

2008 Seminary Transcripts Class, Berkeley Shambhala Center

Teachers: Jesse Miller, Sarah Woodard, Jeremy Anderson
Coordinator/Registrar: Kathryn Rile kathryn@pogodesign.com
Tuition: \$100 for members of any Shambhala Center

Since there are readings to complete before the first class meeting, you must register in advance. Readings will be available to registered students.

Syllabus and Readings

Class One: Ground of Hinayana - April 22

Truth of Suffering, Origin of Suffering, 3 Marks, 4 Noble Truths

1980:2 Basic Anxiety (8)
1975:4 Transcending the Lower Realms (12)
1975:6 Origins of Suffering (8)
Also a handout on 3-fold logic

Class Two: Ground of Hinayana - April 29

Karma, Realms and Nidanas, Skandas

1981:4 Mindfulness Discipline (9)
1978:6 Origins of Suffering (8)
Karma Seminar, Talk One (11)
Also a handout on the four reminders

Class Three: Path of Hinayana - May 6

Four Foundations, refuge as practice, Shamatha and Vipashyana

1975:8 The Path (13)
1979:7 Taking Refuge (7)
1979:2 Becoming a Dharmic Person (10)
Optional: Four talks on Mindfulness from 1973 (54 pages total)

Class Four: Fruition of Hinayana - May 13

Two-fold Egolessness, so-so tharpa

1979:9 Twofold Egolessness (7)
1978:10 Enlightened Genes (10)
1974:8 Open Space (6)

Class Five: Key Principles of Mahayana - May 20

Buddhanature, absolute and relative bodhicitta

1973:15 Discovery of Tathagatagarbha (10)
1980:8 Message of the Elders (7)
1980:11 Absolute Bodhicitta (7)
1980:12 Relative Bodhicitta (7)

Class Six: Practices of Mahayana - May 27

Lojong, Tonglen, paramitas

1973:16 Nonaggression and the Bodhisattva Path (17)

1975:22 Paramita Practice (14)

Optional: 1979 talks covering Lojong I-VII (57 pages)

Class Seven: Heart of Warriorship - June 3

Chapters 1 to 5, and 7, in *Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior*

Class Eight: Sacred World, Sacred Path - June 10

Chapters 6, 8-10, 16 and 17 in *Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior*

Other Handouts:

The Sutrayana Seminary Gateway exam

The Morning Liturgy for Mahayana Students (includes the Bodhisattva Vow)

TALK TWO

Basic Anxiety

WELCOME, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN. We have achieved the basic ground, or atmosphere, in which we can practice properly and listen to the dharma properly, and at this point the ground is very good. As you know, the study period is in effect from today onward. We would like to synchronize our studies with our dedication to the basic sitting practice and the oryoki discipline. They should be put together, so that we do not create any situations of schizophrenia, of taking time off or on, or anything like that. In that way we can become dharmic practitioners altogether.

Tonight I am going to discuss the headline, so to speak, of the study situation that we are just beginning. One very important point here is that, in practicing buddhadharma, we have to begin at the beginning, and we cannot bypass anything. Some of you are vajrayana students, and you might think that now that you have received the transmissions of the best vajrayana goodies, you can just capitalize on that. You look down on hinayana discipline, and you think that the facts and the original truth of buddhadharma can be ignored. You are mistaken. Some of you have received instructions from great vajrayana teachers already, and some of you are about to receive them. Nonetheless, we have to go back to the beginning. That is very important. Otherwise, you will misunderstand completely and have no way of correcting or curing yourselves.

There is no way to relate with dharma as medicine if we don't relate first with basic dharma as basic dharma. Having done that, then mahayana and vajrayana will come along naturally. We have to be genuine parents. We do not want suddenly to adopt a child who is sixty years old because we want to be the father of somebody who is already accomplished. [Laughter.] We prefer to conceive our child within our marriage. We would like to watch the birth of our child and its growth, so that finally we will have a child who is competent and good because of our training. So we have to pay attention to the basic situation, ladies and gentlemen.

The dharma is well taught by the Buddha and by the lineage. The procedures of hinayana, mahayana, and vajrayana are so well said, so well taught, that we can't go against them. If we do, we might wind up consuming terrible end products, eating excrement as the fruition [laughter], as opposed to eating food in the beginning. Ladies and gentlemen, if we misunderstand this, we are barking up the wrong tree, a terrible tree. Wanting to consume the

best vajrayana ice cream right now is not such a good idea. We have to understand that vajrayana is regarded as the final end product of the best beginning. In other words, understanding the hinayana and doing our shamatha-vipashyana discipline become very important and powerful. It is very important for us to understand that logic.

Hinayana is known as the small vehicle, the little vehicle. The analogy for that is that when we get up in the morning and get dressed, we put on shoes that fit our feet; we don't jump into shoes that are too big for us. We don't jump into a jumbo jet right away. In order to walk into the vehicle that is workable for us, the one nearest to us, or even to walk on the pathway, we have to wear shoes to walk in. That is the idea of hinayana—or a better word would be the immediate yana.

You might think that, since you have heard the hoo-hahs of the great yana and seen the miracles of this and that, you can forget your shoes and just dive into a supersonic airplane. That is wrong. You have to start from the beginning of the beginning of the beginning, once more. At least you could do a good job of being here, doing what you are doing. It is a reasonable practice that is being presented to you. It is workable and possible altogether.

The hinayana, or the immediate yana, is very practical, very pragmatic. It begins with the truth of suffering: that we all suffer. We discussed that already in the orientation talk, but I wouldn't mind reiterating. The notion of pain refers to the anxiety that we all possess. Furthermore, you might rediscover that anxiety again and again. During your ten days of sitting practice, you have rediscovered your own pain and anxiety. You have found that you are constantly wanting to slip into a higher level of practice, which might be the transcendental chewing gum. [Laughter.] But it doesn't quite work on the zafu. It is impossible to chew gum and sit on the zafu at the same time! In fact, that's against our policy. [Laughter.] Samsaric misery, the misery of samsara, consists of the basic anxiety that we find in our neighborhood, in our immediate surroundings. Whether it is connected with our relatives, our best friends, our world, or our particular job—wherever we look, basic anxiety is always there.

Our personal basic anxiety is what stops us from cleaning our oryoki bowls. That basic anxiety stops us from folding our shirts properly. That basic anxiety stops us from combing our hair properly. That basic anxiety prevents us from having a decent life altogether. We are distracted by it, and we are constantly hassled by it. There are also other hassles involved, all the time—whether they are sociological, scientific, domestic, or economic. Basic anxiety of that type is very painful and always present. Every day seems to be different; nonetheless, every day seems to be exactly the same. There is that kind of outstanding basic anxiety taking place in our everyday life, all the time. The minute we wake up and look around, we might think of coffee, or food, or of taking a shower. The minute those preoccupations are overcome or accomplished, the minute we have had our coffee or our breakfast, we realize that the basic anxiety is still there. That basic anxiety is always there, hovering, haunting us throughout our entire life. Even though we might be extremely successful, or so-called successful, at whatever our endeavors might be, still basic anxiety is always there. We are always anxious about something or other, which we can't actually put our finger on, but it is always there.

According to tradition, basic anxiety is categorized into the three types of dukkha, or suffering. Everybody here probably knows them already. There is natural, all-pervasive basic suffering, or pain; the suffering of change; and the suffering of suffering, which is one

suffering on top of another. All-pervasive suffering is basic discomfort. The suffering of change means that while you are enjoying a little pleasure, something else interrupts that. The suffering of suffering means that when you are suffering already, then something else drops into your life which makes you even more irritated and creates even more suffering. We have to understand that the basic samsaric situation is based on anxiety of those three types.

Out of that realization of basic anxiety and suffering, we see our pain as it is, which is a tremendous help. Ordinarily, we don't even see our suffering. We are so wrapped up in it that we don't even think we're suffering at all. We are swimming in oceans of ice water of anxiety, and we don't even see that we are suffering. That is the most fundamental stupidity of all. At least, we as buddhists have realized that we are suffering. We realize that anxiety is taking place. We have been told that such a thing does exist, and because of that, we begin to realize that there is a possibility of salvation.

First of all, you have to develop some sense of deliverance from that particular pain and anxiety. You have to be very practical about that: you are going to do something about anxiety. On a personal level, a very personal level, you are going to do something about that. One of your alternatives is to give up your scheme of what you ideally want in your life. Pleasure, enjoyment, happiness—give up those possibilities altogether. In turn, you can try to be kind to others. This does not necessarily mean going out of your way, but it simply means cutting out inconveniencing others. Your existence might cause pain to somebody: just try to stop causing that pain. Relate with your own existence by making sure that if you find that your anxiousness and your desire are comfortable, you question that perspective.

The main thing is to realize that you do have that anxiousness in your being. You might be a great scholar and know the buddhist path from top to bottom, including all the terminology, but still you are suffering from yourself: still you experience that basic anxiousness. Look into that—that is the basic point. We are not talking about an antidote or how to overcome the anxiety; the first thing is just to see that you are anxious. In some sense it is like teaching your grandmother to suck eggs. [Laughter.] On the other hand, you have to realize and understand samsara. You are in samsara, and you actually have to realize that.

Before that, before you have been taught about samsara, you have no idea where you are. You are so absorbed in it that there is no reference point. Now that we are providing some reference point, look at what you are doing, and look at where you are, what you are in the midst of. That is a very important message. That is the beginning of the best enlightened message that could ever come about, even at the vajrayana level. We might talk about the nonduality of samsara and nirvana, or fundamental wakefulness, or the flash of instantaneous liberation—but whatever we might talk about is concentrated in this very, very ordinary message: you have to review where you are.

It might be a somewhat depressing prospect to realize that you are so thoroughly soaked in this greasy, heavy, dark, and unpleasant thing called samsara, but that understanding, that realization, is tremendously helpful. That understanding alone is the source of understanding Buddha in the palm of your hand, or any such vajrayana possibilities. The possibility of vajrayana begins at this point, right here, in realizing your samsaric anxiousness. That anxiety, which is very frustrating, and not so good, is the key to realizing where you are.

The only way to work with that anxiety is the sitting practice of meditation, which is the taming of your mind. That is the basic idea of *pratimoksha*, or the monastic discipline: taming

yourself. The way to tame yourself is to talk yourself out of that particular type of anxiety, through the concentrated practice of shamatha discipline. The beginning of the beginning of the path of buddhadharma is related with how you can actually save yourself from samsaric neurosis. You are not up to saving others yet, so you have to be very careful and pragmatic at this point.

I hope everybody respects that this is *the* dharma which was taught by the Buddha. You might say, “Well, I have understood all sorts of ways to become a tantric practitioner. I might be able to perform miracles of all kinds.” But that approach is wrong. If you think that way, you have disrespect for the basic dharma, and therefore you are an outcast altogether. If you don’t relate with basic hinayana practice completely, you are not worthy of listening to vajrayana. It doesn’t matter what your background or your upbringing is, or whether you have read this and that book, *The Life and Teachings of Naropa*, *The Ocean of Songs of the Kagyü Gurus*, or whatever you might have read. I’m sure you have read lots of this “junk.” [Laughter.] It doesn’t make any sense to you, and you are not worthy of it—if I may say so, with my humble duty.

You have to become straight buddhists, good buddhists, at this point. In order to do that, you have to respect what Buddha did: his own tradition, style, and teachings. Ladies and gentlemen, you have to cop to this particular hinayana discipline: otherwise, we cannot teach you anything at all. Otherwise, it will be impossible for you to be students; you will suddenly become deaf and dumb. If you don’t have a basic foundation of hinayana, when we begin to talk about even the mahayana level and the possibilities of benevolence, you won’t know who is being benevolent to what. No matter if you have received darshans from His Holiness Karmapa, or met trillions of siddhas in the past few days [laughter], or few years, or had great revelations of this and that and everything—so what?

You have to stick with what you have, and that is the fact that your body, speech, and mind are in pain. And at this point, with due respect, I don’t see any saints arising here. Maybe later, but not now. [Laughter.] You are all trapped in samsaric neurosis—without exception, all of you. [Laughs; laughter.] And that is good. In that way you can actually work on the dharma properly. It is best that you work with reality, rather than with ideals of any kind. Thank you. If you have questions, you are welcome.

QUESTION: When I was a sort of baby buddhist—I am still a baby, but then I was a baby, baby buddhist—I was talking to my friend about buddhism and basic suffering. And he said, “Well, I have a brother-in-law who is a surgeon and he does a good job. He tries to help people,” and so on. I was sort of speechless. My friend was quite serious. I didn’t know how to talk about basic suffering to this guy.

