



DHARMA TEACHINGS

by

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Meaning of Life and Experience of Death in Buddhism

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Today, I am going to speak about the meaning of life and the experience of death in a positive way, which is very important to our lives. As you see, everybody, no matter what country he or she comes from, what language he or she speaks, what social, economic and political system he or she belongs to, what kind of culture or belief system he or she is acquainted with, whether he or she is rich or poor, educated or uneducated, desire to have peace and happiness and be free from suffering. There is no question about that. Even if we have to destroy our happiness, we are destroying our happiness in order to bring happiness. Even if we have to chase the suffering, we are chasing the suffering in order to be free from suffering. Due to ignorance, we chase the suffering unintentionally in order to be free from suffering. We make efforts and work very hard in our lives in different fields to acquire more happiness and be free from suffering. Due to different cultures, different belief systems, different teachings, we follow different paths materialistically, spiritually, outwardly and inwardly. However, the basic purpose of our lives is the same, that is, to bring happiness and be free from suffering. This is the meaning of life and the purpose of life.

Because of that, as modern technology advances, many new things are invented and developed in order to bring happiness and to make our lives more comfortable and peaceful. The advanced technology enables us to measure and go to the outer space. We try to explore the outer space as much as we can even though there is no limit to the outer space. We try to see what we can find there –another planet, another place, what kind of things or beings exist. We would like to have more control of the outer space in order to secure our peace and happiness. Computers can do so much and still there is no end to exploring technology in order to have better and more meaningful lives. When we are so busy exploring the outer technology, outer phenomena, we forget our inner mental technology. The quality of our inner mental technology is immeasurable, infinite, like space. We keep projecting and exploring outside and forget that mind is the one that explored and created all these technologies. We lose the sense of mental

quality. To know our mind, we do not have to go anywhere. It resides within us, face to face and yet we do not know. We judge other things, other people, outer technologies, we do not know how to judge our mind.

Let me say a few words about Buddha's life story as a historical person who taught us Buddhism for more than 2500 years ago. Buddha was born as a prince who was called Siddhartha. His father was a very powerful king in Northern India who ruled a big country. Siddhartha lived in the kingdom until he was 29. His father supported him and made sure that he had a perfect life. He had everything he needed – a very beautiful kingdom, a comfortable place with relatives, servants and all the services. One day, he saw a person who was old and could not see well nor walk well with shaking hands. Another day, he saw a man who was sick, full of pain in his body. His pain completely occupied his whole being, physically and mentally. Another day, he saw another man who was dead and was carried to the street. His family and friends were crying, beating their chests, asking him not to leave. When Siddhartha saw these, he woke up. He asked numerous questions – "What is happening? Who are these people? What are they doing? What are they experiencing and why? I have never seen all these before, what is all this about?" He gathered many scholars and ministers and asked them these questions. Their reply was that every person individually has to go through these experiences. Everybody whether he or she is educated or uneducated, rich or poor, who has been born into this world has to go through these experiences by himself or herself. We cannot deny these experiences. Siddhartha was deeply moved by what he saw so he thought that it was not enough just being in the beautiful palace, just enjoying a comfortable life. There were many people relying on him. So what kind of help could he offer them? What kind of ability he had to help them? Not only that, if he himself had to go through these experiences, did he have the wisdom and ability to face these challenges positively? Many serious questions arose in his mind and he could not answer them at that moment. "It is not enough to just to attach to this beautiful palace with all these beautiful people. I must look for some special answer." For that reason, he denounced the kingdom. He denounced the kingdom not out of weakness, not out of selfishness, rather out of great compassion, great wisdom. Out of great compassion because he would like to help everybody to go through these challenging situations and circumstances. Out of great

wisdom because it required such a technique and method of how to face these challenges. So for six years, he went through great hardship, even without eating food, without wearing clothes, but he could not find complete answers. So he thought, being in the kingdom which had every comfort, wealth and luxury, there was no answer to be free from suffering; by going through lots of hardship, not eating food, not wearing clothes, there was no answer to be free from suffering and to have happiness. So what was the real solution? He investigated, scrutinized and realized that it was the mind. Mind is the most mysterious subject. It lies within us and yet we do not know how it looks like, the way it abides. We cannot judge or have control over what we do. In the morning, we may be happy and peaceful; in the afternoon, we may be completely different with different mental states. So knowing our mind is most crucial. When our mind is not realized, when we do not know our own mind, even if we own the whole world, the whole universe, there is no happiness, there is no peace. It does not mean that we should not have food or clothes. It does not mean that we should not have anything. We can have anything but yet if we do not know the mind, that cannot bring complete happiness and ultimate peace. So for that reason, he sat under the Bodddhi tree and he dedicated himself and promised himself, "Until I realize the total nature of the mind, I will not wake up or stand from this seat even if my body disintegrates, falls into many pieces!" With such strong determination and powerful mind, he sat practicing and meditating and realized the total nature of the mind and at that time, he was called Buddha, the fully awaken one.

When we are asleep, we are like dead, we do not know what is happening around us and we have no awareness. Likewise, when we are in the state of ignorance, we do not know what we are doing. We think that we are doing many things in a smart way; but in reality, we are not. We want to have happiness but we destroy our happiness. We want to be free from suffering but we chase more suffering. It is due to our ignorance that lies within us. However, our precious human life has every ability and opportunity to be fully awaken from that ignorant state and put all the sufferings to an end. All the causes of suffering can be purified. With great wisdom and compassion, this precious human life can give us all the qualities. With the help of precious Dharma teachings, we can utilize our energies, efforts, time and opportunities in the best way to realize the truth. Therefore when

Buddha attained complete enlightenment, Buddhahood, he taught the Four Noble Truths. He said, "This is suffering, we should all know." In a way, suffering is something that we do not desire but on the other hand, suffering is very important. Without suffering, we would not wake up. Suffering gives us hints. It gives us great opportunity to look at suffering and examine what the causes of suffering are and avoid the causes of suffering totally. That is why Buddha said that we should know the suffering, be aware of suffering. Once we know the suffering, there is no more to know. However, if we do not know what suffering really is, even though we would like to be free from suffering, we end up chasing more suffering. Knowing about suffering, the causes of suffering and how to avoid the causes of suffering is called great wisdom. With this understanding, we practise wholeheartedly and patiently. In this way, we know how to be sincere to ourselves. Otherwise, we destroy ourselves by ourselves. But first we have to face suffering and accept it. If we do not accept suffering, then small suffering will become big suffering. Suffering on the one hand is very negative, undesirable and nobody should have that. However, to attain Buddhahood, complete enlightenment, suffering is very useful and very helpful. I am sure there are many practitioners when they encounter suffering, they can focus better in their meditation and when everything goes well, they forget about meditation. Every sentient being desire to have happiness and be free from suffering. When we cultivate and develop the thought of genuinely wishing every sentient being to be happy and free from suffering, it is called the mind of great compassion, Bodhicitta. Great compassion is the real source of peace, fearlessness and courage. Great compassion helps us to open up our potential and be closer to the nature of our mind. I am sure you have heard of many great Bodhisattvas who have great indomitable courage to help and benefit other sentient beings. That indomitable courage comes from great compassion. The nature of the mind is infinite, like space, beyond limit. When we do not realize this, we become so narrow and limited. Our mind is deluded and confused with self-centered ego, attachment, hatred, anger and emotions, which invite more suffering. It is like a veil which covers the true nature of our mind. Our mind has no ego, no attachment and no hatred. Ego, attachment, hatred and so on are just bad habits. Ego is something that we created and we cherish it and take care of something that does not exist and that is why we suffer. If it is something that exists, we should not suffer. When there is peace and harmony, we feel so

comfortable. The moment when there is anger, hatred or violence, we feel so uncomfortable. This shows that the nature of our mind does not agree with that. The true nature of our mind does not have these delusion or confusion. Thus, in order to reveal the total nature of the mind, we have to avoid all these confusion and delusion. Therefore we need to purify these bad habits, not the mind. With the guidance from a good teacher, doing meditation practice is a way to purify these bad habits. We need to make efforts to relax, to get to know the unfabricated nature of the mind. When we realize the nature of the mind, we have total freedom. Therefore, great wisdom and compassion are the most important technologies within us that we can utilize in order to completely free ourselves from suffering. This is a brief talk on how to achieve a meaningful life.

Experience of birth, aging, sickness and death is for everybody, not just to some. We cannot deny it. Denying does not help us to free from suffering. We have to explore and understand what we can do and how to face it positively. For example, when a doctor examine patients who have a problem, the doctor has to know what symptoms they have and the causes of their sickness. After the doctor knows the problem well, he can then prescribe good medicine. If the doctor does not know the patient, he cannot prescribe medicine. Similarly, we want to know how to free from suffering of death, we have to know about death. Death is a good opportunity to free ourselves from suffering and to attain enlightenment. So death is unavoidable. There is a story about two great masters who discussed teachings, experiences and all that and one asked the other master, " Since you are a great practitioner, great teacher, maybe you have a special method of not experiencing death, please show me that method." The master said, "You should not be born. You should not be here at all. Do not create karma. Once you are born, definitely, you will die one day. This is unavoidable." Generally speaking, birth and death are like everyday experience; in the morning when we wake, it is like birth; when we go to sleep, it is like death. When we go to sleep, we have no awareness. We do not know what we are doing. The next day when we wake up in the morning, we remember we had such and such dreams, that's all. So it is good to make preparation for death. It means that we sacrifice our happiness in the morning for the happiness in the afternoon. We sacrifice our happiness and peace today for the happiness and peace tomorrow. We sacrifice our happiness and peace

this year for the happiness and peace next year. So why not sacrifice our happiness and peace this life for the happiness and peace at the time of death. Especially, when we are alive, we can get a lot of help from others, from our family, teachers, friends, relatives. At the time of death, we cannot get any support. We alone have to face it. No matter how dear friends, relatives we have, they cannot do anything. Therefore, it is very important to utilize our precious human life and prepare ourselves to die without fear, to die happily. This becomes the real purpose of life. It is very important because no matter how much happiness and peace we experience in this life, at the time of death, it is like a dream, an illusion. When you have good times during the day, it is just a memory, no substance to it. There is nothing we can attach to. The same thing applies to at the time of death, if we could prepare well, organize our mind, develop great wisdom and compassion so that we die without fear. Otherwise, no matter how much wonderful time we have during this life, at the time of death, it becomes a dream, an illusion. Therefore, we need to remind ourselves about our death, not to make life miserable but rather to awake our wisdom and compassion, to be a good human being, to be totally sincere to ourselves. Just as we now need happiness and peace, at the time of death, definitely, we need happiness and peace. However, it will not happen by itself at that moment. Just like pushing a computer button seems very easy but preparing that button takes years of hard and dedicated work. Therefore, we need to prepare now. We prepare ourselves by developing wisdom, compassion and all other mental qualities. So at the time of death, it is just like pushing the button. That button we have to prepare now for dying is like going to sleep. The mind draws things out. We project outside. Mind sinks more and more inside, we cannot hear, see or think well. Our body is made up of four elements. All our functions, senses are based on the four elements - water, air, fire and earth. When they function well, we are healthy. When they do not function well, our health deteriorates. When they do not function at all, we are dying. During that time, it depends on individuals how familiar they are with different types of meditation techniques, realizing awareness and so on. When we know those well, it is like going to a familiar place. When we do not prepare well, we are like going to an unknown place and have no idea of where we are going. There are lots of fear, doubt and hesitation. When we prepare well, it is like having visited the place before and we have some idea of where we are going. When we do not prepare well, we have no idea

and we are lost. Death is inevitable and we all have to go through death. Therefore, in order to die positively without fear, it becomes very important to prepare now. Based on wisdom and compassion, we use meditation techniques to stabilize and organize our mind. Mind brings insights and we should get to know it, be familiar with it and make friend with it rather than making enemy with it. During this process, we should transform our negative thoughts. For example, if we put manure into a field, it becomes so fertilized that big crops can grow on the field. Similarly, within our negative thoughts, if we plant the seeds of Bodhicitta, big tree of Bodhicitta can grow within them. Since every individual is endowed with the seed of enlightenment, we have the ability and responsibility to awake that potential, to prepare the button, to push the button, to open the door of enlightenment and to see our Buddha mind directly. Until we are fully awoken from our ignorance, we have to make effort and practise patiently.

Law of Karma and Interdependence Origination

by Venerable Khenchen Konchog Gyaltsen Rinpoche

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The philosophy of interdependence origination is a very important subject because we all live in a relative state in a relative world. This relative state and relative world constitute the institution of interdependence origination. We are all interconnected by cause and effect. The result does not arise without a cause and the effect does not arise from the wrong cause neither. What our minds are going through right now and what we are going through in our lives are all arisen from causes and conditions. Karma, a Sanskrit word translated into action, is included in the subject of interdependent origination. Action becomes the cause and condition for manifesting effect and result. For example, walking the first step is the result of initiation and it becomes the cause of the second step. Taking the second step is the result of the first step and it creates the cause for the third step and so on. The philosophy of interdependent cause and condition, cause and effect is not a Buddhist belief, but rather it is how everything is constituted and how everything functions universally. We are all functioning within the institution of cause and effect. Without clear understanding and awareness of interdependent cause and effect, it is easy for us to become short-sighted. We perceive this body as permanent, unique and real. Therefore we attach to ourselves and make effort only to bring happiness to this body. But how is this body originated? Historically, some great practitioners, pratyekabuddhas and solitary realizers meditated at the cemeteries and they saw bones, skeletons scattered here and there and aroused sad feelings. We cherished this body so much in our lives. We sacrificed many things for this body. This was the result. They investigated further by asking where did the bones come from? From death. After death, we saw bones. Where did death come from? Death came from aging. We got older and older and when we died, we saw bones. Therefore, bones are not independent. It depends on death and death depends on aging. Aging does not necessarily mean old. We are aging every moment right after birth. Aging comes from birth. We age because we are born. How does birth come about? It comes from causes and conditions that exist. Anything can happen within that existence.

