global studies, all this? It's training the mind to be able to focus on different things simultaneously or next to each other. That is the first way of focusing and concentrating, even on the spiritual path. Then, you can specialize in certain things, go deeper, and zoom in. The same thing happens on the spiritual path. When you focus, when you specialize, you can go much deeper. And when you go deeper, you gain more clarity.

If you don't have clarity, when you go deeper, it all goes "whooooo." It is like putting ink onto a piece of paper. When the concentration is wrong, the paper absorbs the ink and it disperses everywhere. The more you focus, the better the clarity should be. Somebody with a beautiful handwriting will take a nice pen and write a letter and it

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becomes beautiful, clear, and wonderful. Because of that concentration, you can see all of the words clearly. But if you do it like me, you take a pen and scribble all over the place, with the wrong spelling, and you end up with a dirty mess! Really, true! So focusing or concentration has to bring clarity. The clarity confirms the concentration.

During the *Gom* teachings, we said very clearly, when you're thinking and focusing carefully, you look at a pillar and gain the confidence to be able to see each and every particle within that pillar, or within that bowl, or within that glass, or within this flower. I don't mean the petals or leaves. I mean each and every particle within them. That is the clarity we are talking about.

Concentration is not sleepiness, not like being drunk. Concentration is neither high, nor low. Concentration is clarity. If your concentration does not bring clarity, something's wrong with it. If you concentrate for five minutes, two hours, two days, one week, and still there is no clarity, don't worry. You have not spent enough time. But if you spend months and years and there is no clarity, then you do worry. Then you have to look back. Something's wrong.

The ultimate concentration is described in the seventeen focusing levels. There are seventeen stages of concentration, which indicate how far you can go and what you can reach. The seventeenth stage reaches to the peak of the samsara, which is the ultimate concentration. But Buddha told us that concentrating at that level is not necessary in order to achieve our goal. It is fine; you can

go and concentrate, do whatever, but you don't have to go to the peak of samsara. If you do, even though you reach the peak of samsara, even then your suffering is not exhausted. Something happens, and you fall back.

A great Indian anti-Buddhist master, who later became a Buddhist scholar, praised Buddha. He said that in some traditions, people go up to the peak of samsara, yet their power of concentration is eventually exhausted, and something happens. There is an example: A person is sitting in meditation for centuries and eons. Their hair has grown so much that rats or mice start eating their hair. When they eventually notice, they become angry, die, and fall back to samsara and the circle of life. Then this person praises Buddha and says, "But your followers, although you did not reach the actual stage of the true meditation level, you have reached the necessary prerequisite level, and so you can pluck the eyeball out of samsara."

Like Bill did in *Kill Bill*, a movie I saw the day before yesterday. Bill picks up the eyeball with one little Kung Fu effect, and it was just like that, taking the eyeball out of samsara. That was the praise by an outstanding non-Buddhist meditator, the greatest master they had at that time. Later, he became Buddha's follower. The level of concentration that he called "the necessary prerequisite level" is what we call *shamatha*. So Buddha recommended that we develop our concentration up to the level of shamatha. It is absolutely necessary, if you want to get out samsara. Without that, you cannot do it.

That level is also called *nyer to mi jo me*, which means

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“the first meditation stage’s prerequisite”—that one cannot do without. Then, the moment you reach shamatha, instead of continuing with that meditation, switch to meditation on wisdom, and that is what takes the eyeball out of samsara. This is how you can overpower samsara, the circle of suffering, the continuation of suffering. That is the concentration we are talking about.

WISDOM

The third Higher Training is wisdom. We have talked about wisdom so many times. Generally wisdom is knowledge. Knowing is wisdom. Everything, even knowing how to read, is wisdom; knowing how to write is wisdom. I don’t have that wisdom in English. I know how to read and write Tibetan, but I can’t read and write English. Anything that goes against not knowing or wrong knowing is knowledge and, therefore, is wisdom.

However, here we are not referring to every wisdom, every knowledge. We’re referring very specifically to the knowledge that understands the true nature of reality. We’re talking about that wisdom, not any other wisdom. We’re talking about the wisdom of knowing the nature of reality—the reality of our life, the reality of our self, the reality of the individual, the reality of the group, the reality of society, the reality of phenomena, the reality of existence. That’s what we’re talking about, not just education.

What is that wisdom? It is the skill that Kill Bill needed to take the eyeball out with seemingly no effort,

suddenly. That is the skill. As Nagarjuna said, *tenzin so ba di gyi . . .*

*Even raising a doubt alone tears samsara
into pieces.*

That is the wisdom we're talking about, even raising a doubt alone. If the doubt alone can do that much, what will actual wisdom do when we gain that? It is almost unimaginable. We will truly know reality, which is the interdependent nature of existence. We call it emptiness.

What is the essence of emptiness? The essence of emptiness is interdependence. In the prayer of meeting the teaching of Tsongkhapa, it says:

dong da je de . . .

*From emptiness one sees, finds, discovers,
realizes interdependence. From
interdependence one sees, finds, discovers,
realizes emptiness.*

dong do cha de gye de . . .

*It is empty in nature, yet, we can establish
every functioning, everything, as it is.*

What we see every day exists. We can establish that within emptiness. That is the real beauty of Nagarjuna's presentation, which has been made easy to understand

by the great Je Tsongkhapa. That's why from Tsongkhapa onwards, everybody prays in that way, because that understanding is the real wisdom.