VAJRACARYA: Because he was successful?

Q: The problem wasn’t particularly that the brother-in-law was successful. What my friend was trying to convey was that his brother-in-law was doing a good job, you know, helping people, doing the things he should do.

V: Well, there is always a problem with that. Sometimes they themselves, the good-doers, break down. They realize that their endeavor is so monumental and gigantic that they can’t keep up with it, and they break down. You find a lot of people like that in England, actually.

[Laughter.] They are such fantastic people, and then suddenly you find them hanging themselves in a cellar. [Laughter.]

Q: But this guy wasn't that type. From the picture I got, he was more the ordinary Jewish doctor type. [Laughter.] He wasn't going to hang himself. [Continuing laughter.]

V: Sure. Well, basically, I think there's no problem.

Q: But how could I tell my friend about basic suffering?

V: A person has to express his pain. Basic suffering is pain, and someone actually has to say that. It is not polite conversation; it is serious conversation: there is pain.

Q: Okay. In other words, I should shut up at that point.

V: Yes, maybe. And maybe you could bring him around in a different situation. Maybe you should create a pleasurable situation for him, like inviting him to your home and giving him a good dinner. He could enjoy himself, and then he could afford to talk about his pain.

Q: In other words, seduce him to death. [Laughter.]

V: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: Thank you.

Q: Rinpoche, I have a question about the idea of giving up the scheme of an ideal life and the possibilities of salvation. It seems that we could practice for fifty years and—

V: We have practiced for 2,500 years.

Q: Okay, 2,500 years. But it doesn't seem that alone would—

V: That's not enough?

Q: It doesn't seem so, at least to me personally.

V: Well, you have to go much deeper.

Q: It seems that there's a decision that needs to be made.

V: Yes, absolutely. That is what we call taking the refuge vow. That is the decision-making.

Q: Well, I took refuge, but I still feel like a coward.

V: Well, your decision has been made already. [Laughter.]

Q: [Laughs.] How did I miss it? [Laughter.]

V: You didn't miss it, but maybe you're a coward. There is a difference between missing the point and being a coward. Being a coward is very intelligent. That is why you are so cowardly. If you missed it, if you hadn't heard anything, you would just say, "What refuge vow? I never took any refuge vow." [Laughter.] You forget the vow. But if you are a coward, you say, "Oh, yes, I took the refuge vow. But now what?" [Laughs; laughter.] That's an expression of intelligence.

Q: Well, maybe there's a second decision. I mean, it seems that—

V: What? [Laughter.]

Q: It just seems that in my practice there's a constant attempt to find safe ground.

V: Safe for what?

Q: Safe from the un-ideal world, or that which is—

V: What do you mean, un-ideal world?

Q: This, I suppose.

V: What?

Q: That . . . that is . . . it's [Vajracarya laughs; student laughs; laughter.] Yes, I see. Okay. Thank you very much, Rinpoche. [Continuing laughter of Vajracarya and students.]

Q: Sir, I can't help but notice that you're wearing a Zen *rakusu* [biblike garment worn by ordained Zen students]. [Laughter.] Is there any particular significance in that?

V: I think it is like wearing a monk's robe. It was presented to me by Maezumi Roshi, and he actually bothered to have "Chögyam Trungpa" written in English on the inside. [Vajracarya turns *rakusu* over to show the back side; laughter.] The *rakusu* represents the monastic possibilities and the sense of mindfulness. When you hold your hands together, you don't do it overtly; you aren't an exhibitionist. Instead, you hold your hands underneath the *rakusu*, which shows respect for monastic discipline and also shows our appreciation of the Buddha—that we still respect him a lot, in spite of our suits and ties. [Laughs.]

Q: Rinpoche, you said that the main point was to realize that basic anxiousness is in our being. Yesterday I was reading seminary transcripts, and I came across a passage in which you said that we yearn for pain. Experientially, I understand that I'm anxious, and that there is anxiousness happening all the time. But in terms of yearning for pain, it doesn't seem like that is actually what I do, or what we do.

V: Of course we do, of course we do, all the time. We yearn to cure our anxiety, our anxiousness, and so we look for another potential pleasure, which in itself is pain.

Q: But aren't we yearning for pleasure rather than yearning for pain?

V: Well, that particular pleasure *is* painful. Whenever we look for pleasure, it is always painful—painfully pleasurable, always. Without fail, we always do that. We always look for something supposedly pleasurable, and the end result is completely painful. We have been doing that all along. That is the ill-logic or the bad logic of samsaric existence altogether.

Q: So when you say that we yearn for pain, is that the same thing as saying that we have a tendency towards pain?

V: Yes. As far as our idea of pleasure is concerned, we look for pain which will produce pleasure—all the time, in any way that you can think of. Suppose you became rich. Suppose you became a millionaire. You would collect a lot of anxiety about losing your money. Because you are a millionaire, therefore you are even more anxious. Things like that happen all the time. You have a good meal with fantastic bread and cheese, or a good hamburger, and you are afraid of losing that. You want to eat your food on the spot, right away, so that you won't lose that good meal.

That kind of animal instinct arises in us all the time, all the time. That is the instinct of the lower realms which exists in the human situation: regarding pleasure from the point of view of pain. Otherwise, if you didn't have a reference point, you couldn't actually enjoy anything. You might say, "I got this bottle of wine for \$3,000." (Let's exaggerate.) [Laughter.] "\$3,000. This is such good wine, and blah blah blah. It's aged, and everything. And because of the pain of paying all this money, I got this bottle of wine. Very painfully, I paid for it. I spent my \$3,000 on this bottle of wine. Now let us have a good occasion." But it is also a painful occasion: what if somebody doesn't appreciate his sip of wine?

This kind of thing goes on all the time, always. In fact, we call it "nouveau riche samsara." [Laughter.] Samsara is nouveau riche, from that point of view. It is crazy and stupid and makes it unnecessary to raise your dignity at all. [Laughs.]

Q: Sir, how do you deal with discipline without having the expectation of creating something that is comfortable or something that is ideal? For instance, in the discipline of oryoki, isn't there a sense of trying to attain some sort of ideal thing?

V: I don't think so. You see, in the oryoki situation, the fruition and the process are one. I find the same thing to be true with flower arranging: the arrangements are dismantled after a few hours, and nobody regards them as monumental works of art. It is just a one shot deal. They are created beautifully, and at the same time, they're transitory. They come, and then they're gone—which gives us more confidence about how we can actually relate with them. Hopefully, if you were going to build a city, you wouldn't have as a centerpiece in the middle of the city square a sculpture of somebody doing oryoki. Hopefully, you wouldn't do that. [Laughter.] The most famous oryoki-ist in the whole country, the whole nation—that would be terrible. [Laughter.] That would be really terrible.

Q: So it's the element of impermanence.

V: Well, you have art, which is accomplished and understood and used pragmatically. It happens on the spot.

Q: But what about the ordinary discipline of picking up after ourselves? How do you do that without creating a heavyhanded attitude?

V: There's no "how." There's no "how." Just do it, just go ahead, sweetheart. Just do it. You can do it. [Laughter.]

Q: I don't know how. It seems—

V: It doesn't have to be monumental.

Q: Well, in my experience, it seems that discipline actually creates more problems than—

V: No, not as long as you are pragmatic enough. Just do it on the spot; then there's no problem. It's like a cough: if you want to cough, you don't ask somebody else to cough for you; you just cough. You just cough or sneeze. That's it. That way everything is clean. You might have to use a kleenex to burst out into. But the kleenex is just there to catch the product, or the accomplishment, of your cough or sneeze, which is good.

Well, at this point maybe we should close. Hopefully, you will be able to join in eating oryoki breakfast, as well as your good lunch, and a nice western-style meal in the evening. I

would like to request you to maintain some kind of decorum throughout this study session. What we are trying to do here overlaps with the previous seminars and in many cases goes a step farther. We have had orientation, and we have our oryoki practice, and our sitting practice has been quite disciplined altogether. At this point, as we enter the study period, the issue arises of how much we can relax or not relax. The idea is that your study and classes could be regarded as a good reference point for learning how to listen to the teachings properly and fully. Also, please take part fully in the oryoki discipline. If you can do so, that would be very good.

I have tremendously high hopes for all of us here. We have had a good beginning, and we have hit it off with each other, so to speak, famously already. I have tremendous faith and respect for all of you, and I think we can hit it off even more famously. [Laughter.] It has been working, and it feels good. Thank you.

Transcending the Lower Realms

Tonight I would like to discuss the same general theme, basic buddhism. But at the same time this particular vision has to be categorized as hinayana discipline. So tonight we are discussing hinayana, basically. Last night we discussed the yana principle as the vehicle you are in. From that point of view the definition of *hina* is “lesser,” or “small;” and the definition of *maha* is “great” or “big.” According to Jamgön Kontrul and his commentaries on that, these descriptions refer not so much to the size of the vehicle alone, but to what the vehicle is capable of carrying. For instance there are 8-cylinder cars and 6-cylinder cars, which have different amounts of power. So the hinayana or the lesser vehicle is probably somewhat comparable to a 6-cylinder engine. It is much more than a bicycle or motorcycle, basically it is a motorcar which has a 6-cylinder engine. And on a utilitarian basis, it is very compact and easy to park. It does not take too much gasoline and you can zip in and out quite easily. Nevertheless, if you get on the highway you may not have enough power to speed along as much as you want. So the interesting point is that the hinayana is a slowing-down process. But you are still taking a journey on the spot, in some sense. And you do not become too ambitious, taking a big load or taking too many passengers in your vehicle, since your engine is so limited in power. So you are reduced into being very definite and precise.

The idea of the hinayana approach is trying to prevent any possibilities of frivolity. There is nothing frivolous in the hinayana approach. Everything is very direct and precise. That seems to be the basic point of hinayana. It is the straight and narrow path. And to begin with, everything has its own reference point in terms of how much energy is involved. That hinayana style of approach is always present—throughout the nine yantras. You cannot display your frivolity in any

case. There has to be some kind of hinayana mentality carrying through, continuing throughout the nine yana journey. So when we discuss hinayana we are discussing the notion of the absence of frivolity, which plays an extremely important part in the entire buddhist path. Rather than a cheap car, or a small scale approach, or an unvisionary experience, we are talking about something which is highly practical and critical of situations, and which continues throughout the entire journey. Therefore there is a need for a lot of reverence and respect for the understanding of the hinayana in general.

Within the hinayana discipline or approach, there are general categories. The three ideas of discipline or morality, meditation or samadhi, and prajna or knowledge exist throughout the hinayana. And hinayana discipline is directed towards transcending the six realms, including the realm of the gods. Basically the six realms are six states of experience or patterns of experience: the realm of hell, the hungry ghost realm, the animal realm, the human realm, the jealous gods' realm, and the realm of the gods, who dwell on their appreciation. The hinayana is directed towards transcending all those ego-trippings, transcending all those particular fixed conceptual ideas.

For instance there is the idea of transcending the realm of the gods, devaloka. The general attitude that gods have is that they have created the universe for humanity, or other once-living beings. And the idea is to try to transcend that type of pioneer's mentality. If you are associated with the realm of the gods, you are associated with someone who is a pioneer of this particular world, beginning with Adam and Eve and gardens and apples and snakes and all the rest of it — the guilt and pride elements of the whole thing. I am not particularly making a mockery of those wisdoms. However, according to the buddhist approach they seem to be somewhat cheap. I have to say such a thing at this point, I'm afraid. It is not I doing it, but the dharma is telling me to do so. So there is some sense of cheapness, a little bit of cheapness.

If we are the makers of the world, if we have produced it, if we are the instigators of the passions of the world and the aggressions of the world, we do not particularly want to take the blame for it or to throw the blame on anybody. So we begin to throw our blame on the devil, which is another kind of god at that point. So we get very complicated. And, of course, buddhism says that confusion has to be dispelled and that there should be some realization beyond confusion. But we are not referring to confusion and the fall of man as an act of the devil. In buddhism, confusion is just somebody's mistake, basically. Nobody instigated this downfall in the form of two guys working against each other, one called a devil, and one called God, with God trying to push his trip and the devil doing likewise. This subject is not a laughing matter, actually. It is a very deep-rooted kind of problem that exists for a lot of Westerners. The Western audience for buddhism is basically bound by that theistic philosophy, that theistic makeup.