Because of ignorance, we fail to recognize our own intrinsic awareness and as a result our existence is overpowered by grasping. Grasping, holding on to or to keep, is a powerful mental factor. When we see or hear something we like, we want to get it or achieve it. Things that we do not like, we would like to get rid of them. This is a type of grasping. Grasping comes from craving, craving objects. Craving comes from feelings. Feeling comes from contacting objects with our 5 senses -- we see with our eyes, we hear with our ears, we taste with our tongue, we smell with our nose and touch with our body. These 5 senses together with mental form 6 senses. Feeling and contact come from 6 senses. Six senses in turn come from names and forms. When we see form, we label and name it. This is a person, a table, this is beautiful, this is sweet, this is good, this is bad... We do not realize that all these are just labels and names. Labels and names come from consciousness. Consciousness creates labels. Consciousness comes from mental formation. We continuously create karma, mental formation that imprints in our consciousness. What drives our karma? Ignorance is the root cause of all these. Ignorance is a mental factor. It is a type of obscuration that prevent the awareness of mind to perceive wisdom. It obscures the mind. When the mind is obscured, we see things as real, as substantial and we cannot see this interdependence and interconnectedness. Originated and unoriginated - - that which is born free from causes and conditions is unborn, unoriginated. Everything arises from that unorigination is originated in the interdependence. Since everything is interdependent, interconnected in this relative state, all energy and forms are empty. For example, this table here, is it short or long? If you say that it is long compare to that, then this table is long. But if we compare it to the base of the stage, the base is longer than the table, so the table is short. So the table being long is empty. It does not exist. I did not create emptiness, namely, table being long or short. It is empty by itself. Being long or short are just labels. Without label, we cannot communicate. "What is your name?"

"Alexander."

"Without the name Alexander, we cannot call you. Where is Alexander?"

"is nowhere."

Everything has a label so that we can communicate and function properly. Therefore, there is nothing to attach to or hate. We should not attach to labels -- table being long or short. Knowing this, we can free our minds from

grasping, craving. Mind is also empty. For instance, our head does not have any horn, so we have no mind to project horn to your head. This table being long is illusion. You eating lunch is also illusion. Your happiness, your emotions are illusion too. Illusion does not mean negative. This table being long exists illusory, not inherently, only temporarily when compared to that. We cannot deny that this is not long compared to this, but not being inherently long because it is short when compared to the base. Therefore, in this interdependent relative state, everything that exists is illusory, temporary, transitory, momentary, impermanent. Experiences are just illusions and can arise at any moment. They are all empty. So there is nothing to attach to, nothing to hate, nothing to compete with, nothing to reject, no subject or object, no self or others. Because of our ignorance, we fail to recognize the independence and empty nature among all things.

So our lives start with ignorance. From ignorance, life goes down to the 12-interdependent link. When ignorance is there, a chain of this life continues just like a wheel with no beginning and ending, go around and around no matter what we do. In this wheel, no matter how much we do, we are not free from suffering. Even if you are very successful in your business and you can do anything that is expected, are you free from suffering at that moment. Why? Because we cannot break the chain. Arhats, pratyekabuddhas realized this: everybody, Buddhist or non-Buddhist, is constituted in this institution of interdependent origination. This is the universal law and it does not matter who you are. As human beings however, we are specially gifted with our intelligence. We can utilize our special brains in the best possible way so that we may have the opportunity to cut the chain of suffering and confusion and attain liberation. Therefore, knowing the philosophy of interdependent cause and condition is a special method to dispel ignorance, cut the chain of suffering and confusion and blossom wisdom. Right now, we are here and think that we are one solid independent body. We are not solid independent bodies. Our bodies are made up of six elements: fire, water, wind, earth, space and consciousness. All 6 elements have to be balanced. If any of them is absent or imbalance, we cannot function. Therefore, we are not one piece but a combination of many pieces. When there is imbalance, we have to balance it through different ways. For example, when we feel cold, we need more heat. When we feel thirsty, we need to drink. Suffering and happiness are not

independent. They depend on causes (primary causes) and conditions (contributory causes). For instance, when farmers farm potatoes, the seed of the potatoes is the primary cause. To grow potatoes, we need good location, good soil, good climate and adequate water. They are contributory causes. Neither one cause is sufficient, we need both to grow and manifest. We look into ourselves, when we have suffering -- physical or mental, we usually blame somebody else. We have this problem now because of this or that person. So this or that person is the contributory cause of our problem. However, the primary cause, the real cause, we planted the seed long time ago. For example, we have headache due to sunshine and strong wind, therefore to avoid headache, we wear hats, take pills and avoid sunshine. However, these are just the contributory causes. The real primary cause, the karma that causes us headache, the seed of the karma we planted long time ago. If in case sunshine or wind is the only real cause for headache, then anybody who goes outside and exposes himself or herself to sunshine or wind will definitely get a headache. Knowing the philosophy of interdependent cause and condition is a special method to dispel ignorance, cut the chain of suffering and confusion and blossom wisdom. When we clearly know the causes and conditions interdependent on each other, we can be sincere and truthful to ourselves. We become fully aware of what karma we are creating. We watch our thoughts and actions carefully and consciously so that we do not create negative karma. We will wholeheartedly try to create positive cause/karma and avoid negative cause/karma. We will have the courage to take responsibility, accept consequences and to correct and improve our situations. It is impossible to deny suffering or avoid suffering. We have to accept it and learn from it. We cannot ignore karma, but we can always purify negative karma. Once upon a time, a mother who had only one child and that child died. She could not bear the pain and could not accept that. She held onto the child and put him on her left shoulder. She went from place to place crying bitterly while asking "Can you revive my child?" She asked one after the other and nobody could show her anything. In desperation, she cried in front of Buddha and said, "Please make alive my child. I cannot accept this. This is my only child." Buddha said, "Go and find a house where no one has died in that house and bring a handful of mustard seed from that same house then your child will revive." After hearing this, she left the body of the child next to Buddha and went from house to house, place to place asking that

question. At the end, she finally realized that it's not only her child died., everybody died. It is nature. So she should accept this because there is no other choice. The next story illustrates how easy it is to hurt or destroy others and how difficult it is to help others. It is easy for us to create negative karma, have negative thoughts such as anger, attachment, pride and jealousy and it is very difficult indeed to have positive karma , cultivate positive thoughts such as compassion and loving kindness. Once upon a time, there is a village in a country. Inside that village, lived a giant demon who ate human flesh. One day, the demon came and gave the people two choices. "Either I eat all of you today or I eat you one by one each day." The people were all very frightened and decided that it's better to be eaten one by one. They suffered so much so they asked Buddha for help. So Buddha came to the village and met the demon. The demon said, "I'll eat you." Buddha said, " That is why I am here. But before you do that, I would like to ask you two questions." The demon replied, "What are they?" Buddha asked, "Can you cut down all the branches and leaves on this tree?" The demon raised his big knife and cut down all the branches and leaves on the tree in a short moment. "What is the next question?" asked the demon impatiently. Buddha said, "Please put all the branches and leaves back to the tree." The demon was shocked and stunned. "How can I put them back? It is impossible. I cannot do this.", cried the demon. Then Buddha explained, "You have taken many people's lives and for you, it's easy. However, to keep people's lives is not easy. Look at your own life. If someone take your life , how would you feel? Think about it. Meditate on it. If somebody helps you, how would you feel?" He felt deep remorse and received Buddha's blessings and gave up taking lives. The point is that, because of our deeply-rooted habits, it is so easy to create negative karma and hard to create positive karma. Some people say, "I believe in karma" or "I do not believe in karma". Karma, as mentioned before, is a Sanskrit word translated into action. Action becomes the cause to manifest effect or result and is not a belief system. If it is the case that if we believe in karma, there is karma and if we do not believe in karma, there is no karma, then it is better not believe in karma, including myself, since we create more negative karma anyway. Let's forget it. Just because it is not the case, we cannot deny, reject or ignore karma. It is a universal law as stated in the Bible -- If you plant poison, poison will grow. If you plant medicine, medicine will grow. Once we create

karma, we either have to experience it or purify it. It is unavoidable. This is the profound wisdom.

Interdependence and emptiness are not created by Buddha, but rather Buddha realized how everything functioned within that relative state. Emptiness does not mean negative or negation. It is a wisdom. Knowing the interdependent and emptiness philosophy opens up wisdom and provide great space to develop unconditional compassion, loving kindness. This great space is unoriginated and infinite. The self-occurring intrinsic awareness, that dwells there in its natural place of rest, is not sullied by any flaw.

Indeed, infinite supreme qualities manifest unceasingly from that. This great space does not depend on anything but we all depend on space. Without space, we cannot function and the whole planet would not exist. The nature of mind living in that space is infinite, beyond causes and conditions. Our lives which is functioning in that mind is unlimited. If we do not know this, we suffer. Even though we know this intellectually, our minds still wander. Our minds are controlled by two opposite forces. On the one hand, we would like to cultivate good thoughts while the other mind resists that. It's very difficult to hold positive thoughts. It is because we have been so habitulize in our concepts and ways of thinking --- attachment, hatred, pride, jealousy, afflicted emotions and so on. The seed of inveterate propensity has grown so large that we feel that they are natural. They arise effortlessly when we encounter the proper conditions. We suffer unnecessarily. Because of our deeply-rooted habits, it will take us a lot of time, patience and wisdom to fully cultivate positive thoughts and develop Boddhicitta, unconditional loving-kindness and compassion. Therefore, we need to do meditation practices--meditate on the interdependent cause and effect, meditate on impermanence and meditate on the Boddhicitta, in order to train our mind and to penetrate into the wisdom, the essence of all knowledge.

Knowledge is infinite, like stars in the sky. There is so much to learn and our lives are short. We do not have enough time to study them all. Therefore, it is important to know the essence of knowledge, apply it and put it into action. Just like Milarepa, who worked so hard, said, "When I know one

thing, it opens the door to everything." So when he attained enlightenment, without studying all subjects, he knew everything. He got "the special button" to push and this button opened up every door of knowledge that existed in the whole universe. In order to cultivate Boddhicitta, we need make effort to train ourselves on the six perfections and 10 virtues and avoid 10 non-virtues. (The six perfections are -- generosity, patience, perseverance, moral ethics, meditative concentration, wisdom awareness. The 10 virtues are: protecting lives of others, practicing great generosity, maintaining moral ethics, speak truthfully, harmonizing those who are unfriendly, speaking peacefully and polite, speak meaningfully, practicing the reduction of attachment and development of contentment, practicing loving-kindness and engaging in the perfect meaning. The 10 non-virtues are: taking life, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, divisive speech, harsh words, idle talk, covetousness, harmful thought and wrong view.) Boddhicitta is a special cause, a special technique to purify negative karma, open our wisdom and dispel all ignorance which is the root cause of suffering.

The Four Noble Truths I

The Truth of Suffering

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The Four Noble Truths was Buddha's first teaching given at the Deer Park near Benares to his five disciples. The Four Noble Truths is the most fundamental teaching among all the Buddha's teachings. The Four Noble Truths are the truth of suffering, the truth of the origin of suffering, the truth of the cessation of suffering and the truth of the path to the cessation of suffering.

First, the truth of suffering, Buddha said, "This is suffering, we should know. Once we know about suffering, then there is no more to know." Next, he said, "Since suffering does not arise without a cause, by knowing the causes of suffering, we would abandon and purify the causes and the origin of suffering. Once we have purified the causes of suffering, there is no more to purify and then comes the cessation of suffering. By knowing that there is cessation of suffering, we would follow the path, attain the path that leads us to such cessation. Once we have perfected the path, there is no more to attain and no more path to follow." This was how Buddha taught.

This evening we will discuss about the truth of suffering. When we study and practice Buddha's teaching, there are lots of discussions about suffering, different types of suffering. Some people may think that Buddhism is very pessimistic. They do not like to hear about suffering. However, it is very important because in order to be free from suffering, we have to know the suffering. Just like when we are sick, we have different types of diseases and sicknesses. We want to get rid of the disease and sickness. In order to be free from the sickness, we have to know about the sickness - what type of sickness we have, what are the causes of the sickness and then find a way to treat the sickness. Without knowing the sickness, we cannot free from the sickness. Similarly, to free from suffering, we have to first know the suffering - what is suffering, what are the different types of suffering. When encountering some undesirable conditions, we think, "I don't like this. Why is this happening to me?" So, basically, we know that

there is suffering. What is the purpose of suffering? We will see in our later discussion that there is in fact a deeper meaning to suffering. First of all, every sentient being, including human being, even a small insect, desire to free from suffering whether one can express it or not, whether one can explain it or not. The innate nature of the mind of everybody is to desire happiness and to be free from suffering. That is universal. Because of that, we make effort and we work hard. We try to train ourselves on different skills, techniques to bring more happiness and to be free from the suffering. It is very obvious, whether we are in the spiritual world, business world, political world, animal world or any world. We all do something, go somewhere to experience some harmony, peace, joy, happiness, to be free from undesirable conditions, to be free from suffering. Maybe we do not know what suffering is. Because of that when we try to free from suffering, we create more suffering. Some may know somehow that suffering is there. The reason why we need to dig out different types of suffering, different states of suffering, is because there is a way to be free from the suffering. If there is no way to be free from suffering, then there is no use to talk about suffering. It is better to forget it and just leave it behind. But since there is the truth to its causes and the truth to its cessation and most importantly, there is a way, an alternative to be free from suffering, therefore we need to know, understand, study and analyze about the suffering.

