

VII

THE FOURTH NOBLE TRUTH: THE PATH

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

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

How the Path Becomes Capable of Delivering Cessation

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

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

Out of the five paths, we are on the Path of Accumulation, most of us. If you’re on the path at all, it will be the Path of Accumulation. On the Path of Accumulation, what’s most important is the accumulation of merit. This means that even if we get on the

Path of Accumulation, we have not yet reached the level of doing anything *except* accumulating merit. This may sound depressing.

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

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

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

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

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

This is the great gift that the Mahayana carries. We know quite clearly that motivation is the first thing in the line that will lead you wherever it is going. You

know how when groups of animals are traveling across the land, one animal is the leader and every one else follows? Like that, motivation leads every good thing we do in the direction of enlightenment, even if we don't think about it. Maybe we are blind, but the blind are lead by someone who is wise, someone who has eyes, someone who sees and can lead them to the city of liberation.

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

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

People like those of us who spend a long time in dharma practice may have to think about that carefully. When you are first joining, first working, first thinking, it might not be that important. The first thing is to overcome all wrong things, and these good positive things are great. But our goal is not just simple joy or simple happiness. Every positive karma can give you the result of joy or happiness, but not every karma is capable of giving the joy that has never known suffering! For that, you probably need wisdom or a powerful motivation like bodhimind. Simple goodness may not be able to do that.

Impermanence and Wisdom

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

Normally when you talk about the path, you hear about the Noble Eightfold Path or the Twelve Interdependent Links or something like that, but the real truth is that every effort we put in, whatever we do, particularly those of us who have daily commitments, are working in the right direction. It may look like, “Oh, it is a sadhana commitment. It is something to do with a deity.” But in true reality, the sadhana is actually leading to total enlightenment, and that is the reason why we do that commitment. That is the reason why we have a positive motivation. That is the reason why we’re looking into the wisdom of whatever we’re going to bite or chew on. That’s why we deal with impermanence.

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

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

Just by raising a doubt alone you destroy samsara.

An Unconventional Fourth Noble Truth

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

Vajrayana gives you the result level at the beginning, even if we know nothing about it. We don’t even know the ABCs of dharma, but still they give you the result level as it is, because Vajrayana is the result-yana. Sometimes the gap between where I am and what I meditate and read seems to be gigantic and huge. It seems to be a huge gap, but it is not. Actually Vajrayana is a much faster way to get to that

level of understanding. It is like forcing somebody into a very difficult school where they almost cannot manage, almost pushing the person through. As long as they don't break, they go through, and when they come out, they come out a very good one. It may not be so gentle and so kind, but the essence of the sadhana, if you really look very carefully, has nothing else.

Everything, whatever you're doing, can be done that way. Your daily practice may be a sadhana, or Ganden Lha Gyema, or Lama Chopa, or whatever it is. I do not know whether our Jewel Heart Prayers can deliver [the non-dualistic level], but to a certain extent they can, because we have strong motivation and the Seven Limbs and certain mantras in there, so to a certain extent it can happen.

The Fourth Noble Truth and Daily Practice

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

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

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

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

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

So, for daily practice, whatever you do, even if you’re saying a simple OM MANI PADME HUM, even then, that should be able to become the Fourth Noble Truth. For us, the best opportunity is to bring in the motivation [of bodhimind]. The second opportunity is to bring in wisdom or at least to think about impermanence. Impermanence is tremendously effective, because when you know that everything is changing, it cuts the status quo and ego grasping.

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

You know Buddha himself said:

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

The most important imprint is the elephant imprint.

When people walk in the mud they leave footprints. The elephant leaves the biggest footprint because it has a big foot. Out of all our practices, remembering impermanence leaves the biggest impact on us. Impermanence causes us to think, “Whatever we may be thinking, at the end, this thing [death] is going to happen, right?” Thinking that makes us slightly uncomfortable, and normally this culture of ours that we created to make life comfortable doesn’t want you to think about that. But being slightly uncomfortable helps us not to have a strong attachment for or obsession about the material world. Not only that, the feeling of being slightly uncomfortable helps us to think that this life is not the end, honestly.

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

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

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

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

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

Truth.

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

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

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

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

and:

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

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

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

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

Questions and Answers

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

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

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

Rimpoche: Yeah.

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

Rimpoche: Motivation, as I've been telling you, is the thing. We are so fortunate; every text that we read or prayer we say has generating bodhimind somehow attached there. We do it so often so that it will become part and parcel of us. You know, like, "I take refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha until I obtain enlightenment . . . for the benefit of all beings." So, obtaining enlightenment is the goal and then there's bodhimind as the motivation. It's completely attached there. Every time, wherever you go, whatever you do, somehow it's there, and that is very fortunate. That's what gives us strong motivation, which is the Mahayana special quality.

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

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

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

Audience: Sometimes it seems that it's very hard to help other people if you are unhappy or miserable yourself. I've had this experience sometimes. If you are unhappy, it is difficult to generate real *bodhichitta* [bodhimind] or bodhichitta that will be effective. Also, sometimes people don't really want your help.

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

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

difficult.

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

Audience: Rimpoche, I think this is along the same lines. I was reading a book recently in which the Dalai Lama was making the distinction between two kinds of compassion. One kind of compassion that you generate is more that you "wish" — you feel someone's discomfort and you just wish within yourself to get rid of it. The other kind of compassion, I guess, is the more complete compassion where you really want to do something to help somebody else who is in distress. How do you get from that first kind of compassion to the second kind?

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

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

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

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

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

Audience: So you better dedicate right away.

Rimpoche: Better, before you get mad.

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

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

Audience: And then you go on doing it?

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

Audience: I mean helping someone else . . .

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

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION/MEDITATION

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