So we have to make our ground extraordinarily clear when we begin to present our understanding of buddhism to the West. We have to be very clear. We have to understand our territories, our levels of understanding and our reference points. At this point that reference point seems to be based on the idea of transcending the highest ideals of the human mind completely, which is called enlightenment. That is why it has been said that you cannot watch your own

burial. Once you dissolve, once your particular expectations dissolve, that is liberation, freedom, enlightenment. So we cannot congratulate ourselves on becoming the first buddha of the age or the first buddha of New York.

In the hinayana, the entire discipline is based on trying to get out of samsara, samsara from top to bottom, bottom as the realm of hell and top as the realm of the gods—or God, for that matter. We should probably use the singular God at this point, judging from the background and history of the audience. So we are talking about how to transcend, how to relate with life within the six realms. And how we are going to transcend is by the teachings and doctrines of the hinayana tradition.

How are we going to do that? Well, a lot of suggestions have been made. The basic suggestion is discipline, which falls into three categories: morality or ethics, meditation or contemplation, and knowledge. Knowledge, in this sense, is the understanding that takes place in the situation of awareness, which is related to the sitting practice of meditation. It is how to see our particular view of the world as it is. The discipline of meditation is based on cutting through unnecessary neurosis. It is seeing through our game of holding back and trying to maintain our particular ego trip. And the discipline of morality is keeping a code of behavior that is largely based on the idea of awareness or mindfulness. We follow a certain code of behavior that exists. The popular notion is that such codes are based on the idea of not committing aggressive crimes to harm somebody else, that is, not taking people's lives or other sentient beings' lives. That basically seems to be it.

Having followed those three disciplinary processes completely and having already developed discipline, then it is important to realize how we are going to view our world from the point of view of the path or the journey itself or the doctrine. In this regard, we have the four marks of livelihood, or the four marks of view, actually. These are views of life. So they are slightly different from the four marks of existence. When we talk about the four marks of existence we are talking in terms of the samsaric nature of selves. But when we talk about the four marks of view we are talking about how to take an attitude towards the phenomenal world, which is a slightly different take. It obviously comes down to us from our doctrine, teaching, scriptures, and everything. So those four marks are impermanence, suffering, egolessness, and nirvana. We do not have an English word for nirvana and we better not try too hard to come up with one.

The definition of impermanence is that things which exist in our life or in our experience are impermanent because they are put together, that is they are composite. Take this carpet under your seat. Once it was put together out of different colors, green and beige and red all put together—which makes up this rug. Since it was put together already, it is subject to decay sooner or later.

There is no such thing as eternal craftsmanship. So far as we know there is no such thing at all. And likewise, we could expand our vision to include all things. Every existing article, including our own body is also composite and is subject to decay. Not only is it subject to decay but it is decaying every minute. Every minute we are getting gray hair, although it may not be particularly visible. Every minute our mechanical body is getting much older and older and older and it is beginning to wear out. And every minute the building that we are sitting in is

getting older and older and it is in the process of collapsing. And whatever we do in our life, there is always the possibility that everything is not going to last as long as we expected. We clean up our dining room table, clean up our dishes, and try to make things as if they were new each day. Every meal is presentable. But at the same time, it is all getting older each time, all the time. Every minute we use the ballpoint pen to take our notes, it is getting older and running out of fluid. And our notebooks are getting older because we are using up every page. Not only that, but the pages themselves are decaying as well. And the hand that we use to write our notes is also getting old and approaching death constantly. Not only that, but the brain that we are using is also very much decaying and is less functional every minute, every second, all the time. Not only that, but our mind, which makes use of our brain to write down notes in the notebook is also questionable. Our mind is trying to relate with the behavior patterns in our brain—which is wearing out all the time. So our mind begins to get worn out all the time in accordance with that. So there are continual possibilities of death and impermanence existing in our everyday life.

We might appreciate having bought a new car and how great or how functional it is. But each time we drive our new car, it is on the way to its own junkyard, as we know—particularly modern cars. Each day when we are taking a shower, we think we are getting cleaner and younger and making ourselves look more beautiful. We shave our beard or put on our hairdo or whatever. But actually we are one skin closer to death. When we take our shower, we shed another skin and rinse it away with the dirt. So we are uncovering the next possible skin growing on our body, which is an old-aged one. This is taking place all the time. So whatever is composite or put together is always subject to death. That is the basic truth. In this case, the truth did not come from divine sources, according to buddhism. I should remind us again and again and again that this truth never came from a revelation from God and it has nothing to do with Moses, for that matter. But at this point, the revelation is self-evident, all the time. If we shave more things or shed more things we could say that we are growing more things out of that. Nevertheless, that does not make any sense. We are still on our way, we are still involved in the fundamental, basic decaying process. We are decaying all the time, every minute. Every time we wink our eyes we see less and less and less—our vision is decaying with each wink. And every speech that we make, each time we talk, our breath is running shorter and shorter, our tongue is becoming more and more numb and our mouth is becoming more and more unworkable. So we are slowly phasing out. Every minute every moment, all the time. That is a very realistic way of approaching the whole thing and very ordinary. We actually do not have to discuss the whole thing. Anybody who is reasonable enough and intelligent enough will be able to think it out. So it seems that anything composite is impermanent. And we could analyze that, that whatever exists in our surroundings, not only our body but our furniture, our rugs, our houses, our world, our landscape, and everything is impermanent.

The next mark is suffering, which is based on the gross world, grossness. I suppose we should say grossness, that is much better. Suffering is based on grossness. It is very gross and very rugged. Gross. So very funky, in other words. Gross, funky. Since everything is subject to death and decay all the time, it is basically very funky. Something could be beautifully fantastic and artful, even a

tastefully put together art work, but it is still very gross because everything is subject to death. Everything is decaying. And that particular grossness or that funkiness begins to give us some kind of feedback. It does not match our own state of experience, basically.

Our own experience has become a hoping for a better world, hoping for some much greater level of experience. We hope for happiness and pleasure only. For instance, all sorts of little complaints have come up during this seminary, and however small people's complaints may be, individually they are not happy enough. We expect great happiness and harmony. But we cannot expect any happiness at all if we understand basic grossness and basic impermanence.

The reason that grossness becomes a source of unhappiness is because things are inflexible. They do not go along with what we want; they are just petrified or mummified things that hang around us. It could be our lover, it could be our friend, it could be our food, it could be our own constitutional problems—having hangovers in the morning or anything of that nature. Everything is petrified experience. It has turned into wood or stone. Everything seems to be in the way because we would like to dance with reality and we would like to make love with reality all the time. But at the same time the phenomena that we experience are not so kind and helpful. They just clunk. We would like to embrace them but they are like petrified teddy bears all the time. That is one of the biggest problems we feel. It brings a lot of pain because we want so much, we are in it so much. And when we begin to approach somebody else, that somebody else finds that we are petrified already. We are already out of date. Nothing clicks. Or, on the other hand, we might find *them* petrified. So things are always made out of substances which are very clunky. Things are always in the way. It is like having a drink, but instead of ice somebody put pebbles in your glass. And pebbles do not melt. They are such a nuisance as you drink your particular alcoholic beverage. They are in the way, somewhat. That seems to be one of our basic reference points, a sense that everything is so clunky and so unyielding, that things are so fucked up, I suppose we could say.

We would like to have a certain vision of how things should be, obviously. We would like to have a greater vision in this world, in accordance with our own particular ideology, our socialistic or artistic or political or spiritual vision. We would like to see this world as a good world and our friends as good friends, who understand and who are completely adjusted to our world, the fantastic world that we have envisioned. But when we begin our projects, things do not go along with what we expected at all. It is very disappointing, highly disappointing. And then we begin to rethink, again and again. We begin to list our complaints, which are created from the intellectual level, not the experiential level. The experiential level has already made up its mind, so to speak. But then we would like to embellish that through the intellectual level of experience: "Well, the reason that I had pebbles in my drink was because of so and so and so. I didn't like the glass and I didn't like the person serving me. So she or he deliberately put pebbles in my drink instead of ice. It is *her* fault. It has nothing to do with me." Sure, we can say that. It is a very New York kind of thing to say. Quite possibly people from California would say that it must be the latest gimmick. How clever! Suffering is very painful—naturally, needless to say. And the basis of suffering is that things do not meet our particular demands.

The next mark is that all dharmas are egoless. We have a semantic problem with the wording used in the Tibetan tradition, that all dharmas are egoless. We are not talking about ego in terms of our own individual being alone, in this level of hinayana. Instead the term “egoless” refers to a fixation and a possessiveness of some kind. When we say that all dharmas are egoless, dharmas are the experiential level, which has no substance, no basic substance. No substance means that what we perceive in this world is not real perception at all, just a prefabricated perception based on preconceived ideas. We have already planned our philosophy, our concepts and ideas. Therefore we do not see anything really clearly, first-hand. If we do not see anything first-hand, completely and properly, then our experience becomes questionable. I would call that “lawyer’s mentality.” It is exemplified by Mr. Christmas Humphreys of England. He is a complete example of that type of person. He used to be threatened by the Tibetan buddhists who came to the United Kingdom. He did not know what to make of them. And he did not want to publicize their existence in the *Middle Way Journal*, which he controlled. He had to be talked to and reassured: “Everything is okay. We are doing everything right. We are serious Tibetan buddhists and we are going to set up a place called Samye Ling.” Then he was very happy and he decided to put things into his journal. So he was lost for a moment because of his confusion, not knowing how to get security from his own thinking, which was very highly confused. I suppose that when he was the Queen’s Counsel acting as a high court judge, which is something like a Supreme Court Justice in America, there were books written already and he could say: “Wow—this belongs to that category already, so therefore we have this thing.” Since we do not have buddhist supreme courts in the Western world, he is in trouble. I sympathize with the poor thing and the lawyer mentality- “This belongs to mahayana and this is zen”—which he loved so much. Although he was never a zen person he tried to be very zenny. But he had his problems, being too English. There is a problem with that. A complete demonstration of egolessness needs to be placed in contrast to a person who is looking for ego. Even trying to sort out various buddhist doctrines and put them into categories is so filled with ego. There is so much ego-hood taking place. Bless his heart. I am glad this is being taped. If you have any questions later on, please ask them without any hesitation on the question of egolessness. We could actually discuss it on the level of dialogue rather than just presenting facts and figures, which does not seem to work exactly.

The fourth mark we are going to discuss is that of nirvana or peace. There is a statement for each of these four marks: everything composite is impermanent; everything at the gross level is painful or suffering; all dharmas are egoless; and nirvana is peace. That is the whole slogan. We could call these the four mantras. “Nirvana is peace”—you might find that very shocking to say. In a sense nirvana is not really permanent peace. But the idea of nirvana or *nyangen le de* (mya.ngan.las.’das) in Tibetan, is transcending pain. And the pain that is being transcended is the pain of fixation, the pain of holding onto ideas. We begin to feel that the rug is being pulled out from under our feet. But that pain of fixation is pulled out at the same time. So we might have to regain our consciousness of that particular drama. Nevertheless, that is not particularly a problem.

Another aspect of peace is the nonaggression element of giving. When you

are actually transcending apparent pain, that is related with nonaggression at the same time. If there is any form of aggression and holding onto something very dearly, next to your heart, your life, your particular philosophy, that creates more pain, more freaked-out situations, because you cherish your beliefs so much. And when those particular beliefs do not match what is told you—[long pause]. So that seems to be the last mark.

By peace we do not mean peace with pleasure, particularly. Any time buddhism talks about peace, we should be quite clear and precise as to how it differs from the other words for peace—the om, shanti, shanti, shanti stuff. Peace in this case refers to an absence of chaos and a definite sense of clarity. But we are not talking about peace connected with pleasure at all. That should be very clearly understood. The basis of this notion of peace is that we should cut through spiritual materialism. That peace has nothing to do with pleasure. Peace is just simply peace. Nothing takes place. We simply quiet the whole thing and at the same time things become very clear. That seems to be the definition of peace.

Thank you. We could discuss the whole thing if you would like.

QUESTION: Joe asked me to ask you to repeat the four dharmas.

RINPOCHE: Oh yeah? He did? Well, give the microphone to him. He could ask for himself.

Q: [Joe] Would you just repeat the four mantras?

R: Yes, gladly. All composite stuff is impermanent; anything at the gross level is suffering; all dharmas are egoless; and nirvana is peace. You're welcome.

Q: Is the idea of ego or self a dharma? How does that fit in?