Suffering is not always negative, there are lots of positive things. Suffering gives us great opportunities to be a realistic person, to be a sincere person, to develop wisdom and to develop compassion. Just like in a country, there are many laws. If we violate a certain law, we will have to face certain consequences. So we better behave well. So that gives us opportunities to behave sincerely. Similar to this, suffering brings down oneself to the ground. When there is no suffering temporarily, we are so proud of ourselves - "Oh! I am so special!" Then when the conditions we face are undesirable, we suffer and at that time we think - "I am nothing special. I am just like the rest of the people. Maybe I am the worst person." So when we feel that, pride disappears and we think - "What should I do to free from this type of suffering and undesirable conditions?" We try to find out some methods. Secondly, our own experience of suffering gives us opportunity to see all others who are going through similar suffering. In this way, sincere genuine compassion can be cultivated through knowing, understanding our

own suffering, not just limited to our relatives, friends but to all sentient beings who go through similar suffering. Thirdly, suffering gives us wisdom. When we suffer, we try to find out where the suffering is coming from. We investigate, analyze and scrutinize to find out the causes of the suffering, to find out whether suffering is independent or dependent on these factors. When we have the wisdom on the causes of suffering, we have the wisdom to avoid the causes of suffering as well. Therefore, it is not enough just to fight against the suffering. It is not enough just to reject or run away from the suffering. It is not enough just to say – "I don't want the suffering. Why is suffering coming to me?" Those are not the solution to be free from suffering. We need wisdom to understand the suffering and to avoid the causes of suffering. So suffering is not always bad. It gives us great wisdom and opportunities. It is a way to wake us up from our deep sleep of ignorance.

Generally, there is suffering in all the six realms of sentient beings in the Buddhist cosmology. Within that, we are familiar with the human realm and the animal realm. In the animal realm, there are many types of animals. It includes all insects, includes all those who live in the oceans, on land, in the forest, in the air and so on. It is obvious that there are different types of suffering in the animal realm. Even in our human realm, we have the suffering of birth, aging, sickness and death. They are the suffering that every unenlightened human being is going through. It does not matter whether one is educated or uneducated, rich or poor. Even for rich people, they do not get what they want. They get what they do not want. Even highly educated people get aged, get sick and finally die too. So those are the types of suffering that is unavoidable. This is how we go through the wheel of being. We will study all these further in our next talk. Through studying the Dharma, we know how to relate to these things which we cannot avoid. There must be a way to deal with these in a positive way rather than in a negative way. This is the basic reason why the first Buddha, Prince Siddhartha renounced his rich kingdom and happy family life in order to seek the truth. When Prince Siddhartha was in his 20s, he came into contact with a person who was old and he wondered who that person was. The next day, he saw a person who was sick and full of pain. The other day, he saw a person who had died and all the family surrounded him crying. The last day, he saw a person who had renounced samsara looking for

liberation and peace. Seeing that life is full of suffering, he began to look for something more. These conditions gave him great opportunities to ask many questions. Since he was very young in a rich kingdom with good environment, he never thought of those conditions before. So he gathered the ministers and asked who those people were and wondered if they went through those conditions individually or if everybody had to go through them. The minister explained - "We all have to go through them. Even though right now, you are so young, healthy, intelligent, talented in such a rich kingdom, you also have to go through old age, sickness and death too." So this kind of consideration led him to develop a strong sense of detachment from pleasure. He renounced his kingdom. He renounced his family life. He renounced the family life, not out of despair, he had a very happy life. And yet when he saw the sufferings of life, recognizing that no matter how great one's indulgence in pleasures of the senses might be, eventually one would have to face these sufferings. He renounced the kingdom not because he did not care for the people around him, but out of great wisdom and great compassion. His renunciation was based on the recognition that all existence was suffering and would like to look for the ultimate answer to free all sentient beings from suffering. For six years, he went through such a great hardship without food, without clothes. He was not happy either. When he was so rich, so powerful and had time, there was no solution to be free from suffering. Now when he went through great hardship with perfect meditative concentration, there was no complete solution to be free from suffering. So after all these experiences, he asked himself what the real solution would be, to face all different types of suffering in a positive way and not to experience suffering. Finally, he realized that mind is the one. When we know the mind totally, then it is the time to be free from suffering. When the mind is deluded, through ignorance, through confusion, we create the causes of suffering. As a result, we suffer. When our mind is enlightened, free from the boundaries, free from delusion and negative thoughts. In this way, we do not create the cause of suffering. When there is no cause of suffering, then suffering does not exist. Because of that, Prince Siddhartha meditated one-pointedly and achieved complete enlightenment, Buddhahood. At that moment, he said, "I actualized such great nectar, the nectar that can transform all suffering and the causes of suffering, which is very profound, that is the mind. Mind is very profound, free from elaboration, like a sky, like space. It is

uncompounded, uncreated. There is luminosity, there is total peace. That is the one that I actualized." It was not easy to understand and there were many people who requested Buddha to talk about these things. He blessed a few for some weeks, but there were lots of other people who requested him to perform the teachings so he taught the teachings - The Four Noble Truths. It was not that he realized what he did not have. He realized what he had from the beginningless time and that we all have. All sentient beings desire to be free from suffering. There is no question, no doubt about that. We all desire to have happiness. Even small insects, small bugs running here and there, they all want to have happiness, pleasure and peace. We human beings are the same. Why? It has nothing to do with the belief system, Buddhist, Christians or anyone who does not believe in anything. We all desire to have happiness. We all want to be free from suffering. The reason is because we have the Buddha nature, the seed of enlightenment. The Buddha nature that we have is very profound, free from elaboration, boundless, limitless. It is uncompounded in nature and possesses total peace. But since we have not actualized it, even though it is within us, we do not see it. We have not experienced it. We have not revealed it. Our mind is deluded and confused. Through confusion and ignorance, we go to the wrong place and we suffer. Therefore, to reveal that, we need to know the nature of suffering, the cause of suffering, in order to free from the confusion and delusion. When we know the causes of suffering, we can purify the causes of suffering and then we would come to the right place. Through that, we would understand who we are originally. So there are ways to go back to our own home clearly without confusion or delusion. Therefore, it is important to know about the suffering. After all, we do not want suffering anyway and would like to make all efforts to be free from suffering and to bring happiness, joy and peace to our mind.

Here is a story. At the time of Buddha, there was a young woman who got a child. One day, the baby got sick and she tried everything to help the baby. She went to the doctor and asked for all kinds of medicine. The doctor told her that the baby would die. She could not accept it at all. She asked the doctor why he could not heal the child. The doctor said that he had tried his best. She met a spiritual master on the way and asked him to pray for the child. His prayers did not answer her wishes. She went around to many different places, meeting many masters and asked them, "Why did my child

die? I cannot accept my child's death. I want to bring my child's life back." No one could help her. She finally came to Buddha and there she cried, "I cannot accept my child's death. I want to bring my child's life back. Please do it." Buddha with great wisdom and compassion said to her, "I understand your feeling. I know what you are going through. Perhaps there is a way to help you to get help. You just leave your baby's body here. I will watch it. You just go to different places, different houses and try to find a handful of mustard seeds in a house where nobody has died. Then maybe we can do something about your child. At that time, there was no public hospital. Everybody was born and died in their home. She went around to many houses and asked for a handful of mustard seed where nobody had died. The whole day passed and she could not find any such house. There was somebody who had died in every house that she went to. A child, whose parents had died early, told her bitterly, "I am alone. I am suffering so much. I miss them so much but I could not help." In another house, there was a couple whose child also died. They said to her, "We could not accept it but there was no choice. We went through so much agony and suffering." She found out that in every house she visited, there was somebody who had died. She finally gave up and she thought to herself, "It is not just my child. Everybody die. Some died when they were old. Some died when they were young. Some died when they were just born." She got a relief from the thought that she could not accept the death of her child. She came back to Buddha and said, "I could not find a mustard seed from a house where nobody had died." Buddha said, "You see, everyone goes through this. No matter if you are young or old, just saying that I cannot accept it, is not the answer for you to free from the suffering. It happens not just your child. One day you also have to go through this path. We all go through this. But we should learn how to accept this condition, this situation in a positive way. Develop compassion to all those whom you have met in different houses and had that kind of experience. You saw in their mind how much agony, anguish and suffering there was. In order to develop compassion, you should have the wisdom knowing how this can happen." She completely changed her mind. She studied about the samsara and how to be free from samsara. Buddha taught her method how to meditate and how to understand her own mind, how to free from the suffering. This is an example showing how suffering can give us wisdom to see things clearly and to awaken our minds. When we know how to accept suffering, then we

know how to be free from suffering. When we do not know how to accept suffering, then small suffering becomes big suffering.

There are three types of suffering, namely, suffering of suffering, suffering of change and suffering of conditions (pervasive suffering). First, suffering of suffering includes physical sufferings and mental sufferings. All sentient beings in the six realms experience suffering of suffering. Some are actually experiencing suffering and some are on the way to suffering. Every sentient being makes great effort to be free from suffering. In human realm, we have the suffering of birth, pain, sickness, aging, death and so on. Birth is suffering not only because of the physical pain suffered by the infant but also because birth is a gateway to other sufferings such as sickness, old age and death. There is mental suffering of separation from our loved ones, suffering of contacting those whom we dislike and those who dislike us, suffering of frustrated desire such as not getting what we want and getting what we do not want. Even those who are most successful in their lives, whether in the business, political or scientific world are not free from this type of suffering. Some, in order to free themselves from suffering, create the cause of more suffering. We struggle to gather things that we want and then struggle to protect the things that we have. In fact, in our human realm, we may also experience conditions as if we were born in the other realms. Picture yourself in a desert with no water and heat waves so powerful that you feel like you are burning or being cooked in an oven. Such a sensation feels interminable, even if it lasts for a short time. This is like a hot hell realm. Sometimes, when you are on a snow mountain in a blizzard, there is no place to hide from the wind. Your clothes are inadequate and your feet and hands freeze. Again, even if this actually lasts for a short time, you feel it is forever. That is like a cold hell realm. Sometimes, you take a long journey and become completely exhausted with no food to eat and no water to drink. There are no restaurants around. You feel you are starving to death and dying of thirst. The complexion of your body changes. You feel so skinny and lean. This is like the experience of the hungry ghosts. Sometimes, you are overpowered by other people or enslaved with no freedom to express your wishes or feelings and you feel stupid, incapable of doing anything. You do not know what to do or how to behave. This is like the suffering of animals. Sometimes, your mind is completely overcome with jealousy for another's dignity, wealth or prosperity. You become

overwhelmed by these thoughts and take action to harm others, but the result brings you more suffering. This is like the life of the demi-gods. Sometimes, you feel so peaceful and happy. Everything goes well and you are proud of this situation. You become dominated by the thought that, "There is not anyone like me." Even if you experience this for a long time, still you feel it was a short moment. Later, particularly at the time of death, so much suffering is caused by having to part from pleasant conditions. This is like the suffering in the god realm.

The second type of suffering is the suffering of change. Our temporary happiness, pleasure and achievement in the unenlightened state are called suffering of change because they do not last long. They change into the suffering sooner or later. For example, when we have a set of very nice clothes to wear, we feel good. We get some kind of happiness and pleasure from the nice clothes. However, if you wear it every day, you will feel uncomfortable. So it does not give you complete happiness, complete pleasure. Therefore, your closet has many clothes, hundred of clothes to choose from. When you are interested in something in life and you think that it is very important to achieve, you attach to it and make all effort and sacrifice everything. We go through all suffering to achieve all that. Once we have achieved that, the happiness does not last long. So it is not the real source of happiness. There is fear to loose it and there is hope and attachment to keep it, which bring us the suffering. The characteristic of existence is impermanence. Our bodies are impermanent and they are subject to constant change. Our mental states are impermanent, at one moment we are happy and at another moment we are sad. Our relations with others are impermanent - friends become enemies and enemies become friends. Our possessions are also impermanent. Those things that we dearly love such as our homes, our cars, our clothes are all impermanent, all of them will decay and eventually be destroyed. Our human life is like a flash of lightning or a waterfall. There has never been a single living being who has escaped death. Buildings, rivers, mountains and oceans are all impermanent. This process of constant change of all things goes on constantly even without us noticing it. Therefore, craving to keep such temporary happiness and pleasure lead us to suffering.

There is one more profound nature of suffering, namely, the suffering of conditions or the pervasive suffering. As long as we have ignorance and delusion, suffering is bound to come. Ignorance and delusion arise because of the failure to see things as they really are. So long as we have not developed our ability to concentrate our mind and penetrate into the true nature of phenomena, we are ignorant of the true nature of things. Even a very successful politician or the head of the country under the democratic system has to work so hard, go through many rounds of elections to achieve the position. Is he or she completely happy and free from suffering? When we achieve what we want, still we suffer. Suffering is bound to come. We are definitely not free from suffering. No matter which state of samsara we are in, our existence is propelled and perpetuated by ignorance and its mechanism described by the twelve links of interdependent origination and there is suffering so long as we do not know how to dispel our ignorance. Therefore, we have to purify our ignorance, delusion and obscuration. The way we perceive things and the way things actually are, can sometimes be different. That is why two different persons can perceive the same thing in completely different ways. The way we perceive things sometimes involves delusion. Ego, for example, is just a habit. We are so habitualized with our ego. But when we ask where our ego is, we cannot show it. We cannot find it. Ego exists because of our attachment to the ego. Ego makes you work and do things to identify yourself. Ego asks you to be special. Therefore, in order to free from the suffering of conditions, we need to first know the suffering and from that develop the wisdom to understand the causes and conditions of the suffering. Based on the wisdom, we practice compassion both for ourselves and for others. Suffering is a mental state. We create the causes of suffering. Because of the causes of suffering, we suffer. Therefore, instead of projecting outside, we bring back our mind. We make effort to purify the causes of suffering. When suffering comes, instead of fighting outside or inside, we look into our mind. This temporary suffering actually gives us an opportunity to wake up from that state. We make effort to examine carefully what we can do to free from the causes of suffering. In this way, suffering is not bad. Rather, suffering is very useful. It gives us the genuine motivation to develop renunciation to the causes of suffering, to develop an enlightened motive of Bodhicitta. Seeing that all beings experience the suffering of samsara, wish to be free from suffering and to attain ultimate happiness, we are encouraged and dedicated to purify the causes of

suffering, to strive to attain Buddhahood in order to liberate both ourselves and others. This motive gives us the realization of emptiness, the added force that will bring us to Enlightenment.

