

VI

THE THIRD NOBLE TRUTH: CESSATION OF SUFFERING

Why the Third Truth is Called “Noble”

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

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

So, where does the “special” business come in? It comes in when you reach the third spiritual stage, the Path of Seeing the truth, seeing reality—emptiness. At that level, we call you a special person. The third path, the third of the five paths, is also divided into three categories: beginning, actual, and conclusion.

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

The Five Paths

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

On the **Path of Accumulation**, our major purpose is to accumulate merit. Merit is obscure language, however. We can understand it better in terms of positive karma, though technically merit and positive karma are different. Without having accumulated merit or positive karma you cannot take strong action because you

don't have capital to invest; you have nothing. Just as in ordinary life, if you don't have money, you cannot make money; if you want to make an investment, you cannot just put down your finger, you know. For that reason, the accumulation of merit is important.

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

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

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

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

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

The truth for those who have reached the Path of Seeing is not necessarily true

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

The Truth of Cessation

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

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

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

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

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

They say:

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

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

They dissolve in the sense of being dismantled.

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

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

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

Cessation means the total exhaustion of mental, physical, and emotional sufferings. At that point, are you a Buddha? No! You are only halfway through. When you have finished off all suffering, you have to replace it with something else. You replace it with joy. This doesn't mean that the individual person has to die. It doesn't mean that the person has to dismantle his or her physical body. Rather, it means that he or she has obtained freedom from suffering. That is called cessation.

So what is that exactly?

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

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

That's the definition. The cause of cessation is the practice and the path, in other

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

In the definition, the term *pung ja* is something that you want to get rid of: negativities. Every time we practice, we cut some negativity. Practice is not necessarily just saying *sadhanas* but everything we do. That's why the definition of cessation is cessation's cause, the Fourth Noble Truth. It is by exhausting suffering that you gain whatever you gain. They use the word *tah wah*. What you gain has no form but is a spiritual gain. Spiritual gain within the individual is formless; it is a mental aspect. It is cessation, and it is spiritual development.

Motivation, Action, and Conclusion

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

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

There is an example:

When Atisha, the great Indian master who brought Buddhism into Tibet, had passed away, Drom Rinpoche, his second in command, took over and went to visit all of Atisha's followers. Unlike Atisha, Drom Rinpoche was a native Tibetan. When Drom Rinpoche walked in to visit a Kadampa Geshe who had been meditating a lot, the meditator literally jumped up from his meditation seat and started prostrating to Drom Rinpoche. Drom Rinpoche looked around and noticed that the Geshe's mandala set was covered with dust. Obviously the Geshe had not done the mandala offering for a while because, while Tibet is full of dust, so much could not have settled in one day. So Drom Rinpoche asked, "What happened to this mandala? It's covered with dust!" The meditator replied, "Oh, I've been thinking for a while and I forgot." In other words, he had been meditating and forgot about making the

mandala offering. Drom Rinpoche laughed and said, “Atisha can meditate much more than you, but he never forgets to make mandala offerings.”

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

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

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

The Most Important Motivation: Bodhimind

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

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

For the benefit of all mother sentient beings one would like to attain the state of a Buddha for which one would like to listen to and practice this teaching, etc.

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

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

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

Shantideva said:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Strong Action

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

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

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

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

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

For example, in 1985 or 1986 when I went to Singapore, I was giving little talks here and there. And there was a very well known and famous kundalini teacher who had thousands of followers in Singapore. This teacher wanted to see me. Everybody told me he was very famous and blah, blah, blah, and you have to go to him. I said, "No, I'm not going to go to him." The people who brought me to Singapore said, "You have to go," and I said, "No, I'm not going, no way!" Then, finally, he wanted to come and see me. But he would only come at midnight; he didn't want to come in the

daytime. I think he didn't want anyone to see him there. So he came at midnight, wearing dark glasses and a hat.

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

Unfortunately, this wrong kundalini burning is terrible for the person going through it, and you can't do much because certain techniques have been misused. The only thing I could do was to visualize certain kinds of light and liquid from Avalokiteshvara. In the Chinese tradition, Avalokiteshvara is the bodhisattva Kuan Yin or Kuan Yin Pu Sa. So that's what I did. I visualized that through Kuan Yin, some cool light and liquid poured over him. I created a little practice for him, and he kept on acknowledging, saying in his letters that it was helping him. Whether it helped him or not, unfortunately he died. Honestly, this sort of thing happens. Dying is not necessarily bad, but dying through a wrong process of practice is bad.

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

Otherwise spiritual practice would be some "shaking business" that anybody could do. You can be given an electrical shock and that will shake you, too. Honestly, it doesn't do any good. You can take drugs, and you can get all kinds of experiences. It may help to a certain extent. Maybe you'll be able to visualize better; maybe it brings a little bit of clarity. It is possible; it depends. You people know more than I do, I hope. I had that experience only once.

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

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

By that time I realized that this was due to the effect of the drugs and I started using the experience to see how the inner central channel works and how the chakras look there. I began to focus and sort of got it. I thought, "Oh, yeah, I'm doing this. OK, why not?" That's when I saw that the channels are not really red, as described by the books. Inside they are red, but on the outside they are green. That's what I know. Maybe it's a delusion. But then, you know, the description given in the books, as well as the actual stages, is what I saw, except for the colors.