R: Yes. A dharma. Yeah. The idea of ego is a dharma. It is still a spiritual search, I suppose, but it is a theistic spiritual search rather than a nontheistic one.

Q: So you would say that the idea of ego does not have an isness?

R: No. No. The rest of it, the *-less* has isness. *Egolessness* has isness, but ego does not have any isness. You see?

Q: Mm-hmm.

R: Somewhat.

Q: Somewhat.

Q: I do not understand what you mean by composite or accumulated. What would not be accumulated? You said that everything accumulated is subject to impermanence.

R: Well, what isn't accumulated? Nothing comes singlehandedly.

Q: Are the teachings subject to decay?

R: In your conceptual mind, sure. That is the whole idea of yana. The previous yana does not make any sense once you have fully gotten into it, so you leave for the next one. And it continues in that way.

Q: Is it that the interconnectedness of things is impermanent?

R: Well, it is like taking medicine. You may take medicine to get over your first sickness. And that medicine cures your sickness. But it also leaves a chemical hangover. So you begin to look for a new medicine, which is much better, which gives you less of a hangover but still cures you. And the whole thing goes on in that way. That is the idea of the nine yanās, basically. By *accumulated things, basically we are talking about household affairs, relative things, love affairs, things of comfort, things that we care very much for in our life—which are the reference points of our existence.* Accumulated or composite means that a lot of stuff has been put together. For instance, the clothing you may want to buy comes from a tailor and has material, thread, color and shape of all kinds, and a price attached. So it is a composite of many things, or accumulated. Therefore anything that is accumulated or put together as a bundle is subject to decay.

Q: So what kind of thing is not accumulated?

R: Nothing very much. Nothing very much. It could be just a sudden shot of precision in one's mind such as the experience of sunyata, something which does not need to be contained. The very idea of enlightenment does not need to be contained; it is self-contained already.

Q: In the hinayana we hear that nirvana is cessation, and I have a sort of negative feeling about that. It seems that somehow someone sort of mistook the idea and decided that cessation meant no more thoughts arising. Is that true or is the hinayana notion of cessation a little more sophisticated than that?

R: Well, the idea of cessation from that point of view is a sense of the cessation of samsaric activities, but at the same time, with insight.

Q: But is that distinct from the idea of samsaric activities still continuing but not involving oneself in them since there is no one to be involved?

R: Yes.

Q: That's hinayana?

R: That's hinayana. Very sophisticated.

Q: Yes. Very.

R: It is very powerful. We must not look down on it.

Q: Today in the survey course we were talking about the three marks of existence. And the question arose as to whether there could be an ego without a God. It occurred to me that there is a whole religion that is based on there being an ego without a God and that subscribes to the three marks of existence. That is a very cynical religion and it has claimed the feelings and beliefs of

countless people from all times. It has been called by some people, "natural religion." Such people believe that, for instance, life is not a bowl of cherries. Seriously. There is a lot of suffering in it and that suffering is seen as a challenge. It inspires a heroic response. And things are impermanent: we witness the cycles of life and death all the time. And as far as egolessness is concerned, they do not believe in life after death. They don't believe in anything. They just say, "Well, it is time to die." And there is a curious sort of utter sense of lack of self-esteem. It almost seems as if buddhism is more hopeful than that kind of life. And yet there are people who really get off on that and help their neighbors and raise families. There are folk songs about it and blues and so on. Do you see what I mean? Theism does not undercut my buddhist beliefs. But the thing that makes my buddhist beliefs hard is this folk religion that creeps in there close, you see, and believes all these things.

R: Well, we can go too far. The humanists' perspective is that everything is made by man, human beings. We tend to neglect the other sentient beings, worms and mosquitoes and fleas and crabs and scabies: "Well, now is the time to be a self-made man, man is finally free from God. Let's celebrate that and let's cut wood. Let's cut the trees, and let's ski down. And let's drink a great deal or let's not drink a great deal. Or let's celebrate the aspen trees or the maple trees. Let's celebrate the sunrise and the full moons and the sunsets and everything. Let's drink tequila." There is some kind of ego in that approach. It is not such an egoless situation. The ego with God is an old problem which is very much understood already. But the ego without God is very difficult to understand because then you are in some kind of bind. Humanism becomes important and: "Let's kill and eat. Let's kill and eat. Let's kill the fish and eat it." It involves a kind of getting back to animal instinct. Then there is another level in which it seems that ego does not exist: "I don't exist as such, but I would like to do my service and relate with the world and serve the world at the same time and make myself useful." That becomes very subtle, very suspicious. Highly suspicious.

Q: Why?

R: That's it. According to the complete 100 percent buddhism, it does not sound so good because you are too eager. You are too eager and you want to do so much. Why do you do that anyway?

Q: What else is there to do?

R: That sort of candid answer has almost become a slogan. There is something more than that "Why do you do it?"—"What else is there?" There are lots of other things to do. Of course.

Q: Let us say someone is hurting so you help them or you help your neighbor with his load. It is just that there is no end of work to do. You don't have to be overly eager or greedy or rapacious or—

R: Why? Why at all? Since you have no God, no doctrine, no dogma, why?

Q: Love?

R: What does that mean?

Q: I would say that there would even be a spontaneous desire to help someone who is sad, you know. Just because, well, there are bad vibes around. It is like sweeping up a room with dust in it. Or maybe, to put it at the grossest level, it is sort of natural, like mother love, or brotherly love, just an extension from the family setup. Now I will say this, that it doesn't get me off. It doesn't get me off, but it is a continual barrier. It is a bigger barrier, it is a sadder thing and a heavier thing than theism is.

R: That is precisely why there are problems. Theism is one of the biggest trips that exist. And then you have the humanistic trip, which is next to the theistic trip. It is also very unnecessary and very heavyhanded as well. And too much importance is placed on social service, being good and kind and great. And at the same time there is some kind of slip or deception which is very hard to find. That deception is like the occasional needle that drops, which is very hard to find. So there are a lot of deceptions in humanism.

I'm sure that there are lots of philosophers of that sort in this area of ski lodges. "Let's have a hefty and hearty experience. Let's appreciate the mountains. It has nothing to do with God, but let's have some nice body work done and let's take a sauna and a Jacuzzi. And let's swim a lot and ski a lot and eat good food and take vitamins." That is another cult of humanism, which is extremely body-oriented, the Esalen approach. Such an extension of psychosomatic sickness may be very, very colorful, exotically colorful. And it may be true, in some sense, that we do not take care of our body. "Let's take a breath of fresh air"—who doesn't want that? Nobody wants to be in the suburban world, the ordinary world. But at the same time it is a trip. It is a very big trip. There is no gentleness and there is no enlightenment. It is not steady, it is based on the idea of up and down, playing with each other.

I'm sorry, I can only fingerpaint. If we could get together, I could discuss it more precisely. I am sure there is an answer to that, no doubt about it. But at this point there also seems to be a problem with relative references. We could get some idea of it from the world of artists. An artist believes in reality and the real appreciation of the phenomenal world as it is presented in the graphic realm, the sculptural realm or the musical realm. At the same time artists don't believe in God, particularly. They believe in the experiential level, that physical experiential level, sort of backslapping: "Aren't we all brothers or sisters together?" That involves a lot of deception. I couldn't suggest anything better than that.

Q: Could I say one more thing?

R: Sure.

Q: I'll put it at the heaviest that it comes down. To put it personally so I am not holding back, my father had a couple of heart attacks and he is waiting to kick off. Now he is an old conman and he says, "Well, son, it's all a con." And he says, "Well, the time has come to die." He is trying to teach me how to die. And he points out that his heart attack is hereditary and that I will probably pick it up. And he says, "Well, it's just a matter of wiping out. Just go—that's it." And if I say, "Wow, that's horrible. That's no way to look at it," he says, "Well,

you are in effect a coward, a copout, trying to look for some easy way out of a dilemma that any man ought to be able to face.” You see what I mean? That is a tough one to deal with. Now, the advice I’ve been going on and I’ve given myself is that he is just a member of a lost generation. It’s tough. I just have to say, each to his own. But it is a tough religion. It is a really tough one, it seems to me.

R: It seems to be much tougher in Canada actually than in America. There are lots of fundamentalists and naturalists and humanists. All sorts of philosophers have begun taking refuge in Canada and have begun propagating their hardcore stuff from that country rather than here. It is too dangerous here, particularly if they are draft dodgers. I don’t see any particular problems there. It is somewhat closer to buddhism than theism is, but at the same time a lot of distortion can take place with that kind of approach. You appear to believe in drama and facts and figures alone—there is not enough discipline, not enough sitting. Nobody would like to commit themselves to it. They would purely like to theorize and philosophize—which makes it all very complicated. Maybe you could help them when you get back to Canada. That was one of our hopes, why you were invited to this particular seminary—which was exceptional according to a lot of other people’s case histories.

Q: Rinpoche, in talking about impermanence, you pointed out the continuous decay of everything. But it seems to me that in the whole nine yana principle or the notion of a journey, there is also a sense of growth and maturity. I was wondering if you could comment on that. It seems slightly contradictory.

R: When you grow, you don’t just stay the way you are. If you grow like you are, you don’t really grow, you remain the same. When you grow, you begin to die and be reborn over and over, again and again. Your fifteenth year is dead as soon as you become sixteen. And when you are sixteen, you become seventeen and so you begin to die and be born again. That seems to be connected with the idea of growth in the nine yana principle. It is not one continual process, particularly, but on the journey death takes place as well as birth. And that seems to be the whole idea of journey, that death and birth take place all the time.

Q: Can I say one thing more? I was just reacting to your description of the body literally decaying minute by minute and your capacity for perceiving things losing its quality of clearness. In as much as the journey is made in the body and in as much as it is based on

R: It is no problem that we are all the time losing grips on reality. Basically we are losing sharpness all the time. We are getting older all the time. But at the same time we might gain some more experience, something more than physical sharpness alone. We are becoming more experienced. We find that a lot of old people have a more visionary experience of how the world is going to be shaped or how they are going to be relating with the rest of their life. So the physical sharpness is going to be lessened but the experiential level is becoming much more deep. It is like the idea of Indians retiring to be sanyassins, that you finally become a wise guy in some sense.

Q: You were talking about theistic religions and the fact that they are ego bound, and it seems that the only path that from your point of view anyone should follow is the buddhist one. All the others are somehow lacking. All the great world religions are deluded. And yet I have heard it said that all scriptures call out for release from self. And I honestly think they do. I think there is some twist here—it couldn't be that everyone else is mistaken [laughter].

R: Well, we are not talking about the teachings themselves, we are talking about the students of those traditions.

Q: That is very different.

R: Yeah, I think so. We have different kinds of students here.

Q: You should make that clear.

R: That is what I am doing right now.

Q: All right.

R: You are included.

Good night.

The Origins of Suffering

Today we are going to talk about the second noble truth. By the way, these topics are not regarded as a progressive perception. The four noble truths are divided into two categories: Two truths are related with samsara and two truths are related with the potentiality of nirvana. The first two truths are related with samsara: the notion of suffering as the result of samsara and the notion of the origin of suffering as the cause of samsara. The notion of path and the notion of the cessation of suffering, or the origin of the path, are connected with nirvana. Nirvana means transcending agony. And agony consists of the usual problems of basic bewilderment and basic dissatisfaction, the basic problems of life and the sense of anxiety.

At this point, we are talking about the origin of misery or suffering. We are going to approach this very simply and very directly from a very basic point of view. The basic idea of the origin of suffering. The Tibetan term for this is *kunjung* (kun.'byung). *Kun* means "all," and *jung* means "origin," so *kunjung* means the "origin of all." *Kunjung* is an abbreviation for *nyömong kunjung* (nyon.mongs.kun.'byung) which is where all the defilements or the pain is created. The idea of *kunjung*, or the origin of suffering, is a basic understanding of things as they are in a very simple way. When we begin to project ourselves into a situation or into a particular world, we begin with a very small and minute shift of attention. And out of that a lot of things become enlarged and exaggerated. There is a particular term used in abhidharma, which indicates that small and large concepts or ideas are very important. For instance, usually when we talk about a sudden drama such as murdering somebody or creating immense chaos out of our confusion, we have the idea of something that is triggered from a very small, minute level of concepts.