What should we do when anger comes? It is important to know how to live with anger. First of all, all phenomena are impermanent, temporary and subject to change. Everything changes every moment. That is why we start getting old the moment we are born. Just because of impermanence, any type of suffering that we are experiencing, going through, is also impermanent, subject to change. Without grasping, without seeing it as substantial, we should see anger as impermanent. No one can be angry all the time, twenty-four hours. Anger comes suddenly due to some causes and conditions, maybe some people have made some mistakes or maybe we met some people that we do not like. Anger arises because of causes and conditions. It does not arise independently. Look at the nature of impermanence like waves in the ocean. When there is wind, the waves arise and then dissolve back into the ocean. So when the anger arises in the mind due to causes and conditions, it dissolves into the mind. When it is dissolved, even if we are attached to the feeling and holding onto it, actually the piece of anger is already gone and disappeared. There is no trace left just like when we draw in the ocean, the drawing would not stay. In the same way, anger comes and disappears any time. It only creates a cause of suffering both to ourselves and to others. Look at how that temporarily arises and dissolves. When it dissolves, it disappears into emptiness just like when we have a headache, it is so painful and we do not like it. The next day, when the headache disappears, it does not exist. It is empty in nature and it is selfless. It does not have any background. It is just a type of suffering and it does not have its own identification. It cannot stay all the time in a concrete way. When we see that the nature of anger is selfless, there is no need to express the anger to others and there is no need to express anger. Just look at it as an illusion. This is a very good way to handle our anger and everybody can use it. So this is how suffering gives us insight, suffering is impermanent, suffering is suffering and the nature of any suffering is emptiness.

By detailed explaining the suffering is not meant to depress people. Rather, it makes the very important point of carefully identifying suffering. If we

fail to recognize the very nature of suffering, that which we are making all efforts to free ourselves from, then we would not know how to free ourselves from suffering. So instead of feeling depressed, overwhelmed or negative, or ignore it or run away from it, we should try to contemplate on the subject well. Awaken! Your mind has been sleeping in samsara for a long time. Recognize what kind of place you are in and make all efforts to flee from samsara. Renounce the causes of suffering and purify the causes of suffering. Renunciation does not mean negative, not eating food, not wearing clothes, not taking responsibility. Renunciation means to renounce, to give up the causes of suffering - to give up temporary comfort, temporary happiness, temporary fame or temporary success. Prince Siddhartha's renunciation of his kingdom did not mean that he gave up his responsibility of the kingdom, rather he took the responsibility of all sentient beings' welfare. Instead of benefiting just a few in the kingdom and making them temporarily happy, he had the courage to give up his kingdom and totally dedicated himself to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. It is very difficult for us to give up these things. It is not easy because we are so attached to our lives and our temporary happiness and possessions. It takes courage and dedication. It is not just a matter of a few years. It may take a few life times. For beginners who do not have any meditation teachings and practices before, you may feel hopeless. You feel that you are completely overwhelmed and enslaved by suffering. In this case, meditation practices are very useful. Meditation practices are important because they give us motivation and strength to overcome the difficulties and uproot our habits. Meditation practices help us to purify the causes of suffering by concentrating, organizing, stabilizing and strengthening our mind in order to penetrate into the true nature of phenomena. The Four Foundations (the four ways to turn the mind) are the most important basis and foundation for our meditation practices. Without them, our meditation would go to the wrong place. The Four Foundations in short are the precious human life, impermanence, interdependence of causes and effects, and the suffering in all six realms. They help to turn our mind from samsara to Enlightenment. We need to know them well, investigate and contemplate on them well. With this foundation, we practice meditation on the emptiness nature of all phenomena. A well-qualified master is necessary to guide your practices. For those individuals who have accomplished well in their practices, suffering is very useful to enhance

their practices. This is how suffering can cultivate our mind and perfect our motivation to attain Enlightenment. We work hard anyway to free from suffering to achieve temporary happiness so why not work hard towards the total freedom from suffering, for the total realization, for Enlightenment. This concludes our discussion on the truth of suffering.

The Four Noble Truths II:

The Truth of the Causes of Suffering

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It is obvious and clear that there is suffering, different types of suffering. General sufferings for human beings are birth, aging, sickness and death; as well as not getting what we want and getting what we do not want. Everybody goes through those experiences. It is important to know different types of suffering. However, it does not help just to struggle with the suffering or denying the suffering. " Why is suffering happening just to me?" Knowing about the suffering wake us up to find out what the causes of suffering are and what we can do about it. It is like when we have a special type of sickness. It is not enough to just not accept or struggle with it. We have to find out what kind of sickness it is and especially what causes the sickness and what the available treatments are. In the Buddhist cosmology, there are three realms or three worlds: desire world, form world and formless world. In this desire world where we are now, there are six realms: hell realm, hungry ghost realm and animal realm which make up the three lower realms; human realm, demigod realm and god realm which make up the three higher realms. In the form world, there are four different types of meditative states and likewise in the formless world, there are four stages as described in the Buddhist Abhidharma teachings.

You may ask, "What are the causes of all these realms?" There are different names to these causes: the origin of suffering, the contributory cause and so forth. Anyhow, basically, these different types of causes are created by the mind, speech and body. Through positive thoughts or negative thoughts, we create karma causes. When we put the thoughts we cultivated into actions by the body, speech and mind, we create karma. So all these arise through different types of causes or karma. Karma is action, the action we performed by our mind, speech and body. Through that action, it becomes a cause to manifest the result or effect. The action together with its effect or fruit are sometimes known as the Law of Karma or the Law of Cause and Effect. Similar actions will lead to similar results (reaction). Wholesome actions will lead to wholesome effects and unwholesome actions will lead to

unwholesome effects. The fruit of karma may ripen at different times: this life, next life or future lives depending on causes and conditions. However, the effect (reaction) of any action will not be lost. So karma is not some special thing. Sometimes when some big thing happens, we say that "Oh! It is just my karma!" That is because we do not think that everything is manifested from the karma causes. In reality, whatever happens in our everyday life, whatever we go through or experience is manifested from the karma causes. For example, when we say something, we will get a response. That kind of response is the reaction to speech. In fact, karma can be explained within the philosophy of interdependent origination. All phenomena in this universe arise due to the coming together of many causes and conditions. They disintegrate when the causes and conditions no longer are present. So all phenomena, causes and conditions, causes and effects are interdependent and interrelated in a complex and yet orderly fashion. It is a very profound subject. Karma is not just from previous lives. Of course, it can be from previous lives, but mostly it is from this life. Whatever we do on a day to day basis, that action becomes a cause that links to the manifestation of certain result. This is basically what karma is. This very interdependence and interconnectedness of causes and results show that suffering itself is not an independent subject. It is something dependent, dependent on causes. Happiness, peace and joy are also dependent on causes. Therefore, it is very important for us to choose the positive causes instead of the negative causes. When we create negative karma, we suffer. What it means is that our own suffering was created by ourselves and there is nobody to blame. Milarepa once said, "We all desire to be free from suffering, but to be free from suffering, we create the suffering." For example, we drink wine or beer to get some relief. But we drink so much and the habit gets so strong that it is difficult to give up. As a result, we suffer, our family suffers, our friends suffer. So our own drinking of alcohol is basically to have some pleasure, to have some fun, to have some happiness, but in reality, it invites suffering. This is what Milarepa meant "To be free from suffering, we create suffering." So in this desire world, we all do like that. We are doing that repeatedly without realizing it. Similarly, some people like smoking because it gives some special pleasure. In reality, smoking ruins our health. But we do not really realize it. So in samsara, the world of existence, we are in that state.

In the nature of karma world, roughly, there are ten non-virtues and ten virtues which create the positive and negative karma. The ten non-virtues are divided into three groups: physical, verbal and mental non-virtues. Physical non-virtues include taking lives (both human beings and non-human beings like animals and so forth), stealing and sexual misconduct. Verbal non-virtues include telling lies, giving divisive speech, using harsh words and engaging in idle talks. For example, we tell lies in order to protect something or to get something, but when people find that out, we create the suffering. Divisive speech divides people. Using harsh words can destroy other people's hearts. Engaging in idle talks not only wastes time and energy, but also gathers a lot of non-virtues since mostly we talk about somebody. Mental non-virtues are covetous thoughts, harmful thoughts and wrong views or ignorance. Covetous thought is related to attachment. Harmful thoughts can be from hatred, jealousy and resentment. Wrong views or ignorance includes not believing that suffering and happiness are caused by non-virtues and virtues, not believing that one can attain the Truth of Cessation when the Truth of the Path to the cessation of suffering is practiced, not believing in the three jewels – Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and instead slander them. So these are the ten non-virtues which create the cause of the three lower realms: the hell realm, the hungry ghost realm and the animal realm. These realms are created by these ten non-virtues depending on levels. If we created very heavy non-virtue then it can become the cause of the hell realm. Hell realm is not necessarily a special place. It can be experienced by any individual. So in order not to experience these lower realms in this human life, we have to free ourselves from these ten non-virtues. Now, let us talk about ten virtues. The ten virtues are just the opposite to the ten non-virtues. They are also divided into three groups: physical, verbal and mental virtues. Physical virtues are protecting others' lives, practicing generosity and keeping moral ethics and disciplines. If you perform these virtues, people respect you, trust you and would like to get close to you. This becomes the cause of peace and harmony. On the other hand a person who has slaughtered or killed others, people in general would generate some special bad feeling towards him even though he has not done any special harm to them. Four virtues from the speech are speaking truthfully, giving harmonious speech that bring all people together, speaking peacefully and politely, and lastly talking meaningfully. If we perform these four aspects of virtuous speech, it becomes a cause of

peace, harmony and happiness. The virtuous thoughts of the mind are the cultivation of contentment, loving kindness, compassion and the engagement of the perfect meaning. Contentment means that whatever we have, we just rejoice and be happy with that. It does not mean that we do not work or not make effort. It simply means that whatever we achieve, we rejoice and be satisfied and happy with that. It does not matter how much you have, but it matters how much you appreciate. If you do not know how to appreciate, even if you own the whole world, there is no peace and no satisfaction. If you know how to appreciate and be content with what you have, this brings joy and peace in the mind. Every sentient being wishes to be free from suffering and to have peace and harmony. The moment we have sincere loving-kindness and genuine compassion, at that very moment we experience peace, joy and harmony in our mind. Further, when we have the right view, the mind is free from ignorance and delusion. So these are the three virtues from the mind. When we have these ten virtues, that becomes the cause to be born in the higher realm in the next life. Even in this life, we are already in the higher realm, higher state or higher consciousness. This is not just a Buddhist culture and belief. This we should see as the universal law. Through the ten non-virtues, no matter who we are, whether we believe it or not, that becomes the cause of suffering. When we practice the ten virtues, no matter who we are, that becomes the cause of peace, joy, happiness and harmony. This is the universal law of cause and effect. The basic cause of suffering is the practice of non-virtues and the basic cause of peace and harmony is the practice of virtues. Above the ten virtues, if one has powerful mind and meditative concentration in equipoise, then comes the four form god worlds with four meditative concentration states and four formless god worlds with another four meditative states. In the formless worlds, there is no physical form, it is all mental state, mental formation. The meditative states in the formless worlds are the state of limitless space, the state of limitless consciousness, the state of nothingness and the state of neither perception nor non-perception. All these eight meditative concentration states are based on one-pointed virtuous mind. So this is how all these realms are created through different types of causes.

Phenomena arise due to the coming together of many causes and conditions, and disintegrate when the causes and conditions are no longer present, therefore, when we no longer create the causes and conditions for

suffering, suffering will eventually cease. In order to be free from samsara, first, we have to work with our own mind because mind is the one who creates all this. Then from that mind, come physical and verbal actions. We create more and more causes, one after another, constantly in this way. Therefore, we have to look back into our own mind. First, we have to purify the ten non-virtues which are the causes of suffering; the non-virtuous thoughts as well as non-virtues of body and speech. Abandon and discontinue those actions by practicing the ten virtues which are the causes of peace, harmony and happiness. On the basis of ten virtues, we study more about interdependent origination and emptiness. Causes and conditions are connected, interdependent. It functions in the following manner. Dependent on A, arises B. Dependent on B, arises C. When there is no A, there is no B; when there is no B, there is no C. Because of ignorance, one fails to recognize the clear, intrinsic awareness of mind which is unborn, unoriginated. This loss of consciousness gives rise to an anxious state of apprehension. Then from the successive solidifying of habitual patterns comes the evolution of cyclic existence in the usual progression. First, dependent on ignorance, arises rebirth producing mental activities or karma. Dependent on mental activities, arise rebirth consciousness. Dependent on consciousness, arise mentality-materiality. Mentality refers to factors of the mind—feeling, perception and mental formation. Materiality refers to the physical body, that is, all its organs, body system and functions. Dependent on mentality-materiality, arises the six-fold base which includes eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body (the five sense organs) and mind. Dependent on the six-fold base, arises contact. Contact is the interaction between the internal six-fold, the external six-fold base (which includes form, sound, smell, taste, tactile objects and mental objects) together with consciousness. Dependent on contact, arises feeling which can be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. Dependent on feeling, arises craving. Craving can be sensory craving, craving for continued existence or craving for self-annihilation. Craving manifests in numerous forms through the combination (interaction) of the three types of craving, the internal and external six-fold together with the three times (past, present or the future). Dependent on craving, arises clinging or attachment. There are numerous forms of attachment—attachment to sensuous pleasures, attachment to wrong and evil views, attachment to merely external observances (rites and rituals) and attachment to self or a lasting soul-entity. Dependent on clinging, arises

becoming or karma-resultant rebirth process. Here comes the appearance of the five aggregates—form, feeling, perception, mental formation and consciousness in the mother's womb. Dependent on becoming, arises birth. Dependent on birth, arises aging and death. Dependent on aging and death arises sorrow, grief, lamentation, pain and despair and thus arises this whole mass of suffering. Thus, ignorance, mental activities (karma), craving, clinging and becoming (karma) constituted the five causes of the past. These five causes of the past set conditions for the five effects of the present, namely, consciousness, mentality-materiality, six-fold base, contact and feeling. In the same way, ignorance, mental activities (karma), craving, clinging and becoming (karma) of the present set conditions for the five above effects of the future. This process of cause and effect continues ad infinitum. Only when ignorance is completely replaced by wisdom, then comes the entire cessation of rebirth producing mental activities. Through the entire cessation of mental activities, rebirth consciousness ceases and so on until the cessation of this whole mass of suffering. This is a brief discussion on the interdependent origination or the twelve interdependent links. Buddha once said, "When we really know the interdependent origination, it is the same as knowing the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha." It is because by knowing the interdependent origination, our delusion is dispelled. When we are determined to purify and remove our obscurations: obscurations of our habitual patterns, obscurations of karma, obscurations of mental afflictive emotions, we are already practicing the Dharma. Through studying and practicing the Dharma diligently, patiently and with perseverance, one day, we dispel our ignorance completely and we become Buddha. Once people know that everybody has the opportunity to become Buddha, people study and practice the Dharma and in this way, we become the Sangha. Therefore knowing the interdependent origination is the same as knowing the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

Interdependent or interconnected has a very subtle meaning. Everything is interdependent and interconnected. For example, left and right are interconnected. Without right there is no left and without left, there is no right. Good and bad are interconnected in a similar way. There is good because there is bad, there is bad because there is good. If there is no good thing, there is no bad thing. Not knowing this interdependent nature of all phenomena, we are so attached to the good things and we hate bad things.