The essence of emptiness is interdependence. The essence of interdependence is emptiness. One projects the other. One helps us to perceive the other. One's meaning is the other. The meaning of interdependence is emptiness. The meaning of emptiness is interdependence. Yet, we can establish everything as it is functioning, everything as it is. That is the beauty. That's how you overcome the extremes of nihilism and existentialism. Freedom from these two extremes becomes the central point.

When you ask, "What is this emptiness we are talking about?" emptiness will come out and show you that because causes and conditions are right, everything functions, everything exists. That is the essence of interdependence. Interdependence means causes and conditions coming together, functioning, happening, going, sitting, standing, walking, talking, thinking, eating, shitting—sorry! Yet, when you investigate deeper, there is nothing—nothing beyond that. There is only the functioning level, nothing beyond that. That's what emptiness is all about. The essence of emptiness is interdependence, and because everything is interdependent, there is nothing else. Because of dependent relationships, everything functions. This is a very subtle point, through which we can have everything functioning. Go, sit, drink, throw-up—everything is functioning as it is.

That's why the ordinary eye and ordinary ear and ordinary person's perceptions are not wrong, because

they accord with reality. I'm fat; you are thin. It's reality. Okay, I'm fat, so search for the fat. There's no one thing called "fat." It's all these fats together, which combine in my body, which are sort of put together with the skin so that you get a fat person. If I have liposuction, take the fat out, then one condition for me to be called fat is gone. The liposuction sucked it out. Then I'm no longer called fat, because the condition has been altered. When the conditions are right, causes happen, and it is real.

When our body is able to host our consciousness, we call that life. Conditions are right. If something goes wrong so that the body is unable to host consciousness, then it ceases to be alive and becomes a dead body. It is still the same old thing; you're looking at it, except it doesn't move anymore, doesn't speak anymore, doesn't look at you, doesn't function, doesn't acknowledge, but it is the same physical thing. That is the working of the conditions. Just the combination of life, consciousness, the physical conditions, makes it function. We can smile, we can make jokes, we can walk, we can talk—all this. Conditions are just right.

When you go beyond that, you don't have anything. Let's say you find something called consciousness and are able to capture it. Professor Ray Kurtweil told me he's going to capture consciousness one day and put it in a computer. That's how he's going to establish artificial intelligence. If you could capture a consciousness, let's say it happens to be my consciousness, I could say, "It's me!" But you will all say, "No, no, no, it's not you. You look like this, you look like that, you think that way. It's not

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you!” But it could be, because conditions change. That’s what it is. That’s the truth. It is such a subtle matter, such a subtle matter. And when you realize it, when you gain that understanding and realize it, you begin to see that everything is transitory. Not only is everything transitory, everything is alterable; everything is changeable. You can do whatever you want to do.

Without spiritual development, even scientifically, you can search for interdependence and you will be able to find it, in my opinion. We’re not there yet scientifically, but all these string theories—they put paper through the walls! Why? Because you see the separation between the particles. I know nothing about quantum physics. (Audience laughter) I know the first verse. I’m lacking the physics aspects of it. Anyway, when you can’t trace it, at a certain level, you can’t trace it. Then, at a certain level, you find it; you pick it up. It’s no news for Buddha. Honestly. It is no news for Buddha. Not only just Buddha, but for anybody who realizes reality, who has wisdom. It’s no news.

That is the wisdom we are talking about. What does that wisdom do? A powerful, sharp mind will not provide the fundamental basis on which we create negative emotions. That will totally be destroyed, completely eradicated from our system, from our universe. It won’t be there. Because it is wrong. Because it is not truth. When you get to the truth, untruth gets burst. And that is the wisdom, the third aspect of the path that Buddha is talking about, the path that leads to the cessation of suffering.

ONE, TWO, THREE; ABC

So now we have all three aspects: morality, concentration, and wisdom. If you don't have morality, you will not gain concentration. And when there is no concentration, you will not gain wisdom, because you won't be able to see that much. It is a little bit beyond our ordinary capacity. Like the scientist who has to depend on gadgets to be able to discover more, we have to depend on the mental gadget that is called focusing. With that concentration power, we are able to see reality. So these three are interconnected, ABC. Together, they are the Fourth Noble Truth, the truth of the path that leads to cessation.

This Fourth Noble Truth—one, two, three; ABC; morality, concentration, and wisdom—applies to our daily practice. In your daily practice, whether you're doing the Jewel Heart prayers, whether you're doing sadhanas, whether you're doing mantras, whether you're doing circumambulations, prostrations, or mandala offerings, you should have these three things as the essence of your practice. When you have that, you have the path that leads to cessation. If you don't have them, then you don't have it. So, daily practice is extremely important. All of these, one, two, three, should be included in it. Have discipline, concentrate, and apply wisdom within your practice. That is how we have to spend our life. That way, we can live with cessation, we can sleep with cessation, we can die with cessation, and we can be reborn with cessation.

THE FOURTH NOBLE TRUTH AND OM MANI PADME

HUNG

I'd like to do something funny here. I thought I'd provide OM MANI PADME HUM as an explanation of the Fourth Noble Truth. It is a Tibetan mantra, and people say it all the time.