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

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

True Cessation

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

You don't know that story? Gone, go, going—the bus. A Geshe-la lives now in a nice scenic place in Los Angeles. I call him the L.A. Lama, Geshe Tsultrim Gyaltzen. About 30 years ago, he was in Sussex, England, looking after Tibetan kids, trying to teach them Buddhism. He went from Sussex to meet a friend in London. When he had to go back, he wanted to take the bus. I think he was wearing robes. He wasn't

sure whether the bus was gone yet or not, so he thought: past, present, and future, three of them, gone, go, going. So there was only a very snobbish British lady at the bus stop, and Geshe-la wanted to ask that lady whether the bus had already gone or not. So Geshe-la moved a little closer to the lady, and the lady moved back a little bit. Then he moved up a little bit more, and the lady moved further back and started looking at him. Then he suddenly said, “Busses to the Sussex, gone, go, going?” He was asking whether the bus had gone or not. The lady ran away! So that’s the gone, go, going business.

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

Besides that, if any action that you take hurts anybody—not only hurting them physically but hurting them emotionally—it is also wrong. There are two kinds of being hurt. If an individual feels hurt emotionally because it hurts his or her ego, then it’s a good and positive thing. However, if the individual is truly hurt, not just the ego being hurt, then that is a bad thing. When you truly hurt an individual, that action is called violence. The difference between violence and non-violence is another very important point here. The teaching comes from Buddha. There should not be any violent action at all, any type, any kind. If it’s violence, then more or less by virtue of the act itself, it becomes negative.

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

If you hit the police with the stick, that is definitely violence. But if you grab the

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

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

The Conclusion Is Rejoicing

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

Whenever you cut negativity, you gain something positive, just like a seesaw that children play on. When this side is heavy, that side goes up, and when that side is heavy, this side goes up. It is exactly like that. The instant you cut negativity, the positive starts going up and up and up. Finally, when all of the negativity is completely exhausted, then *rang tob je khi la meng khi pung ja pung ba ta wa che la jo wey chos so*—that particular stage of purity has been obtained and that purity is called cessation.

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

Divisions within Cessation

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

Shravakayanins (followers of *Shravakayana* or Hearers) are those who listen; they have heard Buddha's teaching and are practicing that. Pratyekayanins (followers of *Pratyekayana* or Solitary Realizers) are self-liberating practitioners.

They don't necessarily have a teacher.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Up to the arhat level, what are you cutting? You are cutting the gross level of all negativities. But what is not cut? The imprints of those negativities. The example given here is garlic and the smell of garlic. If you're chopping garlic, the garlic smells,

right? So then you clean up the garlic, throw all the garlic away, so there is no more garlic left, but still the garlic smell will be there, unless you wash nicely with soap or lemon. Until then it remains. This garlic smell is what we call the imprint. (Don't take me literally, you know.)

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

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

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

The Buddha's body has tremendous quality, tremendous. Normally, they talk about the body, mind, and speech levels. However, if a person would appear today looking like the drawing of the Buddha, with those physical attributes, we would probably be afraid and run away because there's the extra lump here [on top of the head] and all kinds of different marks.

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

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

The quality of the Buddha's mind is total knowledge. Remember the verse in the Ganden Lha Gyema: your mind quality is that it *comprehends all that is to be known*. That indicates what total knowledge means; in other words, if there is something to

be known in the past, present, or future, you will know it, all together. The Buddha's knowledge has no limits. The past is easy to know. The present is more difficult to know than the past. And the future is much more difficult to know than the past or the present. But Buddha has no limit; past, present, or future, including all the changes that take place, and what will be at any time or any place. That's what the verse means when it says *your knowledge comprehends all there is to be known*. That is, briefly speaking, the quality of cessation that we can obtain. That is our goal.

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

Questions and Answers

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

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

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

¹

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

The long food offering prayer includes several names for Buddha. *De zhin sheg pa* means “well traveled.” *Drag chom pa* is “one who has defeated all enemies,” not human enemies but rather the negativities called enemies. *Yang dag par* means “completely pure.” *Dzok pay sang gye* means “completion of total clearing and total knowledge.” *Rig pa ten chobs sun den pa ter wa ri chen pa jig ten jem*, that is “all knowing.” We also call Buddha *tam che kyen pa*, “knowing everything.” That is cessation. These are the qualities we look for.

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

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

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

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

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

If you’re doing great, we will not tell you that you are great. It doesn’t help you. Sometimes it even harms you because it will boost your ego. We won’t do that. If you’re doing bad, we won’t tell you you’re bad, but we’ll tell you, “Don’t you think you should do something differently? What do you think about it?” That’s because we

don't want to hurt you, honestly. But your discipline is your own deeds, and we are all grownups. We are all educated, intelligent, actually wonderful, brilliant people here. And if you don't know how to discipline yourselves, it's too bad. We are not in a monastery. In the monastery, a disciplinary person puffs up his dress like this and has a stick in his hand and walks up and down. We don't do that.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION/MEDITATION

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