It is because we are so habitualized, but in reality, for some people the good is bad and for some other people, the bad is good depending on how individuals are habitualized. It shows that there is no one designated or permanent good or bad. It is all interconnected, in a relative state. There is no absolute good existing and there is no absolute bad existing either. They all exist and function in a relative state non-substantially. In this way, all phenomena exist and function just like an illusion, a magical display. Illusion is not something we create as illusion but rather, everything functions like an illusion. When we realize this, our perception is closer to how phenomena in reality function. Otherwise, there is a big gap between the way we perceive and the way phenomena actually function. When we perceive phenomena as real, concrete or substantial which, in reality, do not function at all in that way, we suffer. We try to create something, which is real, solid and permanent, but it does not exist. Thus, we struggle in between. And then everything changes upside down. When everything changes upside down, we get upset. So what we have to do is to know and realize how in reality all phenomena function. They function connectedly, interdependently and impermanently. Everything changes momentarily depending on the coming together and the disintegrating of the causes and conditions. There is big change, small change and subtle change. All phenomena basically exist only in one single instant. They arise, function, decline and disappear momentarily, simultaneously. When we see this nature, you see really how everything functions as illusion. Thus, dispel our delusion. There is a story about a woman who wanted to have a child. Because of her strong mental desire, she had a dream one night. In her dream, she gave birth to a child. She was very happy. "Oh! I got a child!" In the dream, she stayed with the child for several years. After some time, the child died and she was very upset. She cried and cried. When she woke up from the sleep, literally, her clothes were wet from the crying. Now, did she really give birth to the child or not? What do you think? In the dream, she really got a child and was really happy. After some time, the child died and she was very upset. Is that true or not? What do you say? It was true until she woke up, because it was true that she gave birth to a child and she was very happy. When the child died, there was true suffering. When she woke up, she realized, " Oh! I had such a strange dream!" So, it was not true. In fact, the manifestation of all phenomena is like that too. The state that we are in now is like living in a dream world. When we wake up from that

state, we say, "It was just a dream that I had and that dream was not true." We may think that this world is true. But this world is also a dream. For one month, you work very hard, make lots of effort and have a hard time. When that month has passed, you become very happy. So the hard time that you had does not exist in this month, so it was a dream, just an illusion. When the causes and conditions are present, we experience this and that and as soon as the causes and conditions go, they no longer exist. This is how all phenomena are impermanent, interconnected and interdependent.

This shows that phenomena do not have any substantial existence. In other word, any existence is only an illusory existence arising due to causes and conditions. Although it exists, it does not exist substantially. "All dharmas (phenomena) exist due to the coming together of the four great elements. They are earth, water, fire and wind elements. The four great elements are fundamentally empty and the five aggregates – form, consciousness, feeling, perception and mental formation are non-existent." This was Buddha's explanation of the nature of all phenomena of this world and universe after he attained Enlightenment. Emptiness means that phenomena has no substantial, independent and permanent self, but rather everything exists temporarily, interdependently in a relative state. In particular, as discussed above, our body, consciousness, feelings, five aggregates are the coming together of many ever-changing causes and conditions. Failure to see that due to our ignorance, all phenomena, particularly oneself, are perceived as permanent, unique and real. Dualistic grasping of self and others develops. Because of that, attachment to oneself and the things that one desire develops. Anything that arises which is contrary to what one desires is received with aversion and one becomes very protective. There is endless dualistic grasping at subject and object. When the fruit of clinging ripens, rebirth occurs in the realm of pretas afflicted with cravings, experiencing frightful hunger and thirst. When the fruit of aversion ripens, there comes the terrible suffering of burning and freezing in the hell realms. As one's mind becomes swollen with arrogance, the ordinary attitudes of competing with and belittling others give rise to powerful mental states of pride, so that the suffering of strife between self and others is experienced. When the fruit of that karma ripens, rebirth occurs in the realms of gods who will experience the eventual fall from that state. We struggle constantly in these unending realms. Therefore, numerous sufferings arise due to the

attachment to our ego. When we cherish it so much, sacrifice so much to please the ego which in fact does not exist, we suffer tremendously. Fear comes from ego since we are so afraid to lose it. Ego is just mental projections which come from dualistic grasping thoughts of self and others. Opposite to this is selflessness. Selflessness does not mean to deny the meaning or the value of life, it simply means that self does not exist independent of causes and conditions. It frees us from self-attachment and all other sufferings that follow. It dispels the ignorance which veils the true nature of mind which can be described as non-discriminating, openness, boundlessness, non-substantial, impermanence, non-conceptual, penetrated with wisdom, loving kindness and great compassion. Since afflictive emotions have been habitualized for a long time, the seed of inveterate propensity has grown so large, that we feel they are natural. They arise effortlessly when we encounter the proper conditions. Therefore, we need to make great effort to purify and release the bad habits and to practice the ten virtues which are the causes of peace, harmony and happiness and to avoid the ten non-virtues which are the causes of suffering.

Afflictive emotions like attachment and hatred are very difficult to release. Since all phenomena are empty, non-substantial in nature, it shows that the nature of our delusion is also empty depending on causes and conditions. For example, suppose that we would like to know about a mechanical machine. First, we do not know. This not knowing is called ignorance. Now we study it and we get to know the machine. "Now, I understand what it is made up of, its functions and how to operate it." Now, the ignorance of not knowing is gone. Where has it gone? It has gone nowhere and this is called emptiness. As long as we do not know, we have ignorance. Ignorance obscures the clarity of the mind. It is like when there are clouds in the sky, we cannot see the sun, moon or stars. As soon as the clouds disappear, they manifest. Likewise, the clarity of our mind is obscured by the ignorance, delusion. Knowing the machine, that knowing quality is within our mind and it does not come from outside. We just have to study it diligently to bring out our wisdom to dispel the ignorance. Therefore, when we know the dependent arising, like the right and left, of all things, there is nothing to attach. When everything is interconnected, it is just a matter of labeling. We just put labels on the phenomena and there is nothing to attach. When there is nothing to attach, there is nobody to hate. Through that, our ignorance is

dispelled and mind becomes free. So this is how to achieve freedom. In particular, when anger comes, look into the mind and recollect the emptiness nature of anger and there is nothing to attach. It is just temporary, momentary depending on the causes and conditions. At one moment, somehow, it pops up so strongly that you are completely dominated and enslaved by the anger, you feel miserable. Then when it disappears, we feel good again. It is like morning dew on a blade of grass, evaporates like an illusion. Rather than getting upset or worrying about it, just see it as the true nature of that phenomenon. Accept the change and allow it to happen. Release the attachment. Try to build the strength of the mind in this way. At the same time make effort to create the causes of peace, happiness and harmony by developing loving kindness and compassion for all sentient beings (Bodhicitta). This altruistic mind is so precious and powerful that it transcend and purify all the negative thoughts and delusion. In fact, we can use anger in positive ways. When you cannot control your anger, may the anger that you have be sufficient strong to purify the anger of all sentient beings. May all sentient beings' anger be completely purified. In the beginning, it is very difficult to practice in this way in the beginning. But if we practice mindfully and diligently, our anger becomes powerless. To practice Dharma well is not easy, not because Dharma is not easy. Most people understand Dharma easily. But when it comes to real practice, real applications, then because our negative thoughts and emotions are so strong and so stubborn that they would not like to listen. So they are the ones that are needed to be purified and uprooted. We have no other choice. We have to learn to replace our non-virtues by practicing virtues, our habitual negative thoughts and afflictive emotions with Bodhicitta (the mind of Enlightenment). Negative thoughts and afflictive emotions are the real enemy within us, the causes of suffering. They destroy our peace and happiness. No matter where we are, even though we stay in a beautiful, luxurious place, eat delicious food and have wonderful, beautiful, expensive clothes to wear, as long as we have enemy inside, we destroy our happiness and peace. It goes with us wherever we are and finally flows us into the hell realm. The outer enemy, the person who make you upset, you can just ask him or her to get out of sight. Now he or she is no longer there but the enemy within us, the negative thoughts and emotions stay within your mind and there is nowhere to escape, nowhere to hide. It does not matter who you are, spiritual or not. So Dharma practice is

not a spiritual or religious practice but rather a method and path taught by Buddha to free us from our enemies, to free from suffering and delusion and to attain the Enlightenment, Buddhahood.

Because our habits are so deeply rooted within us, in order to completely dispel our three afflicting emotions (the three poisons): attachment, hatred and ignorance, it is not enough just knowing intellectually the causes of suffering. We have to practice meditation and at the same time, practice the ten virtues which are the causes of peace, happiness and harmony, and avoid the ten non-virtues which are causes of suffering. For instance, even though we do not like to manifest anger but somehow it just pops up without our control. Similarly, other afflictive emotions such as greed, pride, attachment and jealousy etc rise up effortlessly one after another. In order to uproot and purify our deeply rooted habitualized propensity, we have to do meditation practices, that is, to work with our mind since mind is the one who create the causes of suffering. Meditation practice is a method to change, purify and uproot our ignorance. Meditation does not mean to just close the eyes and blank you mind. Meditation practice, in particular, analytical meditation means to contemplate thoroughly on much of the above-discussed subjects such as karma (causes and effect), interdependent origination, suffering in the six realms, selflessness, loving kindness, compassion, Bodhicitta, impermanence, emptiness, precious human life. Human life is precious because it gives us opportunity to transcend and go beyond the causes of suffering, to uproot our ignorance, to bring forth our Buddha nature, the enlightened seed within us and to attain Enlightenment. Contemplate and bring those subjects in the mind and be one with that, and try to habitulize those and at the same time, purify our negative thoughts, negative emotions such as hatred, greed and so froth. This is kind of replacing the negative thoughts, negative emotions with positive thoughts, loving kindness and Bodhicitta. Realize that negative thoughts and emotions are simply the manifestation of our deluded dualistic mind and they do not exist independently. Just because the nature of the negative thoughts and emotions is empty, non-substantial, impermanent, they have no foundation, they are groundless and baseless and we can completely purified them and replaced them. When we practice more and more, our wisdom develops and we realize more and more the emptiness nature of our negative thoughts and emotions. Thus their strength becomes weaker

and weaker. On the other hand, when our wisdom develops, the realization of the wisdom and the compassion as the ground of being becomes stronger and stronger until we realize the true nature of all phenomena. Even though the waves in the samsaric ocean may be strong, but when we look into our mind, we see how much we are changing, changing momentarily, our courage is strengthened. This is the way to develop courage, the way to cut our negative thoughts and emotions with the razor of wisdom. We need indomitable courage and the indomitable courage should be based on the well-developed, unconditional Bodhicitta mind – the mind of achieving Enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. With this view, the meditation practice becomes very effective. Another form of meditation is stabilizing or calm-abiding or shamata meditation. One simple and effective way to calm our mind is to watch our breath. Analytical together with stabilizing meditation help us to bring our mind in one place and stabilize our concentration. It is because without a calm mind, it is difficult to analyze and without careful analysis and examination, doubts and anxiety would arise, which become great obstacles in sustain a calm and stable mind. When the mind is well-trained, well-organized, concentrating at the right place, it becomes very powerful. It gives us confidence and power to dispel our ignorance by penetrating directly into the true nature of all phenomena which is unborn and unoriginated. With stabilizing and analytical meditation, and the practice of ten virtues as foundation, we study and practice the Dharma diligently and sincerely with indomitable courage and unshaken will. Gradually, step by step, we can purify all our negative thoughts, afflictive emotions, dispel our delusions and ignorance and finally attain the complete Enlightenment with maximum ability to benefit others.