The first is OM. That is the truth, too, because OM is Ah-Oh-M together. Just Ah alone doesn't make OM: Ah alone makes "Ah, Ah, Ah," and O alone makes "Ooo." When you say Oh, there's a light in there, and it becomes Ah. Actually, it is like Allen (Ginsberg) writes, "Ah and then O and M." So Ah makes the Ah alive in the mantra, and O and M combined together make OM.

So, what does that mean? Body, mind, and speech. Body is the physical-mental body. Mind is the mental-emotional mind. Speech is sound, whatever we produce. So Ah-Oh-M together represents the body, mind, and speech of the individual practitioner, or perfect Buddha, or perfect Avalokiteshvara—let's call it the Buddha of Compassion.

Ah-Oh-M: OM really means pure body: the ordinary body becomes a pure body. Ordinary speech becomes pure speech. Ordinary mind becomes pure mind, right? That is Ah-Oh-M's meaning.

How do ordinary body, speech, and mind become what we technically call Vajra body, Vajra speech, and Vajra mind? *Vajra* here means "indestructible," "diamond-like." But, what makes our body perfect? It is the result of the practice of our ethical activities. The cause is really

the moral and ethical aspects of the path; keeping our commitments through the body such as avoiding killing, hurting people, and all of that. Out of ten non-virtuous actions, there are three by body, so keeping those commitments pure makes the ordinary body become an extraordinary body, a Vajra body.

Similarly, Vajra speech is the result of not slandering, not telling a black lie, etc. Out of ten negativities, we have four by speech. By maintaining and ethically observing those commitments, ordinary speech becomes perfect speech. Mind also has three negativities and maintaining those commitments properly makes the individual's mind become a pure mind.

So OM gives you the message of Vajra body, Vajra mind, and Vajra speech, which means absolute, ethical perfection from the body point of view, the speech point of view, and the mind point of view. So, keeping all perfect ethics. We've got that straight, right?

Now, second is Mani. *Mani* is the “wish-fulfilling jewel.” That is compassion—ultimate, unconditional, unlimited compassion, or just ordinary, helpful compassion. Compassion is wish-fulfilling; compassion fulfills the wishes of suffering people. Suffering people wish to be free from suffering. Compassionate ones will work for it, help with it, give support for it, bring it. That's why *Mani* is compassion.

Now Padme, in Tibetan or Sanskrit, is a lotus, which stands for purity. Purity is wisdom. Wisdom may be

grown out of ego. However, when you “get” wisdom, it is absolutely pure. So the lotus and Padme (or “Peme” as Tibetans pronounce it) gives you the idea of wisdom.

Now the path, the Fourth Noble Truth. What do I need to do for me to have freedom, the cessation of all suffering? That cessation of suffering comes about by following the path of ethics, compassion, and wisdom. These are the three basket teachings of the Buddha or the Three Higher Trainings of the Buddha. Truly, when you say OM MANI PADME HUM you have all three of them together. However, when you don't know, you are just saying OM MANI PADME HUM, and I don't think it becomes the Fourth Noble Truth. That is the bad part about it. The good news is, it's there. The bad news is, we need to put in effort. Really, true. Because you have to have an idea of what it's all about, an idea of how it works.

So that's the OM MANI PADME HUM as an explanation of the Fourth Noble Truth. I never heard anybody do it. I may have cooked it up. However, I didn't cook up something wrong. The Three Higher Trainings is the path they give. I never heard anybody put that into OM MANI PADME HUM, but the explanation of MANI PADME is exactly compassion and wisdom, and OM is Vajra body, Vajra mind, and Vajra speech, which is the result of ethical activities. So, OM MANI PADME HUM includes the Three Higher Trainings of the Buddha's teaching and the Sutra and Tantra aspects

of the path all combined together, and it's very simple to say. But you have to think about it.

Then the Vajrayana part of it. You know that OM is the “jewel mantra,” right? What makes it a jewel? The purity of body, mind, and speech. Then HUM (HUNG) is “union”—the union of the ordinary body, mind, speech of me, the layperson or practitioner, and the extraordinary body, mind, speech of the enlightened ones, in this case, Avalokiteshvara or the Buddha of compassion. *Union* means “oneness.” The true union is not just two separate things coming together. We call it [sexual] union, and we see it everywhere, every thangka with the famous *yab-yum* business. Even every advertisement has it. But the true union is oneness. Oneness means inseparable. Inseparable means it is compassion, but in its essence, it is wisdom. Wisdom, in essence, is compassion; nothing separates them. Are you with me?

That is important; that is why we call the ultimate enlightenment level the “union of body and mind.” Mind is wisdom and body is compassion, and their oneness is true union. At the Buddha level, Buddha's body is Buddha's mind, and Buddha's mind is Buddha's body. There is no separation; it is oneness. That is true union.

It is not that the male and female become a union; it is not that way. Sometimes people think that the male and female joined together becomes a Buddha. No, it doesn't; it becomes oneness. The union should really be oneness, with no separation. If your body and mind becomes oneness, that is a great achievement. That is

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true union. All these deities in *yab-yum* form, all of them are supposed to be symbolic of oneness. You know the thangkas we see all the time where it looks like the deities are having sex all the time, twenty-four hours a day? It looks like they're standing there doing it, but they're not. It is a symbol of the oneness of no separation. That is what true union is all about. That is the body-mind combination or method-wisdom combination. It means wisdom and compassion together, oneness. You know, you hear all the time:

tong nyi nying je nying po che

That means, “the essence of wisdom is compassion.”