In the beginning, little things cause a shift in our attention, no matter how small or little they might be. But in the end things tend to get exaggerated immensely. So suffering comes from such little twists that take place in our life. That first little hint of dislike for somebody or that first hint of attraction for somebody eventually escalates and could bring on a much more immense scale of emotional drama or psychodrama. Everything starts from a minute scale at the beginning and then expands. It begins to swell, so to speak and expand in that way until it becomes very large—immeasurably large in a lot of cases. We experience ourselves that way.

Within that frame of reference, that subtle shift of attention seems to be the important cause of suffering in our life. Such shifts of attention make emotions as they are: aggression, passion, ignorance, and all the rest of them. They are seemingly very heavyhanded and large scale and crude. But they have their origin in a subtle twist that takes place in our mind constantly, all the time.

Because of that sudden shiftiness of attention, because our mind is basically so untrained, we begin to have a sense of casualness about the whole thing. We are constantly looking very hard for possibilities of making a connection, either towards possessing someone or destroying someone or conning somebody into our world. That struggle is taking place all the time. So one of the problems in regard to the origin of suffering is that we have not properly enough related with the shiftiness and the subtleties. Being able to relate with the subtleties of those shifts is connected with the sravakayana principle of regarding or paying attention to every activity that we do as a smaller dosage process. There is no such thing as sudden psychodrama without any cause and effect taking place. So every psychodrama that takes place in our mind or in our action has its origin in little flickering thoughts and that little flickering of tension [attention]. Such flickerings are basically either passion or aggression or other things of that nature. That was subject number one.

Subject number two is connected with the origin of emotions. The origin of emotions or the origin of pain is that you are so ready to jump the gun on the spot. You look for little areas of entertainment, little areas of seduction as if they magically manifest—out of the blue. Things come to your attention immediately because you are ready for them. You would like to be entertained by them, and therefore you would like to create such situations. They do happen that way. And finally, the last thing that happens is that having already created some object to direct your attention towards, you begin to develop a further sense of confusion in which desirable things are seen as undesirable and undesirable things are seen as very desirable. Some kind of little perversion takes place. That type of neurosis begins to work. The process that takes place is slightly twisted. You could call it the area of neurosis, maybe, or the higher level of not knowing who you are. Even in the ordinary conventional sense you do not know who you are or what your actual desires are. So there are possibilities of all kinds of things happening. There is a slight twist, which could be described as some kind of mistaken perception.

Out of this basic mental setup, a lot of other things begin to take place: passion, aggression, ignorance, and a lot of other emotions begin to arise. The text talks about the nature of these emotions as being basic disturbances and

basic chaos. They are not really harmonious with how you are actually supposed to proceed, but they are kind of the ups and downs and irregularities which take place in your mind. And there are all kinds of subsidiary emotions, in addition to passion, aggression and ignorance. I think there are supposed to be six types of emotions altogether: passion, aggression, ignorance, arrogance/pride, envy/jealousy, and stinginess/meanness or sort of holding back. Those six emotions are known as “that which disturbs tranquility”—if there is any tranquility at all when you are, so to speak, bogged down in the samsaric world. We have a very hard time finding any little space to actually even have the concept of tranquility or peace, other than tranquility as a temporary relief from indulging in any of those six particular states of being.

It has been said that ignorance is the source of suffering, it has also been said that passion is the origin of suffering. But there is no conflict between those two views, particularly. Passion is a sense of confusion, wanting to grasp the next possible situation. The basic notion of perpetuating continual birth is a result of passion, wanting to cling onto situations continuously. So passion is a kind of driving force, the impulsive force. But fundamentally there is the sense of uncertainty and the sense of bewilderment and the sense of ignorance, which plays a very important part. So the origin of all of it could be said to be ignorance, basic ignorance. By the way, this particular type of ignorance is not included as one of those six emotions. The ignorance which is referred to as one of the emotions is some sense of just superficial bewilderment, almost the level of laziness. But fundamental ignorance, or avidya, is a sense of refusing to relate with the total suffering at all, and wanting to just boycott the whole situation. So there we are.

And then there is a second section of the origin of suffering—by the way, what we discussed already is what is known as the origin of suffering from the point of view of emotions. The second section is known as the origin of suffering from the point of view of karma. So there are two types of origin of suffering: emotion and karma.

The origin of suffering as karma is, I think, quite simple and definite. I decided not to talk too much about that particular subject, it is simply the old logic of the nidanas. We have heard that several times already, even during this particular seminary by various other teachers. So we do not have to talk about it in great detail. But just let me make a rough statement about it. The origin of suffering takes place from ignorance. Ignorance is therefore the origin. And ignorance causes volitional action. From volitional action, the entire chain reaction, one after another can take place. So we have the concept of a karmic chain reaction. Not only the concept but the fact of karma begins to be born in our world, in our life.

Karma is divided into different types: the karma of reality, that psychological state or attitude which brings karmic consequences; and the physical environment which also brings karmic consequences. The karmic force that exists in our ordinary everyday life situation is unavoidable. If we are poor, suddenly we can not become rich. If we are rich we may suddenly become poor, maybe that's easier. But if we are young we cannot suddenly be old and if we are old, suddenly we cannot become young. If we are men, we cannot become

women suddenly, and vice versa. Those are just self-existing situations which we are stuck with. And they are also expressions of the origin of suffering, because we are basically stuck with such situations and we have no choice. Not only have we no choice, but we have a lot of hassle. We have to deal with those situations in any case. So that is a kind of karmic problem. And beyond that, it depends on how we handle ourselves. I mean we can continuously try to create further debts, or we can continuously try not to create further debts. And that also depends on our state of existence, our ordinary everyday life situation.

That seems to be it for tonight, I'm afraid. We have two types of origin of suffering: the emotional pattern and the karmic pattern. We are stuck in our particular world because of the karmic pattern. And we find ourselves so involved in trying to perpetuate pleasure and to cool down the pain- even to the most remote little details. If we feel somewhat discomforted, we might pick up a life-saver and put it in our mouth and try to live on that for a few seconds. Or we take a cigarette and light it, or we might even decide to stand up and stretch our legs and just turn around and look out the window. And all those little things that we tend to do are usually an expression that we are already subject to some kind of problem. But we are only perpetuating it further by indulging in more unnecessary things. That does not mean to say that one should not take lifesavers or stand up and look out the window. That would be too simple. But the kind of habitual pattern we usually have is that whenever there is anything undesirable and unappealing, we try little ways within ourselves to avoid it. We could watch ourselves doing that. Those little things that we do, those little areas in which we try to entertain ourselves, take place all the time. That is the product of suffering and the producer of suffering both at the same time. It is the origin which perpetually recreates suffering as well as what we are constantly going through, which is the result or the product of suffering. It seems that from that point of view, everything is extraordinarily hopeless. Well, it is better that we take that kind of attitude at this point rather than viewing the whole thing as a big joke. That is somewhat adharma or an antidharma approach, regarding everything as a big joke: "It doesn't really mean that. There is something better than that coming up next time and we don't have to stick to that bullshit." That is sort of freestyle buddhism; therefore it is called adharma, antidharma. So we better stick to facts and figures, to what we are going through in our life. We are all subject to these problems and we better realize that and try to understand that in order to be able to go on and to relate to the next topic. Tomorrow—if there is one- we are going to talk about the third noble truth, cessation. From there we could go further—how you can be inspired possibly. But at the same time it is better to be very realistic. That is absolutely important.

If you have any questions you are welcome.

QUESTION: Would I be correct in saying that every time we have a thought, it is sowing a karmic seed, every thought that comes into our mind? Or does it have something to do with our particular investment in the thought? In other words, if we are sitting here in meditation and something just pops into our mind and we recognize it as such immediately, does it still have the weight of sowing a karmic seed?

RINPOCHE: That is an important point. It does *not* have the weight. Once you begin to see through, it is just a game rather than a serious plan that you have. If you write it down in your little notebook so you can remember to call your friend so and so, and tell him about it and you write it down next to his telephone number, you have already planted a seed. But in the case of just perceiving it through your mind and seeing the futility of it, realizing it is just a game—that actually is the saving grace. That seems to be the point of the practice of meditation.

Q: Rinpoche, you were talking about basic ignorance and you said that one was superficial and one was more basic. I am wondering which of those ignorances, or both, causes suffering?

R: The fundamental one. The superficial one is just a sense of stupidity and laziness.

Q: If the basic bewilderment you were just talking about is fundamental to suffering, if it is the origin of suffering, how can it refuse to relate with suffering? That indicates to me that suffering is more fundamental than bewilderment.

R: I'm sorry. I do not quite get what you are trying to say.

Q: The fundamental bewilderment is the refusal to relate with suffering at all. That seems to indicate that suffering precedes bewilderment.

R: Yes.

Q: So how can it be fundamental in that case?

R: Well, because it is the ground, that we are trying to ignore what we are doing. We know that we are doing something we should not be doing. When we were young kids, we did the same thing. We appreciated what we were doing and we were being entertained immensely—but at the same time, we knew that we were doing something naughty. Is that understandable?

Q: I suppose—not really, but I'll give up.

R: What? What?

Q: I don't get it.

R: Let's try again.

Q: Okay. To me something that is fundamental is the end of the line. Is that wrong?

R: Fundamental does not mean the end of the line, particularly. Fundamental means the ground in which you are executing any situation.

Q: So basic bewilderment is the ground of suffering, right?

R: Yeah. It is the ground in which you find yourself suffering.

Q: So basic bewilderment and suffering are co-existent?

R: I don't know that there is a co-, but they are existence.

Q: They are there together.

R: Well, they *are*. They *are*. They don't have any partnership.

Q: They just *are*?

R: Yeah. They do not have any partners. You are your own suffering, your own ignorance.

Q: I believe it [laughter].

Q: Rinpoche, when you talk about the origin of suffering as emotions—

R: Archery and suffering?

Q: In the origin of suffering as emotions, you talk about the desirable becoming undesirable and vice versa. That sounds like a description of the quality of the personality in the realm of the gods.

R: Not necessarily. It exists in ourselves too.

Q: You are talking about a more fundamental level than the realms at this point?

R: I think so. Yes. It is a somewhat basic thing that we have the wrong view of things. We think something is going to make a helluva lot of money so we put our cents and pennies in it and we go bankrupt. It is that kind of thing, doing the wrong thing at the wrong time, all the time. It is very fundamental. You think that some mother principle is going to be the greatest lover of all, and finally you end up by being sucked in and swallowed and chewed and cooked. It is very basic. You have some slight twist somewhere which is not quite right, even within conventional samsaric logic. You are somewhat off the wall, off the point, not quite there—which is an expression of further speeding and further spinning around constantly.

Q: You talked about the shift in tension. What is the origin of the tension?

R: What is the origin of tension? Some sense of loneliness and hunger and needing confirmation.

Q: Is that similar to the second stage in the twelve nidanas?

R: Actually, it is the first one in some sense. It is fundamental which actually makes it the second stage. You are right. The second stage is the activity that takes place and the first stage is the embryonic qualities of that, basically. It is a sense of needing confirmation.

Q: Almost a basic speed?

R: Yeah. It is a sense of inadequacy, sort of funky, being by oneself and wanting to look for something more interesting. It is being naked or too plain

and angry—but you still want to have someone to fight *with*. All those things. In some sense it is all pervasive basic wretchedness, the eighth suffering. Last night we talked about that all pervasive suffering, which is also basic wretchedness. So we are always brought back to the origin of suffering. So even though it is a beautiful day with nice food and nice companionship, there is still something not quite right. You feel a sort of high pitched pissed-off sound. You cannot even hear with your own ears, but that high pitch is going on all the time.

Q: You said in the 1973 Seminary, when you talked about suffering, that it has no root, and that it is basically self-existing, sort of indestructible. That seems to bring out some problem with the second noble truth, which is that suffering has an origin. So by the second noble truth, is it meant that there is an origin of the perpetuation of suffering? In other words, is it how suffering keeps being there rather than some sort of root that you could sort of snuff out?

R: That's right. That is why there is the idea that everything is based on ignorance. Everything is based on ignorance and ignorance is questionable at that point as well. Seemingly, the lower yanās do not actually talk about that. And the real final and good question, good answer, as to what ignorance is really all about, is from the *ati* tradition, fundamentally. Somehow we keep trying and finally we at least come up with something "It is just ignorance." And seemingly, people of this particular yana never ask, "What is ignorance?" That is where the *arhat's* experience stops. When you realize ignorance, then you begin to de-ignorant yourself in some ways, which is still problematic. So from that point of view, suffering is basically groundless, but at the same time there is a lot of hoo-ha about it.