The Four Noble Truths III:

The Truth of the cessation of Suffering

by Venerable Khenchen Konchog Gyaltsen Rinpoche

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The Four Noble Truths was the first teaching given by Buddha Shakyamuni after he attained Enlightenment – Buddhahood. It was taught impartially to all sentient beings out of great compassion, and great wisdom. All sentient beings including us human beings are functioning and wandering in the cyclic existence, the samsara due to delusion. Because of that, we face without choice different types of suffering which we do not desire. We work so hard day and night, sacrificing so much, like comfort and so on to free us from suffering. We expect to be free from suffering, but, as you see, there is not even one day, after working so hard when we can say that now we are totally free from suffering. You may then wonder, "Is there an end to suffering? How can we achieve that?" There come different types of questions. To obtain answers, depending on the individual's mental capacity and interest, we approach various paths and use different skills. We investigate. For instance, all the modern technologies are basically discovered and invented in order to free us from suffering - whether it is for individual interest or for the interest of the whole humanity. This is very obvious. Computers together with Internet are becoming so powerful that they connect and rule the whole world. We can accomplish so much using computers and be very successful. Successful means that lots of things can be done within a very short time. So supposedly we should have a better life and easier life. However, just the opposite is true. We have to work harder and there are more deadlines to meet. If you do not do this by today then the next day you are out of it. So it is contradictory. In the old times, when these modern technologies had not been invented, even though life was more primitive, people had more time. There were not many choices of food or clothing and they did not have beautiful houses to stay in, but they had a lot of time with their families. Even though they had to work hard physically in the field but mentally more peaceful. Now in our modern days, physically seems luxurious - lots of various choices of food, clothing and beautiful places to stay, but mentally so stressful, so much pressure. It is very obvious. In the modern world, in order to have control and power, lots

of machines and tools are created. Nowadays, things can be done in such a high speed, but yet we have less and less time. We are getting busier and busier. Indeed, we are so far from the real peace and happiness. It is getting worse and worse. In this modern culture, everywhere east or west is influenced by this phenomenon. We are living with samsara existence without choice.

The goal, the basic idea of humanity, within our societies is to be free from suffering and to have peace and happiness. In Buddhism, what Buddha taught, the idea is the same but the method is different. Method is different because modern technologies are created for the outer material development. We expect our peace, happiness and pleasure to be experienced from the outside. If I get this, I will be happier. If I do this, I will have more time. If I have a beautiful house, I will be more relaxed and more secure. My life will be more insured and I will be in a better position. I can then relax, go to the beach in the summer and go skiing in the mountains in the winter and so on. The approach in Buddhism is different. Of course for the time being, we do have to depend on the outside materials too. Because without eating, without wearing clothes, without a place to stay, we cannot live. However, the core of Buddhism emphasizes on the inner mental development. It is very important because how everything appears and is experienced in our lives depend on our mental attitudes, mental states. For us, beginners, it may appear that the outer conditions make a difference. They make a difference only on some relative levels, but when you go down to the root, it depends completely on our mental attitude, mental state. When our mind is peaceful and calm, even under chaotic situations, it is quite all right. "Oh, it is fine. It is okay. No problem. We can fix it. Don't worry about that!" So, there is a way to achieve some calmness and peacefulness independent of the outer conditions. Another example, if you wear a piece of jewel on your ears, it brings joy and happiness but if you view that same jewel as a piece of rock then that piece of rock brings burden, shamefulness and suffering. So if we view suffering as suffering, suffering becomes a real obstacle. Instead we can view suffering as an opportunity to wake us up, to investigate into the causes of suffering and to how to purify them. So mental attitude is very important. Our mental state, mental attitude affects our physical body directly. When the mind is calm and peaceful, the physiological state reflects a certain state and when our

emotion is strong and powerful, our physiological state changes. When our mental state is chaotic and destructive, no matter how beautiful the outer environment is, at that moment, there is no peace and you feel like you are in the hell realm. When our mind, mental state is calm, peaceful and clear, everything works out nicely. Therefore, cultivating the inner mental qualities is very important. The inner qualities lie within every individual and they do not depend on the outer conditions. However, unless we are highly developed, we do need others' guidance and help to show how to achieve that peaceful mental state. In one way, mind is very, very simple. It is nothing. It is nowhere. However, when different emotions or thoughts arise, we can be so agitated that our whole being is occupied by that. But as soon those emotions or thoughts disappear, it disappears nowhere, no trace left. It is similar to generating water bubbles in a pool. As soon as it stops, the bubbles go nowhere. Mind cannot be seen in a form through our eyes nor can it be seen or measured by machines, no matter how powerful the machine is. The reason is because mind is insubstantial, so it cannot be measured by any substantial machine. It can only be seen through our wisdom eye. Therefore, in order to achieve peace and happiness, we need inner mental training.

Buddha taught what suffering is and the causes of suffering. Suffering does not manifest without a cause or with the wrong cause. It manifests through causes and conditions. Now you may ask if there is an end to suffering. Yes. The Third Noble Truth is called the truth of the cessation of suffering. There is an end to suffering. If you work properly and progress successively, some day, you can achieve a state, which is called cessation. Cessation is a state where suffering and the causes of suffering do not exist. When there is no suffering, no mental emotions or negative thoughts, there is peace. We do not have to work on how to achieve peace. We just have to work on how to purify all our destructive thoughts. We make effort to uproot our delusion and confusion. When that is done, that state is called peace. Peace is always there within us. Like space, we do not have to make the space empty. We simply get rid of the clouds. When the clouds disappear, the nature of space is spacious, empty and limitless. The state of cessation, Nirodha is the state of total freedom and peace. In this state, the ultimate nature of all phenomena is fully revealed and is characterized by peacefulness, fullness, abundance and perfection. This is the state of emptiness. It is not merely

empty. I am sure you have heard of Buddhists believing in emptiness, no self. Sometimes we may be scared because without self, it is like nihilism. This is a misconception. Just the opposite, the state of emptiness is full of all supreme qualities of wisdom and compassion. All the perfection of knowledge is there. It embraces the interdependence nature of all phenomena. That is why Buddha taught so much on the subject emptiness. If it is just merely empty, how could Buddha teach all that? It is full of joy since there is no suffering. There is no cause of suffering because all those obscurations and illusions are dispelled. They simply do not exist. When there is no cloud, the nature of the Sun and Moon reflects and shines on the Earth. Likewise, the very nature of our mind is fully revealed when the obscurations, which obscure us temporarily, are completely removed. For example, there was a poor man who owned nothing but a piece of very poor land. He could not attain anything from the ground. He felt that he was so poor. "I have nothing. No food to eat, no clothes to wear. What should I do? What should I eat tomorrow?" Somehow, one day, someone who had some special knowledge about mining came and told him that underneath the ground, there were lots of treasure. He tried very hard to dig the ground. He dug and dug and after before long all the treasures were revealed. So he became very rich. Even though he was rich already from the very beginning – sitting on a piece of land, which was full of treasure but since he did not recognize it, he felt that he was so poor. As soon as he realized that, he became rich. In the same way, treasure lies within us all the time, but because of the obscurations that obscure our mind, just like the earth, which obscure the treasure, we do not recognize them. When the obscurations are fully purified, the original nature of the mind is fully revealed. That state is called the cessation of suffering. Now you may ask if it is possible to achieve it or not. Yes, it is possible. First of all, when our mind is calm, in a peaceful state, we have a glimpse of some of those qualities within our mind even though we may not recognize it. Sometimes when some peace and tranquility come from nowhere, we feel so joyful so pleasant and that is a reflection or a glimpse of our inner qualities. Now, to fully reveal the inner qualities, what we should do is to depend on the path that Buddha showed us.

The Fourth Noble Truth is called the truth of the path to the cessation of suffering. There are two kinds of cessation, Sharavaka system of cessation,

Nirodha and the Bodhisattva system of cessation, Buddhahood. Sharavaka system of cessation, Nirodha or the Arhat state is temporary compared with Buddhahood. Those who follow the Sharavaka path are not interested in helping every sentient being as the Bodhisattvas do. Bodhisattvas are committed to help every sentient being regardless of who that sentient being is. They are reborn life after life until all sentient beings are liberated. This is the Bodhisattva way of life. Even though they achieve Buddhahood, their activities continue. Sharavaka system is sometimes called Hinayana. Practitioners of course have compassion but they do not have Bodhicitta (the mind of Enlightenment) and are not committed to help all sentient beings. So in their lives, they help and benefit many sentient beings as much as they can while trying to free themselves from samsara to attain the nirvana state. They perform many different types of activities. They go through their lives practicing and attaining the four fruits or the four different types of realizations. The first is called entering into the stream because they enter into the Arhat path. The second is called returning once. Before they attain the final realization, they have some more purification to do and thus are reborn once more. The third is called non-returning state. They are guaranteed to achieve the full Arhat State within the lifetime so there is no need to return to the samsara. The fourth is called Arhatship or the four destroyers because all the afflictive emotions are destroyed. Arhatship is a state with the complete realization. To achieve that what practitioners have to practice is to purify the self-grasping obscuration, i.e. person self and the phenomena self. Person self is I or me. We are so attached to that. Even though there is no independent self and self is just a label to the collection of the five aggregates, we are so attached to the label. So practitioners have to purify that totally. When that is completely purified and uprooted, the gross obscurations related to the mind are purified and the joyful and peaceful Arhat State is attained. The Sharavaka and hearer school achieve that state. Bodhisattvas achieving Buddhahood is called non-abiding. Non-abiding means neither abide to the samsara nor abide to Nirvana (the Arhat state). So Buddha goes beyond those two extremes. Buddhahood is in the state of total peace. Through great compassion, they do not give up the possibility of benefiting sentient beings and at the same time through great wisdom, they are not abiding in the samsara (the confusion state) like us.

The Four Noble Truths IV:

The Truth of the Path to the Cessation of Suffering

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The Fourth Noble Truth is called *the truth of the path to the cessation of suffering*. There are two kinds of cessation, Sharavaka system of cessation (Nirodha or Arhat state) and the Bodhisattva system of cessation (Buddhahood). Sharavaka system of cessation, Nirodha is temporary compared with Buddhahood. Those who follow the Sharavaka path are not interested in helping every sentient being as the Bodhisattvas do. Bodhisattvas are committed to help every sentient being regardless of who it is. They are reborn life after life until all sentient beings are liberated. This is the Bodhisattva way of life. Even though they achieve Buddhahood, their activities continue. Sharavaka system is sometimes called Hinayana. Practitioners have, of course, compassion but they lack Bodhicitta (the mind of Enlightenment) and are therefore not committed to help all sentient beings. So in their lives, they help and benefit many sentient beings as much as they can while trying to free themselves from samsara to attain the nirvana state. They perform many different types of activities. They go through their lives practicing and attaining the four fruits or the four different types of realizations. The first is called *entering into the stream* because they enter into the Arhat path. The second is called *returning once*. Before they attain the final realization, they have some more purification to do and thus, they are reborn once more. The third is called *non-returning state*. They are guaranteed to achieve the full Arhat State within the present lifetime so there is no need to return to samsara. The fourth is called *Arhatship* or the four destroyers because all the afflictive emotions are destroyed. Arhatship is a state with the complete realization. To achieve this state, practitioners have to purify the self-grasping obscuration, i.e. person self and the phenomena self. Person self is I or me. We are so attached to that. Even though there is no independent self and self is just a label to the collection of the five aggregates, we are so attached to the label. So practitioners have to purify that totally. When that is completely purified and uprooted, the gross obscurations related to the mind are purified and the joyful and peaceful Arhat State is attained. The Sharavaka and hearer

school achieve that state. Bodhisattvas achieving Buddhahood is called non-abiding. Non-abiding means neither abide in the samsara nor abide in Nirvana (the Arhat state). So Buddha goes beyond those two extremes. Buddhahood is the state of total peace. Through great compassion, they do not give up the possibility of benefiting sentient beings and at the same time through great wisdom, they are not abiding in the samsara (the confusion state) like us.

Now to attain complete Enlightenment, Buddhahood, there is a path to follow. It is commonly known as *the Five Paths*. Before entering into the path, first, we study the nature of samsara, the cyclic existence, the cycle of confusion. It is cyclic because it goes round and round in a circle. For example, days – we get up in the morning scheduling the activities for the whole day from morning to evening and then go to sleep. The next day, we wake up and start the daily routine again. So, in this way, days go round and round. Weeks go in a cycle too, Monday through Sunday and then again Monday through Sunday. Similarly, months – after 30 or 31 days, the next month starts again from day 1 to the end of the month. A year has 12 months. After 12 months, it starts the next year again from the first month. So in this way, there is no farther to go and we just go round and round. We are born, getting old and then die and then are born again, getting old and die and so on in a cycle. This kind of existence is called the cyclic existence. We exist in that state sometimes feeling good and sometimes feeling bad, sometimes sad and sometimes happy. We investigate, try to understand that nature and find out how we can free ourselves from that. Relating to the cycle of days, there is a story. Once, there was a king and a very smart minister. The king asked the minister to come to him. The king was very interested in all types of horses and he mentioned all the different types of horses with various colors, shapes, and sizes to the minister. Then the king said to the minister, "Now, you have to find me a special horse – a horse type that I have not mentioned, within a week. If you do not find it after one week has passed, I will execute you." So, the minister went home and he was very upset because there was no way to find such a horse. Whatever existed in this world, the king had already mentioned it. So, he was thinking what he should do. If he did not have anything to tell the king, he would be killed within a week. Then he got a good idea. He asked an attendant of the king to come and told him, "Please tell the king that I have already found

such a horse that he wished for. Please come and get the horse on such a day which does not lie within a week." In other words, the king had to come on such a day which does not exist. The king got the message and promoted the minister to a higher rank because of his intelligence. So in the samsara, things just go round and round in a cycle. To free from that cycle, we have to find out what the cause of the cycle is. In the previous talk, we investigated in great detail the root cause of suffering. It is our ignorance – the delusion and obscurations of the mind that tie us to samsara. In order to break the cycle, we have to purify the obscurations by studying and practicing the Dharma step by step. The mental development of wisdom and compassion in which one purifies the different levels of obscurations is fully cultivated through the five paths: the path of accumulation, the path of application, the path of insight, the path of meditation and the path of complete perfection.