We also have it in the *Migtsema*:

Mig me tse wei ter chen chen re zig

Mig me is the wisdom aspect of it; *tse we ter chen chen re zig* is referring to Avalokiteshvara, which is the essence of compassion. So wisdom and compassion are combined together.

dri me kyen pai wang po jam pel yang

The faultlessness of having no self-cherishing selfishness and the wisdom of Manjushri are combined together. So each one of those lines combines compassion and wisdom.

*Mig me tse wei ter chen chen re zig
dri me kyen pai wang po jam pel yang
dü pung ma lü jom dze sang wei dak*

That is the power button, the first two lines.

The last two are:

*gang chen ke pei tsug gyan tzung ka pa
lo zang drag pai zhab la sol wa deb*

That means “crown jewel of Tibetan sages.” But the first two lines really give you that.

So, in essence no matter whatever you do, wherever you look, wherever you may come from, the Eightfold Path or the Thirty-seven Wings of Enlightenment, or whatever it may be, the real essence of the dharma, or the Buddha’s experience through which he experienced the joy that has never known suffering, is through these three ways: the Three Higher Trainings or three baskets teachings. Being ethical, or morality, really counts, and it makes a difference. Morality alone will not do anything; it needs wisdom. Ethics and wisdom together can liberate an individual, but you won’t be able to help that much, so you need compassion. Three major things, wisdom, compassion, and morality, combined together make the perfect Fourth Noble Truth.

Now, let me go back to draw out the conclusion a little bit more. What happened is that we introduced you first

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to suffering. We even talked about Buddha discovering suffering in the literal sense in that he was going out of the palace and seeing suffering. All of that we mentioned. We also raised the question, where does suffering come from? Is it from nowhere? Are you just born to suffer? Did somebody give this suffering to you? What is it? Is it just from one single source? We delved into quite a lot of detail about that.

THE FOURTH NOBLE TRUTH AND KARMA

Now look at it from the karmic point of view. That is my other job description for today. Karma is something that we always talk about, but how much do we really know about it? Sometimes people think you're bound to suffer because it's your karma. It's sort of a predestined suffering that one has to endure. That's not true. Karma has characteristics, and these are basically four things:

1. First, karma is definite. What does that mean? If we created any karma, the karmic result, positive or negative, is bound to take place. That's really what karma is definite means. There's no free play in there. It's sort of straightforward and clear-cut.
2. The second characteristic is that *karma is fast growing*. It doubles and triples and quadruples. The karmic system is such that it goes that way. So that's why karma is labeled as fast growing.
3. Then the third and fourth characteristics are almost the same as the first. *One never meets a karmic result*

if you have not created the cause; that's the third.

4. Fourth is if you created the cause, no matter how long it takes, you are bound to meet the result.

The essence of karma is really the Second Noble Truth and the Fourth Noble Truth. If we create a karmic cause, good or bad, it builds up, and when the time comes, it gives you the good or bad result. I create negative karma, and that brings suffering. That is the Second Noble Truth bringing the First Noble Truth. I create positive karma, and that brings cessation. That is the Fourth Noble Truth bringing the Third Noble Truth. Basically, what Buddha discovered is this. The principal of karma, bottom line, boiled down: if you do something good, a good thing happens to you; if you do something bad, a bad thing happens to you. That is the bottom line.

One should never look at karma as bad alone because there is very good karma, too. That is why the enlightened ones always have the joy that has never known suffering. Because they do not create the cause of suffering at all, they always have the joy that has never known suffering.

Why do ordinary people have suffering constantly, one pain after the other, added up? It is because we continuously create the causes of suffering. As Nagarjuna said:

dan ke go ing she de su gen so don yo

You are your own leader. No one can be your leader

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In other words, you are responsible for yourself; no one else is responsible. I am responsible for me; I am my leader. It is up to me; I decide where I'm going and what I'm going to do. I do it. In other words, my life and my karma are my own responsibility.

Karma doesn't mean anything mysterious. Any action that we take has mental components. Physical actions follow from mental actions. Mind has been pushed by our emotions, positive and negative. Mind makes us to do mental and physical things, good and bad, right and wrong. The moment we take an action, we create karma. If we take a complete action, we have a complete karma. If we take a half-action, then we have a half-karma. Even a half-karma works, fortunately or unfortunately.

So karma means nothing more than action, mental, physical, or both. Mind alone can create karma. If you keep on sitting here trying to meditate, trying to be nice, and all the time keep on killing somebody in your mind, even though you didn't kill anyone, the thought of killing and even visualizing killing creates a killing karma—not a complete karma, it's incomplete, but yes, it's a killing karma, because of the mind power.

Similarly, we can sit here doing nothing and visualize that we are offering the best we have. We can think that the entire universe is being filled up by the greatest offerings ever possible. Thinking that way is also creating a karma. You're doing nothing, just being a couch potato and sitting here on a big thick cushion, yet you're creating the karma of offering because of your mental actions. In addition to that, if you put a glass of water

or a warm candlelight [on the altar], then your offering is both actually arranged and mentally created. Actually, we cannot fill the universe up at all, but mentally we can always fill it up. That creates karma, just the thought of it. Plus, if you say the words, speech is involved. Plus, if you fold your hands or do something physical, it brings in the body, mind, and speech, all three combined together, which makes the karma stronger and more powerful. It works the same way with negativities, too.