Q: You were talking about noticing these shifts of attention that cause you to go out and seek confirmation. Once you notice that you are doing that, then what should you do? I mean, you see yourself going out, and it just keeps happening.

R: I think that comes up in the next few talks. And we probably have no idea what we should be doing as far as the state of mind of this particular yana is concerned. Maybe I am being too journey oriented, but the idea is that there is nothing you could do apart from realizing that some basic truth exists there.

Q: In this seminary situation, we find ourselves entering into sometimes very complex and confusing relationships, sometimes things that we know will be painful. My question is, from the point of view of *dharma*, how do we approach these relationships as we see them developing?

R: I would try to approach it as simply as possible.

Q: But there is the question of whether you continue in your madness or you sit down and try to toss your madness out the window?

R: Well, try to approach your madness as simply as you can. Make it very simple and dualistic. [Laughter.]

Q: Rinpoche, when you were discussing the factors that affected karma, you

added on the end very quickly that it depends on how we handle ourselves. And then you said that it also depends on the state of our existence in our ordinary everyday life situation. Could you be more specific about that?

R: When did I say that? I already forgot.

Q: You were sort of whipping along when you were talking about the origin of suffering as karma. And at the very end of that you added those two on very quickly. I wondered if you could be more specific about what you meant about the state of our existence in our ordinary everyday life situation?

R: Well, it is very simple. There is a kind of conflict of duality. Duality from the point of view of reference point—two way traffic, so to speak—is taking place all the time. We cannot talk purely in terms of what is good karma or what to do to cut your origin of suffering or whether it is good karma for you to do this or that, particularly. I think a lot of the basic notions of karma are based on the idea of self-inspiration, what is the sane approach and what is the insane approach. It is very simple.

Q: In addressing oneself to the problem of egohood vs. egolessness, you find that there is a notion of ego inside the doctrine itself, time and time again. For instance, *who* has the five cardinal virtues, *who* is alone, *who* suffers? Now if you take the *who* out, it seems to me that suffering suffers, virtues are virtuous, and you have a composite aggregate just sort of buzzing around, like with two-way traffic and so on. So it seems the thing would be to just let the suffering suffer, the aloneness be alone, the virtue be virtuous, and leave the *who* and you out.

R: Well, that is the idea to your surprise. But there are difficulties when you leave *who* out which we will come to tomorrow when we talk about *who* you are. But there are different types of *who* you are. There is the *who* which is being left out of the virtues and the aloneness and suffering. But afterwards, *who* is leaving that out? *Who* is leaving out the *who*? So it is very tricky. We cannot just say that it is a mistake and that we are going to kick it out. It is very subtle. That is what buddhism is all about, basically and fundamentally. But the idea is that buddhism uses the word “-ness” as in emptiness and egolessness. There is an isness quality to the whole thing that should exist by itself rather than by any conditions, a person’s experience of it in particular. That seems to be the starting point. We have to see. Hopefully I will be talking on that subject of egolessness from the hinayana point of view tomorrow. So we could get into that.

Okay friends, I think it is time to go to sleep. It is rather late. Take care of yourselves.

Three-fold Logic, or Ground, Path and Fruition

The simplest form of common logic is a three-fold analysis – any event or process has a beginning, middle and end. We could also think of ground, path and fruition or view, path and fruition as examples of three-fold logic.

Chogyam Trungpa said that his talks always followed a three-fold process, although people might not always hear them that way. And when speaking about how to study dharma, Mipham Rinpoche said: “One of the key elements is understanding the principle of how we change. If we can understand this principle, it will begin to lead us down the path of how to practice and how to incorporate the dharma into everyday life.”

There are many ways to look at ground, path and fruition, or three-fold logic.

One is *conditional*: Ground is the situation as we find it, the conditions inherited from some previous activity or situation, Path is effort that we apply to those conditions, and Fruition is the outcome which would not have occurred without our effort. Here’s an example:

Ground:	revulsion for our confusion	or	fertile soil
Path:	shamatha meditaion practice		farmer/gardener
Fruition:	developing stability, clarity, strength		food

Another approach takes the *unconditional* perspective, focusing less on our relative experience of life and more on the absolute nature of reality: Ground is the way things are in absolute reality, Path is awareness developed through meditation, and Fruition is an awakened mind fully present.

Ground:	Buddha nature obscured by confusion	or	emptiness/shunyata
Path:	meditative insight removing confusion		uncovering habitual patterns
Fruition:	Buddha nature fully present		bodhicitta

Bringing conditional and unconditional logic together balances our view of what we are doing. We are awake by nature, yet we need to exert ourselves on the path to dispel obscurations and uncover these natural qualities. Reorganizing their order helps to emphasize the work that we want to do: Ground is where we find ourselves today, Fruition is where we want to go, and Path is what we have to do to get from here to there. The benefit of this approach is that it grounds you in your immediate experience, yet encourages you to lift your gaze as to your ultimate destination. This also how the Buddha first taught dharma in the four noble truths:

Ground:	recognition of suffering and how we have created it
Fruition:	recognition that liberation is possible
Path:	discipline, meditation, prajna

In the Shambhala Centers, people who give talks and teach classes are trained to organize their teaching using three-fold logic, and if you start to listen for it, you might hear this structure, no matter who is speaking. Pema uses this logic too. During our class, we will practice analyzing talks using three-fold logic as an organizing principle.

TALK FOUR

Mindfulness Discipline: Cutting the Root of Cause and Effect

GOOD EVENING. Last night we discussed the notion of discipline and the notion of *sosor tharpa*, individual salvation. Individual salvation obviously comes from refraining individually from mindlessness, and from relating with the desire to occupy ourselves with neurosis. Therefore the notions of discipline and renunciation become a very important part of our discussion.

I would like to continue further with our general discussion of discipline, *tsültrim*, before we get into the actual details of the various types of disciplines in the two *yanas* of the *hinayana*—the *pratyekabuddhayana* and the *shravakayana*. As we discussed last night, the definition of *tsültrim* is “that which cools off the heat of neurosis.” And that brings about in us the best behavior of body, speech and mind, which delivers us into individual salvation.

We might ask, what is individual salvation? How can we do that? There is only one way to find out and that is to actually do it, practice *tsültrim*, practice the best behavior, the best discipline, of body, speech and mind. You can read about that in last year’s seminary transcripts, in the talk, “The Three Gates of Discipline.” You might take a look at that.

Moreover, it is necessary to realize that, when you begin to practice, you need to have some understanding of logic. How are you going to eliminate your problems? Who knows how to do that? And how do you know that? It seems to be quite simple from a logical point of view. And, as far as that logic is concerned, the one who knows is you. It is you who will find out for yourself.

Creating the *samsaric* world: a mile out of an inch

It has been said that *samsara* is generated or started from a very simple and minute beginning. Whenever a simple little desire, a simple little passion, or a simple little aggression takes form, we begin to hang onto it. We begin to capitalize on it, and we begin to exaggerate it. We begin to exaggerate the whole thing. The end product becomes gigantic: we have created a mile out of an inch—or is it a inch out of a mile? [Confers with students.] It’s not an inch out of a mile, but a mile out of an inch. [Laughter.] That is what we have done.

There is a concept in *abhidharma* studies that is connected with the logic of how what is minute tends to expand. That is a key point in the puzzlings of the *abhidharma*. A lot of scholars have found this particular logic difficult to understand, but frankly, I don’t see why they have any difficulty. The main point is that the minute expands. Whenever there is a flickering of desire for even one moment, it goes on for miles and miles; it becomes exaggerated. It becomes like an echo chamber that echoes further and further and further and further. In that way we begin to create a gigantic world of *samsara*. That is how things work in our *samsaric* world.

We may have a slight dislike for someone. We may have only looked at him or talked to him,

or had dealings with him for just five seconds, but still, we begin to develop immense aggression towards him. And twenty-five minutes later, we have developed a gigantic fortress to defend ourselves from him, and whole armies in order to attack that person. Not only are we ready to destroy that person, but we are also ready to uproot him altogether, including his friends and his profits and everything that he has ever had.

The same thing happens with passion. You take a look at a person, and you are attracted to him. You look at him for only a few seconds, and you find that he is a very attractive and desirable person. Then you want to get hold of that person, you want to possess that person. Fifteen or twenty minutes later, you send out all the possible retinues of your desire; you send out rays of light of all kinds, whatever you have, and you begin to engollop that person completely. You make him part of your package altogether. And you have been doing that for a long time. That is what is known in abhidharma as the expansion of what is minute. I don't understand why scholars have difficulty understanding that.

Another kind of thing that might come up is when there is a situation that is not all that desirable from a common-sense point of view, but somehow you manage to get yourself into a somewhat perverted notion of what is going on. You think that situation is extremely extraordinary, and you begin to reinterpret it. You reinterpret the whole situation; you change the logic of what is happening, altogether. For instance, you might regard somebody who is a nice person as a terrible person; you might regard someone who is a kind person as a dreadful person. Quite unnecessarily, you begin to develop the arbitrary logics of passion and aggression.

That kind of change in logic could also happen in situations involving other neurotic tendencies as well. It could happen at the level of what is called mental contents, which you will learn about when you study abhidharma later on. Some of you are studying abhidharma now, and you will probably be looking into the concept of mental contents, and how mind begins to change the message of reality by imposing its preconceptions on things.

Once our preconceptions have developed, once we have made up our minds already, then we begin to create our own world; our world has developed already. Our particular desire or our particular aggression has already produced its karmic result, its cause and effect; and that determines the future karmic results, our future potentialities and possibilities, as well. Therefore we are helpless; we are trapped in our own doing. Intense aggression in the present situation will result in our being unable to escape from undesirable situations in the future. So the only way to prevent the result of karma is to cut the present situation altogether. The buddhist logic is to try to cut the karmic situation altogether at its root.

Mr. Usow, where are we in the abhidharma studies, at this point?

MR. USOW: Sir, we are just about to begin the study of dependent origination, *pratitya-samutpada*. We have looked at abhidharma in general: its meaning, its content and its scope.

V: I see. Have you ever discussed karma?

MR. USOW: Well, it has been mentioned that the underlying structure is a karmic structure.

V: Yes, that's good. Thank you. As buddhists, or not even necessarily as buddhists, but as realists, as people who feel real pain and real pleasure, who experience the possibility of getting out of such nuisances altogether, and who actually transcend the logic of theism and nontheism, we are concerned with one main point. The main point is to cut through the cause and effect of karmic debt, and to understand where the karmic possibilities began altogether, right at the beginning. How karma began at the beginning seems to be the key point.

Shamatha: planting the seed that cuts the karmic root

Last night we briefly discussed planting a seed of memory in our alaya, at the level of our alaya consciousness. That is the level of alaya where the cognitive mind already exists. At that point, rejecting and accepting already begin to take place in our state of mind. Before we think, we already have the potential to think; we *can* think already; we have faculties of thinking already. So we have the faculties for making up our mind—liking or not liking, and blah blah blah. That is the starting point at which shamatha practice begins to become very effective.

What we are trying to do is to tackle that particular level of alaya consciousness. We are trying to plant a seed of mindfulness-awareness; we are trying to plant a less habitual, less animallike instinct. Rats always go for cheese, and rabbits always go for carrots; but we could do better than that: As human beings, we could always go for sanity, at least. We don't always have to think immediately, for our own sake, of our own comfort alone. But right from the moment when cognitive mind begins to function, we could think in terms of something more than that.

The minute you wake up, the first thing in the morning, or when you have to struggle to swallow a big piece of meat, or when you have a gigantic sneeze—there are always occasions where a gap occurs in your mind. What comes next? Those are the occasions where you can plant something positive in your mind, where you can plant shamatha in your mind, in the form of mindfulness-awareness. It is not mindfulness in the sense of looking for danger: "Be careful. There might be trouble for you." It is not in that sense. It is simply mindfulness in the sense that there is openness, there is a gap; therefore you might as well try to be more wakeful.

That moment of openness is an opportune situation for you. Try to be awake after you sneeze. Don't just grab a tissue right away; allow yourself a little gap. Even if your nose runs, that's all right; it's fine. There is nothing wrong with letting your nose run. Just allow a little gap so that there is a little space, which has some kind of spark and delight in it.