The first path is called *the Path of Accumulation*. First one have to study, contemplate and train well on the Four Foundations: the rarity and preciousness of leisure and endowment of human life; the impermanence of all compound phenomena, including precious human life; the all-pervading sufferings in samsara; and the universal law of causes and effects. Then one gets a clear understanding of the need to renounce samsara and yearns to be free from samsara to attain Enlightenment. On the basis of this awareness, one seeks refuge in the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma and Sangha) as a way to directly connect to and cultivate one's mind to attain the limitless qualities of the enlightened beings. Then one takes the precepts and vows, and go through the three types of training: Sila (moral ethics); Samadhi (meditation); and Prajna (insight wisdom awareness) in order to step by step tame the mind, uproot the habitualized non-virtuous habits, and purify both gross and subtle obscurations such as afflictive emotions. The three types of training can be divided into the six paramitas, that is, the training of generosity, moral ethics, patience, perseverance, meditative concentration and wisdom awareness. One's effort is focused and organized into the spiritual path. With the guidance of spiritual masters, one starts gathering the different instructions and methods that will establish the mind in clarity and one-pointedness. One studies, contemplates and gathers great wisdom and great mental power to directly understand and stabilize the understanding of those teachings by actual experiences. That is, bringing the

Dharma teachings and practices into the mind, and mixing with the mind rather than just intellectually understanding them. On this foundation, great loving-kindness, compassion and Bodhicitta are developed. One cultivates the mind of aspiration and action Bodhicitta through these practices and makes effort in virtues until one attains the heat of wisdom. Progress is classified in four stages: realization, aspiration, greater aspiration and achievement. During the path of accumulation, twelve of the thirty-seven branches of Enlightenment are practiced. They are four types of mindfulness, four types of perfect abandonment, and four feet of miracle powers. Each of the four types corresponds to each of the Four Noble Truths. The four types of mindfulness are sustaining mindfulness of the body, feelings, the mind and phenomena. Through that, uncontrived bodhicitta is developed. There is an instinctive understanding of which acts are unskillful and one firmly establishes those that are skillful. When there is mindfulness, there is meditation; and when there is no mindfulness, there is no meditation. Mindfulness is the freeway to Enlightenment. Sustaining mindfulness of the body focuses specifically on its impermanent and composite nature – the aggregation of many factors. Thus, there is nothing to be attached to. This meditation leads to a clear understanding of the First Noble Truth – the truth of suffering – and one develops a strong wish for liberation. Sustaining mindfulness of the feelings focuses specifically on the temporary nature of the good or bad feelings. This contemplation leads to the understanding of the Second Noble Truth – the truth of the cause of suffering – which causes one to abandon desire and aversion. Sustaining mindfulness of the mind focuses specifically on its momentary nature. This contemplation leads to insight into the Third Noble Truth – the truth of the cessation of suffering – and one realizes that there is no permanent and independent self. Sustaining mindfulness of the phenomena focuses specifically on them lacking self-existence. This contemplation leads to insight into the Fourth Noble Truth – the truth of the path to the cessation of suffering. The four types of perfect abandonment are: abandoning non-virtues which have been created, not allowing new non-virtues to be produced, applying the antidotes and bringing forth virtues which have not arisen, and allowing those virtues which have arisen to increase. Through these four states of complete abandonment, selfishly motivated thoughts are no longer present. One follows every moment the course of causes and effects, and by being constantly aware of this, all one's actions become

skillful. The four feet of miracle powers are the four absorption (samadhi): the absorption of strong aspiration to attain perfect absorption, the absorption of perseverance, the absorption of the mind, that is, the realization of the inherent potential of the mind; and absorption of investigation, that is, the examination of the teachings and one's level of attainment. These four states of absorption are the main methods that support complete attainment of one-pointed concentration. One has the ability to remain in absorption at all times. Whenever one wishes to examine anything, the full power of concentration is available for use. Moreover, one never forgets any of the teachings and can see the spiritual teachers in their enlightened form.

Second, *the path of preparation or path of application*, which begins after the perfection of the path of accumulation. Sometimes, it is also called the linking path because this path links between samsara and beyond samsara. We are now preparing to free from samsara and one gets more glimpses of the understanding of emptiness - emptiness of the self and emptiness of the independent existence. There is a lot of appreciation and joy, the feeling of warmth when one hears the meaning of emptiness because the reality of the nature of emptiness is coming closer. One gets very excited when one gets a glimpse of emptiness and one becomes determined to fully actualize it. One has such confidence and devotion that one makes great effort to stabilize and organize the mind in the right place and purify all the obscurations in the mind. One makes effort to directly realize the truth - direct understanding of the profound meaning of the Dharma. One develops further by training the mind well and strengthening the power of wisdom in order to counter the afflictive emotions. By studying and familiarizing oneself through practice, with the idea that everything is interdependent and illusory, one will gain the ability to transform and subjugate all the powers of the afflictive emotions. It has four stages corresponding to the realization of the Four Noble Truths: heat, maximum heat, patience and realization of the highest worldly Dharma. First, heat, when one starts meditation practice, the "heat" of experience arises, and becomes hotter and hotter as the practice develops. At this stage, kleshas are weakened. Next, maximum heat - at this stage, extremes of nihilism and permanence are abandoned. Next, patience - at this stage, lower rebirth is assured not to happen, the fear of losing self-identity is lost and there is great capacity to

take on suffering. Finally, the realization of the highest worldly Dharma – at this stage, there is an understanding of samsara. During the stages of heat and maximum heat, five powers are practiced: the power of faith, armor-like perseverance, mindfulness on the Four Noble Truths, absorption of combined samatha and vipashyana, and wisdom awareness which enable one to examine the emptiness of the Four Noble Truths. These make up another five of the thirty-seven branches of Enlightenment. During the stages of patience and highest worldly Dharma, five strengths are practiced – the strength of faith, perseverance, mindfulness, absorption and wisdom awareness. These make up yet another five of the thirty-seven branches of Enlightenment.

The third path is called *the path of insight*. On the basis of one-pointed meditative concentration and with the support of special insight, one penetrates into the nature of the mind itself and is completely victorious in the battle with delusion and afflictive obscurations. The process of direct realization and direct experience of the all-pervading emptiness in the meditative state is called the path of insight or path of critical seeing. At this stage, one becomes an Arya and the first bhumi, which is called great joy, is attained (bhumi refers to the progression levels of a Bodhisattva's training). There is great joy because before one had to make effort to realize emptiness and now one can realize it directly. Now, one is above samsara and closer to Enlightenment, and one achieves greater qualities to benefit sentient beings. Earlier even though one had great compassion to help others but one was so limited in many ways, while now one achieves greater wisdom and acquires skillful means. Now one is free from the bond of delusion and confusion. The distinctive practice for Bodhisattvas who abide at this bhumi is on the perfection of generosity. The path of insight begins after the highest worldly Dharma, and calm abiding is the basis for special insight. This path focuses on the Four Noble Truths. Four insights, i.e. patient acceptance, continuous patience, actual awareness, and continuous discriminating awareness, all of which correspond to each of the Four Noble Truths making a total of sixteen stages. For example, the patient acceptance of the truth of suffering, the continuous patience to the truth of suffering, the actual awareness of the truth of suffering and the continuous discriminating awareness of the truth of suffering and so forth. It is called the path of insight because there one realizes the Four Noble Truths, which was not possible before. At this stage,

there are seven branches of Enlightenment. They are the perfect mindfulness branch – one never forgets virtuous conduct or the goal of Enlightenment, the perfect discrimination branch – one possesses the perfect discriminating wisdom to the direct understanding of non-self existence, the perfect perseverance branch, the perfect joy branch – non-samsaric happiness, and joy without self-grasping, the perfect relaxation branch – bliss, the perfect absorption branch and the perfect equanimity branch – one no longer experiences physical suffering and is free from the five fears, i.e. fear of not enough food or clothing, stage-fright, death, birth in the lower realms and teaching more learned people.

The fourth path is called *the path of meditation*. In order to enhance and purify all the habitual tendencies, and to dispel obstacles from the path to Enlightenment, one needs constant reminding and mindfulness. Recalling the impermanence of all phenomena dispels attachment to this life. Recalling the suffering nature of samsara dispels attachment to the pleasures of samsara. Recalling loving-kindness and compassion dispels the obstacles to one's own peace and liberation. Enhancing the practice of bodhicitta dispels ignorance about how to attain Enlightenment. To practice understanding everything as selfless and of illusory nature is the method to dispel one's grasping of phenomena as real. This manner of training is included in the path of meditation. The path of meditation begins after the realization of special insight. Through that one attains the post-meditation direct understanding of truth. It is called the path of meditation because there, one becomes familiar with the realizations that one achieved in the path of insight. There are two types of meditation, i.e. analytical meditation and stabilizing equipoise meditation. First, in the beginning, analytical meditation is important in order to achieve the stabilizing meditation. We analyze, investigate and contemplate on the impermanence, the cause of suffering, precious human life and the interdependent nature of all phenomena. After one attains this wisdom to some extent through analytical meditation, in order to achieve complete realization, one has to stabilize the stabilizing equipoise meditation. Through the equipoise meditative state, one can achieve all knowledge not just intellectually or analytically. When one can develop such a one-pointed virtuous mind in the equipoise state, one's mind is completely organized and stays in the right place. It is so powerful and in such a clear and profound state that it can

eliminate and purify all obscurations and manifest mentally infinite wisdom and compassion. One weighs virtue and non-virtue of everything and sees the value of performing virtue. The very one-pointed nature in the virtuous state during the powerful equipoise meditation allows one to realize the path of special insight and actualize the intuitive actualization of the meaning of the practices during the path of meditation. The second to tenth bhumis occur during the path of meditation. The second bhumi is described as *stainless* because one is free from the stains of immorality. The distinctive practice is on the perfection of moral ethics. The third bhumi is described as *radiant* because the appearances and absorption of Dharma are clear and the light of the Dharma radiates for others. The distinctive practice is on the perfection of patience. The fourth bhumi is described as *luminous* because two veils are burned away by the luminous light of primordial wisdom of all the branches of Enlightenment. The distinctive practice is on the perfection of perseverance. The fifth bhumi is described as *very difficult to train* because Bodhisattvas strive to mature sentient beings and they do not become emotionally involved when sentient beings respond negatively, both of which are difficult to do. The distinctive practice is on the perfection of meditative concentration. The sixth bhumi is described as *obviously transcendent* because supported by the perfection of wisdom awareness, Bodhisattvas do not abide in either samsara or nirvana, so they are obviously transcendent and beyond samsara and nirvana. The distinctive practice is on the perfection of wisdom awareness. The seventh bhumi is described as *gone afar* because it is related to the one-way path to the perfection of action. The distinctive practice is on the perfection of skillful means. The eighth bhumi is described as *immovable* because it cannot be moved by the perception of effort with signs or by the perception of effort without signs. The distinctive practice is on the perfection of aspiration. The ninth bhumi is described as *good discriminating wisdom* because those who attain it have perfect discriminating awareness. The distinctive practice is on the perfection of strength. The tenth bhumi is described as *cloud of Dharma* because one who abides in it showers the rain of Dharma like a cloud and purifies the dust of afflictive emotions of sentient beings. That is, the doors of dharani (mantra) and absorption in the Dharma pervade everything like a cloud covering the sky. The distinctive practice is on the perfection of primordial wisdom. A tenth-level Bodhisattva has such great power to effortlessly manifest activities that benefit countless sentient beings. That

bodhisatta's mind is completely dominated by unconditional, non-objectified compassion and great wisdom. Such a one is free from all fear and doubt, and has the indomitable courage and skill to benefit beings until the end of samsara. The last eight of the thirty-seven branches of Enlightenment is covered in this stage and they are known as the eight-fold path or the eight righteousness path. They are perfect view (view on emptiness that cuts the root of ignorance), perfect thought (with intention to express the understanding to others), perfect speech (giving precise teachings which are free of contradiction), perfect action (to refrain completely from non-virtue), perfect livelihood (free from the five wrong ways to acquire things: putting on an act to impress others to gain something, giving something in the hope of receiving more in return, flattery for gain, hinting for gain, making up excuses to exploit others), perfect effort (effort to abandon all inborn kleshas), perfect mindfulness (highly developed memory) and perfect absorption (use of samadhi to attain the clairvoyance of Buddha). Through perfect speech, action and livelihood, one brings others to a strong conviction to Dharma. Perfect effort, mindfulness and absorption are the opponents to kleshas.

The last path is called *the path of complete perfection*. At the final state, the Bodhisattva does such powerful meditation that none of the negative thoughts can penetrate to create obstacles. When one completely purifies and uproot all the subtle obscurations through the vajra-like absorption, the all-pervading primordial wisdom blossoms. When one realizes this level, there is nothing more to dispel and nothing to add. It transcends all the conceptions of duality and actualizes the primordial mind as such. The total wisdom is fully awakened. At this state, one attains the bhumi of Buddhahood. This is called the path of perfection or the path of no-more-learning. Buddha possesses two types of primordial wisdom - the primordial wisdom of actualizing and penetrating into the nature of all phenomena, and the wisdom of knowing all types of knowledge. The state of omniscience is attained.