That is what karma is all about. It is the karmic principle of the Four Noble Truths. I'm glad I have these two things to talk about together today, honestly. That's really what it is. And that's why we're responsible for our deeds and why we can help ourselves or harm ourselves. That's why we are our own leader. No one else can impose anything on us if we did not create the karma. The characteristic of karma is such that if you did not create the cause, the whole world may crash on you, but nothing will happen to you because you don't have that karma. So that makes the individual responsible for himself or herself. That is very important here.

Some people have the opposite idea. They think that because everything is caused by karma, you can do nothing about it and just have to wait for the karmic judgment. Thinking that way is stupid, honestly! Why stupid? Because karma is a dependant arising, remember? Anything, everything, is a dependent arising. It depends on conditions, whatever conditions we provide for our good and bad karma to connect.

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Sometimes that looks strange. It seems like we're bringing our original karma from our previous lives into this one. It's like this cloth. When the cloth was knitted, you have these big main threads that you put in, right? That is like our karma, the original one. Then you have the side threads that go in here and there and make it look nice. Those are the conditions. When the conditions are right, they meet with the main thread, and exactly this type of fabric is produced.

Knowing that now, just briefly having the idea of what karma is, a question rises here. In one statement I said *karma is definite* and in another I said *karma is a dependant arising*. You may think these statements are contradictory, but they're not. That question was raised to Buddha, and Buddha gave the answer that it is not a contradiction. What *definite* means is that once the karmic result has started, until it has finished, one can do nothing. Before the karmic result has matured, we have every room to play, because karma's ripening depends on the conditions. Conditions are what we provide. Though I can control my karma, a very specific karma that has started giving a result cannot be controlled, because it has become definite. I have lost the control of that particular karma.

Does this confuse you more? Probably. Let me repeat it: I created my karma. Without me creating my karma, nothing happens to me. I create negative karma, and that brings suffering. I create positive karma, and that brings cessation. So, it is me who is actually making it. But once

the karmic result has started, you can't say, "No, no, no, I don't want it, I want to change it at the last minute and switch it over!" But you can't do it, because at that point, you don't have control. You can't do it, because the result has already started, the mechanism is already in gear, it is functioning, and one can't stop it. That's what "karma is definite" means.

What you can do is try to make it go fast and end quickly, by creating different conditions. That's why purification, accumulation of merit, every practice that people do has an effect, has a purpose, and helps. That is the reason.

Basically our life, whatever it is, whatever we're experiencing now individually, collectively, is all our creation. There is something called collective karma, too. So it is our own; we are experiencing what we did. Good—we deserve it; we did it. Bad—we did it; we're responsible.

Remember that early Hindu-Buddhist mythological story? There are five hundred Buddhists, royal family ladies. All of them have achieved the magical power of being able to fly. Their palace catches on fire. The queen, whoever she is, thinks about it and realizes it is karma for them to have to die. It is a sort of dying karma for them in this fire in the house. She makes a statement saying, "If you don't honor your own karma, who else will?" So she jumps into the fire. Then, all five hundred ladies jump into the fire, and they all burn up.

Now their attendant is an old lady, a hunchback or

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something. She has no power to fly or anything. So what she does is jump into the toilet! She crawls out through the toilet and escapes.

So people went and talked to Buddha. Buddha gave, as is always the case, long stories for each of these five hundred ladies in which he said this and that thing happened [that explains why they had the karma to die in the fire.] The Buddha's thing is explaining what had happened. Almost all Buddhist rules and ethical points come out by Buddha explaining what had happened, because he never sat down and wrote out "you can't do this and you can't do that." He never did. He explained everything on the basis of incidents.

So the karmic thing here is funny. Those five hundred queens can fly, yet they have to die in the fire, and one old lady who has no magical powers jumps through the toilet and crawls out and is saved. That is how karma functions. Funny, yet it is very hard to understand.

Buddha himself said, "It is easier to gain wisdom than to understand the details of karmic functioning." One can guess. Grossly, good deeds bring good result, and bad deeds bring bad results. On the gross level, we can make a judgment, but on the subtle level, we can never make a judgment. For that reason, Buddha insists that people don't judge other people.

*na nam dna ka ga tsu
nam men du ta ra*

Unless you are fully enlightened person, do not make

judgments of another person. You can guess (laughs). I guess he's a good person; I guess he's a bad person. You cannot judge people, because this karmic thing is so tricky, and you will never know for sure.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

So what did we talk about today? What we did was basically follow the earlier talks on the Four Noble Truths. Today we followed with the last two truths: cessation and the path that brings cessation to us. Into that we brought the Three Higher Trainings of mind: ethics, compassion, and wisdom. These are the three keys that we can use for our life, and we conduct our lives on that basis.

The result of them, particularly of ethics, is the karmic point. The result is what we were talking about as Vajra body, Vajra speech, and Vajra mind—the totally enlightened levels of body, speech, and mind. The ordinary body produces the result of the perfect Vajra body as a result of practice and meditation on compassion. Perfect mind is the result of practice and meditation on wisdom. The combination, joining them together, is the result of morality. Basically, keep these three as a guideline for your life. Ask yourself, “Is it morally okay? Is it a compassionate action? Is it wise?” If you keep these things as a key in your everyday life, you can never go wrong, honestly. If you have a problem with one of those, then you constantly have difficulties.