That is the starting point of mindfulness. When you are being mindful, according to the Buddha, then walking is mindful, talking is mindful, breathing is mindful, feeling is mindful, hearing is mindful, sensation is mindful. That is not particularly regarded as a taxation on your sense perceptions; you don't need to work harder to feel more than you usually feel, or to hear more than you usually hear. Rather, mindfulness is extra bliss in some sense. I am not particularly trying to make a sales pitch for mindfulness, but it is somewhat joyful. You realize that you could be so uplifted by being mindful. You begin to feel very good that you could rise beyond your regular, ordinary struggles, which don't even require awareness, but which give you tremendous pain and misery and unmindfulness.

That is the point of what we discussed last night: renunciation should be planted as a habitual pattern in our alaya consciousness. That is part of the fundamental mindfulness process, which becomes fundamentally good. Then you begin to feel very soothed. You might be terribly sick, you might have a fever, you might have diarrhea on the spot, but you could still feel somewhat good at the same time. This is because you have something else going on beyond the immediate hassle [lit.: asshole] of the moment. [Chuckles.]

Do you see what I mean? There is something slightly more than the hassle of the moment. You could be mindful of something: the way you extend your arm, the way your arm comes back to your body, the way you move your fingers, the way you speak, the way you smell, the way you look around, the way you see bright green, blue, yellow, white, or grey. All those things you experience in your life are no longer regarded as hassles. They don't have to be hassles.

Sometimes people think that everything they see, everything they experience, costs them money. But that's not quite the case. [Laughs.] Having to spend money implies expending effort, as well. But we can always experience some sense of the joy of being alive as human beings, as

far as we know. Tigers might have a different story, dragons might have a different story, snakes might have a different story—but let them speak for themselves!

The way to appreciate life is to be mindful; otherwise you can't really appreciate your life. With no mindfulness, you have missed lots of things already, and you will miss a lot more in any case. So you are stuck with a lot of things that you have missed. You become like somebody who has been running a projector in a movie theater for sixty years, and who has never actually seen a movie at all. You just keep on running the projector, quite beautifully; but you get tired of yourself.

I think the point we have been trying to get at tonight is that, in order to cut the root of samsara, it is very important to have that kind of mindfulness-awareness. Cutting the root of samsara does not necessarily mean to say that you are cutting the root of your enjoyment; however, your style of enjoyment will certainly be different altogether. Obviously, it will be unconditional enjoyment rather than conditional enjoyment. We will talk about that during the vajrayana section. So I suppose you will have to stay on at seminary for a little bit longer [Laughter]. since we are just beginning the hinayana level at this point.

We are starting at the beginning at this point, in order to appreciate the world properly, in order to enjoy the renunciation part. A lot of clean-up is best; there is nothing better than that. Cleaning up and giving up usually have a ring of austerity from the point of view of the Protestant ethic and the Catholic ethic, and maybe the Hasidic ethic, somewhat. I don't know about the Sufis; they seem to enjoy themselves a lot, but maybe not. On the other hand, I'm not so sure about the Parsis. Are there any Parsis here? [Laughter.]

We could begin our discussion tonight, if you like.

QUESTION: Sir, last night you made a reference to tsültrim as an entity. Could you clarify that?

VAJRACARYA: Tsültrim is referred to as an entity because it is planted in your state of mind. You have understood that it is your discipline and that you are going to stay with it for the rest of your life. Tsültrim is as much an entity in your mind as marriage is an entity—much more so than marriage. It is real. For instance, having a haircut is a temporary entity. When you leave the barbershop, you know that you have had a haircut. It is an entity for a while, and then you forget about it. When your hair grows longer, it isn't an entity any more because your hair begins to speak for itself. But as far as tsültrim is concerned, it doesn't grow longer or shorter; it is always supposed to stay the same. Therefore it is an entity of its own, always. Do you see what I mean? It is like marriage, in some sense.

Q: Thank you.

Q: Sir, I have a slightly funny question. You have talked about the quality of neurosis in a way that is very difficult for me to understand. This evening before the talk, we had a very intense discussion about the differences between neurosis of the American, or New World, style and the European style. Is there any difference between the typical ego-centered neurosis as it is expressed in the United States and maybe also in Canada, and the typical national or cultural neurosis as it is expressed in Europe? I mean, I have been having a very, very intense time here and in the States. [Laughter.]

V: Oh! [Laughs.] You are asking for trouble, eh? Well, I think that anything that is influenced by theism is basically the same. The doctrine of individualism is taught everywhere, not only in

Europe and America, but in the rest of the world as well. Wherever you go, the doctrine of maintaining one's ego is the same. But within that, there are individual styles; the social makeup of different cultures is entirely different.

Europeans tend to be more individual in their own traditions, their own medieval background. They tend to maintain their own style. They are also more in contact with reality in some sense; they are much closer, even, to the farms and basic food. North America, on the other hand, has the problems of a larger population. North Americans have to have fast food service happening all over; they have to have big factories in order to feed all the people; and more synthetic materials have to be churned out. So it is a sociological situation, which causes a lot of problems.

In Europe, people have stayed in their own country or their own town for a long time; they feel connected with their own town, their home town. But in America—or Canada, for that matter, to a certain extent—people feel that they are not particularly deep-rooted in their own birthplaces; they feel they are living out of suitcases. They have lost their connection and they travel around everywhere; they get jobs and travel around.

So there is that general problem, or cultural problem, which probably developed because things are getting too big or because things are getting too commercialized. The North American way is very efficient, nonetheless, which is admirable in some sense. A lot of Europeans are envious of that; they would prefer to set things up like that in their own country. In England we have a place called Wimpey's which tries to imitate the American style. All over England, there is fast food service.

Q: Sir, we already have Wimpey's in Germany and in Vienna too, and also in Geneva, and Milan and Madrid . . .

V: Good heavens!

Q: It's just that it is difficult to know how to relate with the different expressions of samsaric neurosis.

V: Well, I think it all boils down to the same thing: Everything results, in some sense, from modern styles of communication. You don't have to talk to people face-to-face; you can always make phone calls and send letters and telegrams. You don't have to talk to them personally; you don't have to relate with them. That problem of communication is just a natural, general thing; it is a twentieth-century problem altogether. But we don't have to go back to the old-fashioned ways, particularly. We probably should overcome those problems, rather than change the system altogether. That would be rather drastic and difficult at this point. The main point is to practice a lot.

Q: We do that already, you know.

V: Then you will see what happens. We can figure it out. I'm sure we will.

Q: Thank you.

Q: Sir, you said that when we sneeze or when we are waking up, those are particularly good times to try to implant nonaggression or shamatha in ourselves. Why those particular situations? What happens in our mind in those situations?

V: Well, whenever there is a gap, you see that you don't have to run your machine all the time.

Q: Could it also be, for example, when you cut yourself, or if you trip on something?

V: Anything, anything.

Q: How would you actually do that? Do you follow your breath? How does that implantation happen?

V: Well, the point is to be fully mindful and look at yourself—simply be mindful. You don't necessarily have to follow your breath; just be present, just be mindful. Be there. Be there, right? Following the breath is a technique that teaches you to be there. If you can't just be there, then you follow your breath in order to be there. That is the gentle way of doing it, when you are not caught up in any hectic situations like sneezing or anything like that. Since you don't usually sneeze all the time, you follow your breath. [Laughs.] And when you are in ordinary situations, you can catch your. . . . [Vajracarya snaps his fingers.] Just be awake and look. You can catch yourself. Just look, and don't reconnect with your stitchery all over again. You don't have to create a patchwork. Occasional gaps are nice and fresh. Try that. Enjoy it.

Q: Sir, you said that samsara is generated on a simple level, that a tiny thing flickers, and then we exaggerate it. But traditionally, samsara is supposed to be beginningless. I am wondering if, on an individual level, we have been living in samsara from beginningless time, or did we just flicker, and here we are?

V: You have been doing both. From beginningless time and also at the present time, you have been trying to maintain yourself, constantly.

Q: But from beginningless time we have been. . . .

V: Goodness knows!

Q: Yeah. [Laughter.] I just wanted to say—This may be interesting. . . . [Laughter.]

V: Sure. For the goodness?

Q: Well, do you know the expression “bless you” that people say when you sneeze? Do you know how that term came about?

V: Yeah.

Q: Oh, okay. [Laughter.]

V: Well, I think people thought it was an attack of—What was it? It was a particular spell of . . . [STUDENT: The devil]. No, not only that, but there was a particular . . . [STUDENT: Plague.] Plague, yes. The first hint that someone was sick with the plague came when he sneezed. Hopefully we are not catching the plague. As far as we are concerned, sneezing is usually good news! [Laughter.] Good for you!

Q: Sir, Jamgön Kongtrül gave a talk in Boston in which he said that when we realize egolessness, there is no more karma. When you referred earlier to cutting the root of karma, did you mean that realizing egolessness is cutting the root of karma?

V: We are working towards that, but it is not as easy as that. We are working towards it. We are beginning to do our chisel work; we are beginning to work on that, slowly.

Q: But nonetheless, when it happens, it happens completely, doesn't it?

V: Eventually, eventually. But I don't want to give you too much hope. It will happen eventually—definitely—and it will be very effective sooner or later, or maybe very soon, but please don't be startled. When it happens, please don't be startled. That is to say, please don't sue us because you want to get your ego back. [Laughs; laughter.]

Q: Sir, could you tell me where *sosor tharpa* fits into the hinayana path? Is it the fruition of the hinayana path? And how does it relate to discipline, which continues through all three *yanas*?

V: *Sosor tharpa* is, to begin with, individual discipline. So discipline at that point has to be your own discipline, rather than general discipline. For example, when you go to school, you have to learn to read and write personally. It is not that everybody learns to read and write, and in that way you are brought along. That wouldn't help you very much with your own personal reading and writing. But with *sosor tharpa*, we are making sure that you personally can read, write, spell, and do mathematics, properly. That is what *sosor tharpa* is all about. And when you are able to do all those things, then you begin to develop a natural sense of not harming yourself or others. You also begin to plant mindfulness in your *künshi*, your basic *alaya*. You become a natural adept, in that sense, when you develop all those things. And out of that, your behavior of body, speech, and mind becomes admirable and good. All of that is the result of *sosor tharpa*.

Q: Is it the same as the *maitri* principle?

V: Well, the *maitri* principle is very literal. In order to be good to yourself, first you have to learn *how* to be good. You have to learn to clean up after yourself. It is precisely like the principle of *oryoki*: You have to learn to eat properly and to clean up after yourself nicely, as well. You don't give your dirty dishes to somebody else to clean for you. You do everything yourself. And in turn, the world is beautified. The world begins to admire you, and you begin to beautify the world in that way. So you are not creating any nuisance for the world, and beyond that, you begin to inspire the world because you are industrious.

Q: I see. Thank you.

Q: Sir, how does mindfulness cut the root of karma? Is it that, when we have a flicker of desire or aggression, we don't create a mile out of that? And although the flickers keep occurring, because we are mindful, we don't . . .

V: Because you are being mindful, you do not follow the desires when they come up. Each time there is a desire, you are mindful of it but you don't follow it. In that way you cut the minute desires, which could, in fact, seem meaningless at the time; nevertheless, you don't follow them. And although they seem to be very small in proportion, in the long run, if you cut those small desires you are cutting a mile because you are cutting an inch at a time. So it goes a long way.

Q: So those flickers will keep coming up, and we constantly have to not follow them.

V: That is to say, one hour of sitting meditation, of being mindful, actually cuts off ten years of neurosis—literally. Your practice contributes a lot to your life. You might ask, "But what is the outcome of that? I am still the same; I am still cranky." It doesn't really matter, as long as you cut all those roots in your one hour of sitting practice. You cut a lot of roots in one hour, and that goes for the whole ten years. So you no longer have a *samsaric* occupation to go on with. That seems to be the logic of it; therefore, sitting practice is regarded as very precious and very important for you.

Q: It seems a lot easier to be mindful in sitting practice than in postmeditation. I'm wondering if postmeditation mindfulness somehow grows out of the *lojong* practice that we do, out of *tonglen*.

V: Well, postmeditation is very, very important, too. That is how you interact with the world. In postmeditation, you have more interaction with the world; whereas when you do sitting practice, you don't have much interaction with the world. You don't have to deal with cars and

traffic lights, unless somebody drives into the shrine room—which they could do. So postmeditation practice is very, very important. Even in a protected environment such as we have here, postmeditation practice is equally important: It is a rehearsal for maintaining your practice when you go back to where you came from. The main point is that you shouldn't get too much of a shock when you return; it shouldn't be such a big deal that you can't adjust yourself. You should be able to maintain yourself properly.