The above discussion lays out the complete path on how to totally purify and uproot the causes of suffering and to attain Enlightenment. Of particular importance is the study and practice of Bodhicitta (the mind of Enlightenment). This mind embraces the universal loving-kindness, wisdom

and compassion to all sentient beings and no one is neglected. We do not have any enemy. This gives us every comfort, inspiration, courage and mental power to go through whatever difficulties we face in order to purify all our obscurations and to reveal the true nature of all phenomena. Everybody admires and appreciates those who possess that mind no matter who they are. Everybody would like to stay close to them, even animals feel calm and peace. So, it becomes the source to harmony and peace. Buddhist or non-buddhist has to practice Bodhicitta in order to achieve peace and harmony in their mind because it is universal. We are grown up out of the kindness of father, mother, brothers and sisters. If we are not grown up under such kind of conditions, our mind is damaged. It is therefore very important for us to make effort, plant and let grow those qualities in our own mind. This is the wealth that we can accumulate life after life. Ordinary wealth that we have in this life we cannot carry with us. When we die, we have to go with empty hands. So cultivating the Bodhicitta mind is the best investment and the best way of making effort in this life. It is such a best friend, the best friend that we can find in our lives who give us comfort and strength. So, we have to make effort no matter what it takes. We practice joyfully, feeling fortunate to have the opportunity and with contentment. Contentment means that we work hard, make effort as much as we can without expectation, then whatever result or achievement we have, we accept, rejoice and appreciate. We always explore opportunities to improve. Simply resenting the result or doing things with expectation would only bring obstacles and suffering. We make effort anyway, so why not make effort to create the causes of peace and joy for ourselves and for others in this life and the lives after. At this moment, we may not have the ability to help others but at least we generate this altruistic thought. First, we generate and practice that thought in our own mind. Then step by step when we have achieved some good qualities, we share with others as much as we can both for the welfare of others and for our own progress. The journey on the path may be long, but when we gradually see that our negative thoughts, and negative, afflictive emotions are becoming less and less powerful and the mind is becoming clearer and we are more sincere to ourselves and others, then we are progressing on the path. Step by step without expectation, practice with patience, confidence, devotion and perseverance, sooner or later, all our obscurations and the causes of suffering will be exhausted. It is just a matter of time.

Meditation

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There are many different understandings of the subject meditation. Some people think that to meditate is simply to close the eyes, think of nothing and totally empty the mind in order to have some mental relief from their problems. Of course, unless one is totally enlightened, everybody, even the most successful businessman or politician has some problems or negative thoughts in the mind. Buddhist meditation practice is a special technique to eliminate negative thoughts or confusion in the mind -- not just a temporary relief. Meditation practice needs not to be religious, nor to be confined to sitting meditation. In fact, you can meditate anywhere, any time, or all the time. The great yogi Milarepa said, "I meditate while I am walking, I meditate while I am eating, I mediate while I am sitting, I wish every sentient being can do this." Meditation means to be here and now with your mind. Most of the energies or thoughts are spent on what we have done in the past and what we shall do in the future. As a result, we cannot concentrate on whatever we are doing at that single moment, whether reading a book or saying prayers.

When we meditate, be here with our mind. Body should be where the seat is and mind should be where the body is. The mind should be relaxed. Relax means to be here at this moment. When the mind is in the present moment, it is very effective. No matter whether we are reading or planning, we will be able to understand or organize everything very precisely. In Buddhist philosophy, the ultimate goal of meditation is to totally free ourselves from the suffering of samsara and to attain enlightenment. Great mental capacity and confidence are needed in order to achieve that. Analytical meditation and mind-stabilizing meditation (samatha meditation) are two very fundamental and helpful meditation methods that can be practiced by anybody.

To do analytical meditation is to analyze and to investigate how things function universally. First, meditate on the precious human life. It is precious because it has every possibility and opportunity to transcend and purify all the negative thoughts, delusion and to attain the complete quality

of enlightenment. There are individuals who feel so depressed and hopeless that they cannot do anything. Depression creates great obstacles for our well being and happiness. In order to overcome that we look at the supreme qualities and possibilities of the human brain and human life. The presence of the Buddha nature and the seed of enlightenment pervade every single sentient being, in particular human beings. Since this seed of great quality is within us, if we make enough effort, have great dedication and patience, we can definitely be able to totally free ourselves from the suffering of samsara and attain enlightenment. It is just a matter of time. So rejoice and appreciate such an opportunity. The precious human life is the vehicle, the primary cause for attaining Buddhahood. The contributory cause to achieve this excellent quality is having the spiritual master to help us to understand and guide us along the path.

Second, meditate on the impermanent nature of all phenomena. We need to make great effort ourselves. Revealing from within us, the impermanent, transitory and momentary nature of all phenomena. On the one hand, it may seem depressing since we are constantly aging. When we are especially attached to something, we do not want it to change, but things change anyway without our choice, so it seems depressing. On the other hand, it provides such a great positive opportunity. Just because everything can be changed, every negative thought can be purified, every bad habit can be removed. When we are depressed, we feel that things are so concrete and cannot be changed so there is not much hope left. At this moment, just think of impermanence, things are subject to change. It is just a matter of time. We are all living within impermanence whether we are aware of it or not. Therefore, do not attach to the past, or anticipate the future. Past is past, everything is transitory and momentary in nature. Grasping and craving for the past would not bring benefit at this moment. Similarly, future has not come yet so there is no need to anticipate. Here, right at this moment, work as sincerely and diligently as we can. Whether we are experiencing happiness or suffering, it is just at this moment. At the next moment, it becomes just a recollection of the past or a memory. The clock is ticking every moment, and even our grasping and attachment to the past itself are also passing away. Not a single moment can stay in one single moment so just see that nature and meditate in this way.

Milarepa, a great Tibetan yogi, always meditated on impermanence. This great yogi had to often move from place to place and at that time his only food was nettles. Since he needed a clay pot to cook the nettle, he carried a clay pot with him wherever he went. One day, he walked from one place to another and on the way, he tripped over a rock and the pot broke. He was then totally awoken by the power of impermanence. The pot was the only thing he had and it broke there. It symbolizes that every composite phenomenon is transitory in nature and anything can happen at any moment. He related particularly to this precious human life which is so fragile. The life force of sentient beings is impermanent like a bubble. No one knows when one will die. So he said to himself, "If I work for meaningless worldly things or activities for this lifetime, I will be unable to pass beyond the causes for suffering. Now I must make greater effort to practice the Dharma." The breaking of the pot gave him such a powerful teaching and reinforced his practice on impermanence greatly.

There was once a great master who did his meditation in a cave. In front of the cave grew a big bush that caused him great difficulty to walk in and out of the cave. "It is so difficult to get out, maybe I should cut the bush," he thought. "But I am already out so why cut the brush? After all, I may not have time to get in, so what is the use of cutting the bush?" When he came into the cave, he said to himself, "This bush caused me great difficulty to get in, may be I should cut the bush. But now I am already in, I may not have time to go out so what is the use of cutting the bush?" So he meditated in this way. By the time when he achieved enlightenment, the bush was still there. Other people may think that he was so lazy, he could not take care of the bush which caused him great difficulty, but for him the bush provided him great opportunity to practice mindfulness and impermanence.

Third, meditate on the interdependent nature of every phenomenon. Everything is constituted as a result of causes and conditions. Because of that, every phenomenon arises in the relative state, conventional state. Let us look into our mind and see how we perceive a person. When you have a wonderful friend, even if he / she makes a substantial mistake, you do not mind. You would say, "That is okay. It happens to everybody." You still think that that person is wonderful. However, suppose you have changed the perception and he /she becomes your enemy, now no matter what that

person does, you would not like it at all. Even if that person does wonderful things, you would still not accept it. The relative or conventional state of an outer phenomenon does not exist independently. Rather it is just the projection of our mind. Everything is momentary, insubstantial with no essence. Thus believing that the outside object is something real and concrete, and attaching to it lead us to suffering. In fact, it is just a label that we put on it in order to relate to it conveniently. There is nothing to attach to or hate. Since everything is in a relative and interdependent state, friend or enemy arises when certain causes and conditions are present. Therefore, there is no absolute friend or absolute enemy. The projections of our mind, the habitual attachment to such projections arise as the reactions (or the ripening of the fruits) of whatever actions we have done previously. Therefore, in order to free ourselves from suffering and break the streams of continuity of our habitual patterns, it is very important to eliminate all non-virtuous actions and perform as much virtuous actions as we can. On the basis of that, in order to purify the delusion of our mind and to bring out the seed of enlightenment, meditating on loving kindness and compassion to every sentient being, including small insects, is helpful. The altruistic thought, thought of enlightenment, the desire to attain complete enlightenment for the benefit of every sentient being is such a precious marvelous thought that it transcends every negative thought into the golden path of enlightenment. Gradually, we would see everyone as our friend or our close relative. Thus the causes of suffering due to anger and hatred would be reduced and are replaced by peace, joy and harmony.

Fourth, meditate on loving kindness and compassion. The meaning of practicing loving kindness and compassion to every other sentient being is the special thought, the mind that has the desire for everyone to have happiness and the causes of happiness. Just examine how we treat our best friend or our own child. We naturally would like them to have all the happiness. Therefore, we create the causes for bringing happiness to them. We would like to support them as much as we can. Just like parents send their children to school wanting them to have a good education and a good future. In the same way, look at all other sentient beings, they also desire to have happiness and the causes of happiness. There is no difference. Meditate on compassion means cultivating the genuine desire for every sentient being to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering. Examine

how we treat our close friend. When that person suffers, we do everything to try to free that person from suffering. When that person is free from suffering, we feel so happy. In the same way, consider all other sentient beings, everyone would like to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering. So cultivate loving kindness and compassion to all sentient beings in this way. Some people think that love and compassion mean that we have to give away something immediately or we have to sacrifice yourself to every individual. It is not necessary. We can cultivate that in our mind wherever we are, at home or in the office. The moment we develop such thought, peace and harmony arise. So for your own benefit, that mind is crucial. In contrast, when we have hatred or anger, there is no peace, no harmony. At that time, forcefully cultivate loving kindness and compassion to the person who makes us miserable or who irritates us so much, and genuinely wish that person to have all the happiness and be free from all suffering. This is an effective method of uprooting our ignorance due to hatred or anger. Just change our attitude: instead of thinking that the person should have all bad things, wish that person to have all the happiness and be free from all suffering. The moment when we meditate sincerely in this way, there is great peace and joy. We can achieve this in our mind, it has nothing to do with Buddhist or non-Buddhist. There are many life stories of great masters who used this meditation method to transform all negative thoughts into positive thoughts. It is very precious. It is a source of wisdom, peace, happiness and confidence that arise within us. We may say that we cannot cultivate loving kindness, compassion to that person because we hate that person, however, there is no benefit of hating at all. Hating will not give any happiness and peace, rather, it destroys our appetite, health and well being. Therefore, until we can achieve this effortlessly, we have to make effort.

Another type of meditation is the calm-abiding, stabilizing meditation or the Shamata meditation. There are many ways of doing the calm-abiding meditation. One easy and effective way to calm the mind is to watch the breath. Sit on a cushion or chair, relax and breathe normally. It is easy because we have to breathe anyway so we just need to be aware of it. Our breath and mind become inseparable. When the mind is somewhere else, just simply bring it back to the breath and meditate. There is no need to push, chase or feel upset. It is important to relax and do it without

expectations and worries. When we have high expectations wanting to achieve all the good qualities in one session, at the end of that session, we may feel depressed. There is nothing to achieve. There is no need to achieve anything. Just be yourself, relax and sit for half an hour or so. It is just a method to train to be with our mind. When thought arises, just look at it, let it go, and not attach to it. Thinking that you have no thought is itself a thought. Thought is something very subtle and can come at any time from any direction. So there is no need to cling to it or chase it. Just be aware of it. Place our mind, without consciously adopting or abandoning, in a fluid, natural state of being here and now. Be mindful in the ever-present moment and not to wander at all from this state. When we have a sinking mind during meditation, we need to uplift ourselves by, for example, moving the head more forward instead of downward, turn on some bright light or do some walking meditation. Shamata or the calm-abiding meditation is the cause as well as the result of analytical and insightful (vipasyana) meditation. It is so because without a calm mind, no matter how much we investigate, it may not do much. However, without careful investigation, doubt would arise and thus difficult to establish a peaceful mind. After practicing shamata and analytical meditation for some time, doubt or hesitation reduces. Certainty and confidence are important in order to stabilize the mind in the equipoise, meditative state during the vipasyana meditation. Without such clarity, peaceful and calm mind, there is no possibility of having a direct, intuitive realization of the nature of the mind and to enhance that realization.

On the basis of calm-abiding and analytical meditation, we expand our investigation. Gradually, our awareness increases. However, if one would like to purify all delusion, transform and purify all negative thoughts and to uproot our ignorance, it is necessary to train the mind more vigorously. In particular, we can engage in some Vajrayana Buddhist meditation practices, such as the preliminary practices (ngöndro) under the guidance of a well-qualified spiritual master and to receive empowerment (transformation) from the master. Such training helps us to purify our gross and subtle obstacles and accumulate some merit so that we will have less hindrances and more chance of success. Only through exerting the right effort can we achieve effortlessness, the natural nature, the uncontrived state. Right now, we do not know how to exert effort in the right way, therefore we will feel

exhausted easily. Vipasyana meditation (insight meditation) is a special method to uplift the mind. Special insight is needed in order to penetrate into the nature of your mind, to penetrate into the nature of the body self and the phenomenon self. Such direct insight can purify and eliminate the delusion and ignorance in our mind. The actualization and realization of special insight bring us to the first bhumi. From that point, there are ten levels of bhumis. After reaching the ten levels of bhumis, one becomes a Buddha, with the maximum ability to benefit others. The all prevailing mind, the uncontrived state cannot be perceived without meditation. It is inexpressible like the taste of honey. If you have no experience of the taste of honey at all, when you hear others talk about how sweet and delicious honey is, you would think that honey is something wonderful. When a spoon of honey is finally placed on your tongue then you can directly realize what honey is. Similarly, we can only perceive the pure mind through shamata and vipasyana meditation. Therefore, until we are free from all delusion, we have to make effort to practice and apply the practice diligently to our everyday lives. Since the habit of our laziness and delusion is so powerful, we must make extra effort to eliminate all non-virtuous actions, to increase all virtuous actions and to cultivate the enlightened mind, Boddhicitta, based on wisdom and compassion.



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