That is the Fourth Noble Truth and that is the cause that

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brings the joy that has never known suffering. That's how we can lead our life. The other choice is allowing negative emotions to control you. Act according to the directions of the negative emotions and negative mind, and you will have constant suffering, continuously! That is karma combined together with the Four Noble Truths, combined together with OM MANI PADME HUM. That is how it works, okay?

Now, one more thing I have to tell you: the purpose of talking about the Four Noble Truths.

What is the purpose of talking so much about the First Noble Truth of suffering? It is to know, to acknowledge, and to recognize.

What is the purpose of talking about the Second Noble Truth? It is to avoid what causes us suffering, not to entertain it.

What is the purpose of talking about the Third Noble Truth? It is cessation, the introduction of the goal and purpose of your life. It tells you what you can achieve.

What is the purpose of talking about the Fourth Noble Truth? It shows you how to practice. Practice is not just sitting down to meditate some place, rolling your eyes. You don't have to push your mala around. You don't have to. Practice really means conducting your mind and your body simply, nicely, functioning properly, and thinking

about all these points.

The absolute truth is to recognize suffering, but there is nothing to be recognized. Yes, you have to avoid the cause of suffering, yet there is nothing to be avoided. Yes, you have to obtain cessation, yet there is nothing to be obtained. We're talking about the wisdom of emptiness, right? Yes, you have to meditate on the path, but there is nothing to be meditated on, there is no meditator, there is no meditation, and there is no path. It's all empty, right?

So the Four Noble Truths have to be understood three times: In the first round, we are introduced to the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the truth of cessation, and the truth of the path to cessation.

In the second round, suffering is to be recognized, the cause of suffering is to be avoided, cessation is your goal, what you want to obtain, and the path is where and how you reach your goal.

The third round is wisdom. Yes, you recognize suffering, but there is nothing to be recognized. You avoid the causes of suffering, but there is nothing to be avoided. Cessation is what you want to obtain, yet there is nothing to be obtained, and the path shows you how to obtain cessation, yet there is no path to walk.

Thus Buddha actually taught the Four Noble Truths three times for three different purposes. That's why you have the Four Noble Truths, three circles, and twelve points.

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Not just four truths, but four, plus four, plus four, to make a circle of twelve.

That's it, that's how you conduct your life. That's how we live and that's what it really is. Keep that principle in your life, and then whatever you have to do, you have to do, and whatever you don't have to do, you don't have to do. The good things come in; the bad things come in. When the good things come in, it's nothing to be very excited about. When the bad things come in, it's not so much to be sad about, because the reality is, we're living in samsara. That is samsara's nature and that's why we want to get out of samsara. We want to get into nirvana and be pure. That's what it is. Whatever happens in your life, take it as it comes. If many great and wonderful things happen, that's nothing to be excited about because it can go any minute. It can take just a second for everything to go. If something bad happens, you can't worry about it so much, either, because it will change any minute.

In principle, keep compassion as morally clean and apply wisdom. That's actually how you live your life and become very nice and happy. When anything bad happens, when you experience pain and misery, you can think, "By my having this pain, may that substitute for all living beings having any pain. I will pray, and I wish that this pain may substitute for everybody who has to suffer." That is how you can think about it. If good things happen to you, also give it and share it with the people.

Make life simple, good, pure, and nice. If you live that way, nothing can go wrong. By the time you actually

have to go, you can go with dignity and nicely. There will be somebody else who will open the door and say, “welcome.”

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Audience: I thought you said that the Three Higher Trainings were morality, concentration, and wisdom?

Rimpoche: You are right, absolutely right. Morality, concentration and wisdom, but what are you concentrating on? Compassion. Why not? Honestly, you don't want to concentrate on your girlfriend's face. So the subject of your meditation, of your concentration, is compassion.

Audience: Let's say that when I do something positive, I get a positive result. So what's the difference between the action that creates the karmic result and the action that creates the conditions? Are these different kinds of action?

Rimpoche: Very good question. Yes, they are. I didn't think I had time to go into that. Karma has a lot of subdivisions. Basically there's karma that creates life, karma that runs life, and karma that completes life. There's one more, but I don't remember just now. But anyway, to start with, there is one specific karma that creates an individual life like our human life. Although, Buddha says that no single karma creates anything, there is one

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karma that creates a life. The strength and conditions and power of that karma are the measurement of the life strength of that individual. But as for the karmas that run the detailed events of that life, there are zillions, crossing each other. That means some of the positive karmas we create become the karma that gives life, and some of the karmas we create become conditions. Do we have control? No. More or less, we control only the dedications. We dedicate for positive or negative results; we don't dedicate for giving life or for creating conditions. We don't do that. That's why some karmas become conditions and some become the karma that gives you life.

I have said that we can't purposely make different karmas, although we do say that generosity brings wealth, and wealth is a condition to have an enjoyable life. Morality gives you a pure life. Patience brings good looks, majestic looks, makes you Miss America or Mr. America. Like that, some of the karmas do provide conditions. That's how we have to look at it, rather than saying this causes this and that causes that.

Audience: Is there karma that may or may not affect you?

Rimpoche: Yes. You know why? Karma is impermanent; it's a dependent arising. Therefore, negative karma can be neutralized by purification and good karma can be burned by hatred before it gives the result. Some good karmas that we create may not necessarily give us

the results because they have been wasted [by hatred].

Audience: When you are doing the purification process that is also generating merit, are you affecting the karma that is creating the conditions or are you affecting the karma that is creating your stream of life?

Rimpoche: That depends. Negative karma gives you a negative life, but the suffering caused by negative karma also purifies the karma that provided the miserable conditions. Purification is purification. Whatever you can focus on mentally, especially if you can remember, makes purification better. When we don't remember, somehow it also works. We are in the habit of saying, "Whatever I did, whatever I remember and what I don't remember in the many lives that I have had" [I pray that it may be purified.] I think that works because of the kindness of earlier masters, which gives us room to purify everything.

Recognition is the recognition of anything that you did wrong. If you remember it clearly, the purification is much, much stronger because regret follows recognition and brings the decision not to repeat. Allen Ginsberg used to insist that we don't say "repentance" but say "non-repeatable," but that is still the four R's. Those are: **recognition**, which brings **regret**. Regret brings makes you **not repeat**. Finally you apply the **remedy**. These are the four R's that Allen found.

Audience: Is karma eternal? In other words, does it ever

cease to exist, or is there a state where karma doesn't exist? If so, what creates this?

Rimpoche: My understanding is that one never becomes free of karma. The Buddhas have constant, continuous good things happening to them because that is the constant continuation of positive karma. They no longer have any negative karma at all in their store; so therefore, they become free of suffering. But you don't have to be Buddha. When you reach the third stage of the second path, the stage of patience, from then onwards, you cease to produce the negative karma that brings rebirth in the lower realms. On the third path, the path of seeing, when you see reality and everything, whatever you do becomes uncontaminated, positive karma. After that, everything becomes positive karma.

So, my understanding is that there's no state where there is no karma, but some other lamas just say you're free of karma and blah, blah, blah . . . I don't know what that is. For me, enlightenment is the result of positive karma and suffering is the result of negative karma. So everything is a karmic result. The question is this: Is karma unending? The nature may be different, but is karma unending? I think so.

Every action that we do becomes karma. We never stop acting. There is no time that we cease to take action, unless we become a statue or something. Other than that we have constant action. The constant actions can be positive or negative, producing karma accordingly. That's what happens.

Audience: When you recognize emptiness, is there karma?

Rimpoche: Sure, recognition of emptiness itself creates great positive karma. That's my understanding. That's how I read it, anyway. Some lamas say you can be "free of karma," but I don't know what that means. I have no idea.

Audience: How do you know if purification works?

Rimpoche: I don't think there is true scientific proof. I don't know, but what I was told is that if you are doing a lot of purification, there will be some kind of a sign. Sometimes in the dream state you get a sign of washing—taking a bath, taking a shower, washing off an undesirable color—or undesirable insects or things like that are coming out of your body, or else you are wearing a wonderful, pure, clean, white dress. The last one could also mean something else, though. A pure white clean dress sometimes can be sign of a threat to life, too, so you have to be a little careful of that. And if you are running around naked, absolutely nude, that's not a good sign.

Audience: If in your awake life you find that certain things are suggesting that things are getting better. . .

Rimpoche: Judging your own mind, how kind you are, works both ways. Actually, the accumulation of merit

and purification are working together.

Audience: Generally when you create a karma, there are four things that have to be there, from what I understand . . .

Rimpoche: Not exactly. You make the karma by an action. The karma has characteristics by itself. You don't make the characteristics. The characteristics are there; you don't have to make them.

Audience: What I meant is, there's the intention, there's the action . . .

Rimpoche: Right, right. I didn't go into that detail at all. Yes.

Audience: But my question is: that's what you need to make a complete karma. But what happens when you're just thinking about it? What completes a mental karma?

Rimpoche: The thought itself. Even thinking, "I want to kill that man. I want to shoot him so that he's dead . . . good." That's it. That's complete.

Audience: So when you say "he's dead, good, and I'm happy about it." But if you're not happy about it, if you think about it, but then you regret it, does it do something to neutralize the karma?

Rimpoche: It reduces it. It provides one of the four powers of purification. If you produce the three other powers with that one, you make it a good purification. But if you just regret it but don't provide the three others, it doesn't purify.

Audience: So those four things have to be there to purify, even for a mental karma?

Rimpoche: That is my understanding.

Audience: Rimpoche, you said some years ago that the definition of dharma was to respect your own karma. Could you elaborate?

Rimpoche: Well, I don't know whether it's a definition or not. Respecting your own karma is your dharma, that's for sure. If you don't respect your karma, you could end up producing one of those five limitless negativities. That's why respecting your karma is dharmic work.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION/MEDITATION

1. How would it affect my life to remember that “not only is everything transitory, but everything is alterable; everything is changeable. You can do whatever you want to do”?
2. How are the Three Higher Trainings of ethics, concentration, and wisdom interconnected? What

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can I do to apply these three to my daily practice and my daily life?

3. How does it make me feel to hear that “I am responsible for myself,” “I am my own leader,” “it is my responsibility,” and “it is all up to me”?
4. According to this teaching, what can I do in a practical way to improve my life right now and in the future?

GELEK RIMPOCHE



GELEK RIMPOCHE

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

Born in Lhasa, Tibet, in 1939, Kyabje Gelek Rimpoche was recognized as an incarnate lama at the age of four. Carefully tutored from an early age by some of Tibet's greatest living masters, Rimpoche gained renown for his powers of memory, intellectual judgment and penetrating insight. As a small child living in a monk's cell in a country with no electricity or running water, and little news of the outside world, he had scoured the pictures of torn copies of *Life Magazine* for anything he could gather about America. Now Rimpoche brings his life experience and wisdom to both the east and the west.

Among the last generation of lamas educated in Drepung Monastery before the Communist Chinese invasion of Tibet, Gelek Rimpoche was forced to flee to India in 1959. He later edited and printed over 170 volumes of rare Tibetan manuscripts that would have otherwise been lost to humanity, many of them only retrieved due to his memorization as a young man. Rimpoche was also instrumental in forming organizations that would share the great wisdom of Tibet with the outside world. In this and other ways, he has played a crucial role in the survival of Tibetan Buddhism.

He was director of Tibet House in Delhi, India and a radio host at All India Radio. He conducted over 1000 interviews in compiling an oral history of the fall of Tibet to the Communist Chinese. In the late 1970's Rimpoche was directed to teach Western students by his teachers, the Senior and Junior Masters to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Kyabje Ling Rimpoche and Kyabje Trijang Rimpoche. Since that time he has taught Buddhist practitioners around the world.

Rimpoche is particularly distinguished for his thorough knowledge of English, familiarity with modern culture, and special effectiveness as a teacher of Western practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism. He has brought Buddhism into strong dialogue with science, psychology, medicine, metaphysics, politics and the arts, skillfully addressing the dilemma of living a spiritual life in a material world.

In 1989, Rimpoche founded Jewel Heart, a Tibetan Buddhist Center. His Collected Works now include over 32 transcripts of his teachings, numerous articles as well as the national bestseller *Good Life, Good Death* (Riverhead Books 2001) and the *Tara Box: Rituals for Protection and Healing from the Female Buddha* (New World Library 2004). Rimpoche is a U.S. citizen and lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

What I like about Gelek Rimpoche is that he has consistently shown resiliency and flexibility of character. I have also seen him sound understanding of selflessness, the hallmark Buddhist teaching. He can be an elegant lama in a formal setting, a truly worthy representative of his illustrious lineage. He can be a wise advisor in another setting, placing responsibility for growth wherever it belongs: on the individual. He can be a loyal and creative colleague, in the endless work of seeing to the long duration and continuing usefulness of the Dharma. Throughout it all, he remains a cherished and jolly person, a good friend.

—Robert A.F Thurman

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Gelek Rimpoche is one of the wisest, most cheerful people I know. He is a beautiful and gracious spirit who carries the great wisdom of Tibet. We are fortunate to have him teaching in the West.

—Jack Kornfield

Gelek Rimpoche constantly shows wisdom, gentleness, depth, rascality, humor, spaciousness, and the spiritual side to everyday life.

—Ram Dass

ABOUT JEWEL HEART

Jewel Heart Tibetan Buddhist Center is dedicated to helping individuals live the most productive, peaceful, wise, and compassionate life possible. By putting into practice methods for freeing oneself from jealousy, hatred, obsession and pride, participants discover an unlimited source of energy, strength and compassion that is available to each of us.

Jewel Heart programs are based upon Buddha's path, blazed into the present-day by the internationally recognized teacher and bestselling author, Gelek Rinpoche. Rinpoche's teachings address current questions of identity and purpose as well as bridging the dilemma of having both spiritual and material ambitions.

Jewel Heart's graduated program of study and practice program is based on the teachings of Gelek Rinpoche and facilitated by Jewel Heart instructors. These courses, available throughout Jewel Heart chapters and study groups, are open to all and range from questioning the need for spiritual development, to serious and engaged study of the Tibetan Buddhist path. Taking a creative approach to learning, Jewel Heart programs engage the arts, the sciences and multiple media platforms to maximize the ability to absorb knowledge to a level that changes the way we think and live. The complete program provides a foundation for entering the Vajrayana path, transformative practices designed to quickly unlock the mystery of life and end all forms of suffering.

Jewel Heart presents annual open and vajrayana

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retreats in the U.S., the Netherlands and Asia; regular teachings by Rimpoche in Ann Arbor and New York as well as frequent events in Chicago, Cleveland, Nebraska, San Francisco, Northern Michigan, and Philadelphia; weekly member webcasts; teachings and workshops by guest speakers; and meditation and practice retreats. In addition, Jewel Heart's Buddhist-inspired introductory talks, open meditation sessions, film and discussion evenings, various workshops, and yearly pilgrimage offer diverse levels for participation and service to surrounding local communities.

Jewel Heart Tibetan Buddhist Center offers a wide variety programs for spiritual development, supports senior lamas and the training of young monks, a children's school and orphanage, and Buddhist performing arts tours. Sales from the Jewel Heart Store support Tibetan refugees and monasteries in India and Nepal.

For more information on national and international programs, classes, webcasts, recordings and books, visit www.jewelheart.org

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