Q: Could I ask another question? In your first talk, you talked about the five poisons: passion, aggression, ignorance, jealousy, and pride. And in one of the readings that we were given, the kleshas were referred to by the same name. Are the five poisons and the kleshas the same, or is there some difference?

V: I think they are the same.

Q: Sir, this is a continuation of the last question. In terms of cutting karma, when we cut karma, do we cut karmic debts as well? Do we cut the potentiality of further karma at the same time? I'm not sure I understood what you said about cutting through the cause and effect of karmic debt, and how karmic possibility begins at the beginning. Were you referring to what happens now, or to what has happened, as well?

V: Well, it works very interestingly. Your approach is very businesslike, eh?

Q: Yeah. [Laughs.] That's interesting.

V: You should be Jewish.

Q: Half, anyway.

V: At the level of cutting karmic roots, to the extent that there are no more roots left, then you are cutting through karmic debts, as well. But if the karmic roots are not completely cleared, then the karmic debts still remain—as the bank manager would say.

Q: Yes, I'm familiar with that. This is probably a mahayana practice, but there are texts that say if you do something wrong, you should correct it within the hour. There is some attempt on that level, too, to correct the expressions of karma, rather than just noticing them. Is that true? Is there some sense of trying to correct karma in the postmeditation situation, as well?

V: It is always worthwhile to do that.

Q: So it's a matter of cleaning up once you've made a mess.

V: Yes, that is always worthwhile. But you have to understand that it is not the same as the notion of committing sin in the Catholic tradition. You have to be quite clear about that. You are working with a progressive situation, like planting a seed. It's not that somebody is punishing you.

Q: Yes. Thank you.

V: Okay, ladies and gentlemen. We have to close at this point. But before we close, I would like to say that I would like you to pay more attention to your sitting practice, particularly to your mindfulness practice, since that has been the subject of our discussion tonight. Please try to work with your shamatha practice. Try to work on the technique, and pay attention to it, so that you will become quite well-accomplished in shamatha now, and altogether before you leave this seminary.

It is quite a serious matter. I am not necessarily thinking in terms of the disturbances and the

problems that might occur in the hotel alone, but I am saying this for your own good. I would like to see you using your environment here in the best way you can: as a practice platform, a practice ground, as much as you can. So please don't neglect that possibility.

This situation is quite unique. It only happens once a year, once in your life maybe, for a lot of you. So think about that. It is very unusual for you to be here, and very special for you to be here. You have to appreciate this special situation, and you have to remember the preciousness of it. In order for you to be here, hundreds of other people have sacrificed and have—with complaints—given up and let go of their places for your sake. We fought for you, and therefore you are here. So think in those terms. Please make this place a worthwhile place—not that you are not doing so already.

I think what has happened so far is remarkable and, as we always say, this seminary is better than last year's. [Laughter.] It is going beautifully; but I would like to see it go even better *because* it is going so beautifully. My limits for a standard of living are limitless.

Thank you very much.

TALK SIX

The Origin of Suffering I: KLESHAS AND KARMA

HAVING discussed suffering, we can now look into the origin of suffering, which is known as the second noble truth. The origin of suffering is its source: how suffering arises, how dissatisfaction arises.

Suffering begins with a very simple and ordinary flicker of thought, which derives from basic bewilderment. That is to say, before intention begins, there is a state of utter uncertainty. We can't even call it uncertainty as such, because when we talk about certainty or uncertainty we might be talking about some spark of intelligence taking place. But in this case, we are talking about uncertainty in the sense of not even uncertainty.

A general dullness and stupified state of mind occurs every fraction of a second in our state of being—all the time. We don't know whether we are coming or going, perceiving or not perceiving. But at the same time, that uncertainty is colored or flavored by the fundamental ape-instinct, which prefers to spin in circles rather than to look around and extend itself outward. Our only guidance is our own, very fermented body odor, so to speak, or mind odor. So we spin around with that, and that is our guidance. That kind of guidance is what's known as the blind leading the blind. We are just sniffing around.

Within that stupidity we begin to find something, and that something is passion, almost lust. We don't even know what we are lusting for, but we are willing to indulge ourselves. We are willing to step into the stupified corral or den, like an animal. Therefore, before we even know that the consequences will be painful, we are somehow drawn towards pain rather than towards the fundamental sense of pleasure. That natural, instinctive yearning towards pain is known as *kunjung* (kun.'byung). *Kun* means "all" or "every," and *jung* means "becoming." So *kunjung* is Tibetan for the origin of suffering. In Sanskrit it is *bhava*, which means "becoming." You have probably heard about *bhava* in studying the *nidan*as.

KUNJUNG OF KLESHAS

There are two types of *kunjung*. One type is the *kunjung* of *kleshas* and the other is the *kunjung* of *karma*. First we will get into the *kunjung* of *kleshas*. Does anybody know the meaning of *klesha*?

STUDENT: Defilement.

ANOTHER STUDENT: The tendency to wander in stupidity and bewilderment.

VAJRACARYA: That's right. Great. Well, you know that stuff. The *kleshas* are minute at the beginning, tiny. But on the other hand, their consequences are large and disastrous.

At the beginning we have what are known as the six root kleshas, which come out of basic stupidity, bewilderment. From the bewilderment of not knowing what to do comes a sudden flickering of thoughts. That begins to make you very passionate, so lustful. So the first klesha is **desire**, passion. Actually, it is more like lust than basic desire. You become horny about yourself and your state of bewilderment. Then, since you are unable to experience the proper fulfillment of that horniness, you experience **anger**. Out of that anger and inability to fulfill yourself comes arrogance or **pride**, which is some sense of self-preservation, self-maintenance. And after that the whole thing becomes a kind of carelessness and uncertainty, **ignorance**, which is a different kind of ignorance than that of the initial triggering process. This ignorance is not so much bewilderment but, rather, simply boycotting situations, ignoring things, refusing to see anything in an intelligent way. So passion leads to aggression, which leads to pride, which leads to a stupidified sort of noncaring. Those are the first four kleshas.

Ignoring then develops into the fifth klesha, which is known as **doubt**. You do not trust any possible alternatives and you do not want any advice or any way out at all. You doubt the teachings and the teacher and the buddhadharma. You even doubt the simple, sensible norms of everyday existence. The sixth klesha is what is known as **view**, or **opinion**. You form a certain kind of opinion which you use to solidify your trip. You say, "This is it. I've got it. I know it, and I refuse to believe anything else at all. This is my view; this is my idea; this is what I have come to believe is the right thing to do."

Out of these six root kleshas come what are known as the twenty relative kleshas, which we will not be discussing this time. I am planning to talk about that later on, and Mr. Lief is going to expound upon them quite extensively in his abhidharma course.

KUNJUNG OF KARMA

Our next topic is the kunjung of karma, which is divided into three main sections. The first one is unmeritorious karma, the second is meritorious karma, and the third is following a steady course, or unmovability, which we will discuss tomorrow.

Unmeritorious karma

Unmeritorious karma means that when you begin to act, even before you actually get into your suffering, you develop all sorts of wicked desires to plant bad karmic situations, unmeritorious ones. That basically comes from some kind of aggression. There is a certain seed of fundamental aggression. This is not even a polite form of aggression, but we actually have some sort of higher level—or lower level—resentment and anger.

This fundamental aggression is comprised of what are known as the **ten evil acts**. And those ten evil acts are divided into three sections: body, speech and mind. The first three, which are related with **body**, are **taking life**, **stealing**, and **sexual intercourse**. They are a mixture of passion and aggression. The aggression part is obviously the first two: taking life and stealing. The third one, sexual intercourse, is connected with passion—or with aggression, depending upon one's outlook on the

world. All three are attempts to bring the outer world into your own wicked world. You are trying to build some kind of empire, your own version of things. Taking life, stealing, and sexual intercourse are conditioned by ulterior motives of all kinds. If you can't work with somebody, you reject him: you try to kill him or you try to steal from him. And if you accept somebody, if you include him in your territory, you try to fuck him. [Laughter.] It's a very immediate way of dealing with the situation. [Laughter.]

Sometimes we put animals in cages and we study them—how they eat, how they mate, how they produce babies, how they bring up their young. But in fact, we don't even need to put animals in a cage; we can watch ourselves do all those things. We are already in a samsaric cage, and we are a perfect zoological study. It is very crude, and if we had some other perspective, it might be seen as quite embarrassing. But since there is no other perspective, the whole thing is an accepted situation. Taking life, stealing, and sexual intercourse are regulated by social norms. Some of them are approved by law because they go along with the basic scheme of society, and some of them are not approved by the law because they interfere with the basic scheme. But all of them, whether lawful or unlawful, are connected with that basic scheme of rejecting and accepting. It all boils down to that.

The next four of the ten evil acts are connected with **speech**. Number four is **telling lies**. You want to defend your particular cause, so you try to deceive, which is very simple. Telling lies is also connected with a mixture of passion and aggression: you are trying to reject somebody and also to include him in your world at the same time. Lying here means telling elaborate, obvious lies, with the intention to promote your own prosperity, your own security.

Number five is **intrigue**, which is based on trying to divide. When you find that the world is too solid, that it has developed its united front against you, you try to break it down by intrigue. You make somebody your friend, and somebody else your enemy. You try to win by drawing some people to yourself and putting off others.

Number six is **negative words**. You feel that you can proclaim tremendous wisdom by speaking critically of somebody or some particular topic. You speak harsh words. You hope that if you speak your harsh words loudly and clearly, they will be a kind of weapon or bomb that you can throw into the midst of society, into the midst of your friends, into the midst of your enemies. You hope that your words will give you some kind of power over others. You are the creator of that harsh, destructive word, and you hope that you can destroy society, concepts, ideas, feelings, theories of all kinds.

Number seven is **gossip**, or, for that matter, anything other than functional talk. You gossip in order to pervert others, in order to destroy those who have developed great exertion, great discipline. You would like to break down their discipline and bring them down to your level by talking about crocodiles and the weather and your idea of their idea. We are talking about a kind of chatter which has a tremendously evil effect on others because it is so effective. It does not provide sharp points; somehow it just lures others into discursive thought, which is there already, in any case. It lures others into chattering. We know that there are a lot of people who are experts at that.

Then we have the last three of the ten evil acts, which are connected with **mind**. They are quite simple. Number eight is **wishful thinking or poverty mentality**. Those two are saying the same thing. You have so much desire to grasp what you don't have and you feel inadequate to do so. You envy other people's situations. You feel basically inferior: you have less wisdom, less clarity of mind, less skillful means, less concentration—whatever it might be. When you look at somebody who has slightly more than you have, you feel tremendously greedy. You feel completely hurt by that. You feel bad if somebody has a good idea or if somebody has tremendous vision. You invent all sorts of logics and reasons in order to prove them wrong. You indulge in one-upmanship. You would like to bring someone down, or you would like to put down a concept, a theory.

I would like to add a little note here, something which typifies our neurotic style of vision: when you hear or experience the possibility of the Great Eastern Sun vision, you get freaked out. You feel jealous, envious. You are afraid that you might be excluded from that vision. You feel rugged and primitive, and you stick with your particular logic, your jumbled-up confusion, which comes out of your poverty mentality. That's just a footnote, by the way.

Number nine is **deliberately trying to create harm**, having bad feelings about somebody. Bad feelings means simply that you don't feel good about someone and you wish that something would go wrong for him. Because of the tremendous influence of theism, particularly of Christian morality, you might say that you would never think ill of or have any ill will towards anybody at all, that you don't even have an enemy. You could deceive other people quite easily, but if you look at yourself very closely, you begin to find that in fact you have developed some kind of ill will—even the slightest tinge—some kind of aggression or resentment or hatred towards somebody.

The last of the ten evil acts is disbelieving in truth, or **disbelieving in sacredness**. You refuse to work with the sense of reverence. This might make you feel like shitting on the shrine table, tearing down sacred objects, or stepping on the sutras, the words of the dharma. But there is something more than that. You feel totally, utterly disgusted with anything that might add a second meaning to life, some sense of holiness, some sense of richness or sacredness. When you sit on your zafu, you take the Mexican posture, not necessarily because your legs hurt or your back hurts, but because you feel that sitting practice could be a way of just hanging out. When you read the chants at the end of the sitting period, you regard them as just chatter, as something that you have to get through, or get rid of.

Anything that you do deliberately, anything that constitutes mindfulness, is regarded as purely a hassle. You do not recognize that there is something beyond that meagerness, that there is some sense of the sacredness of life. You do not acknowledge that if you related with the sacredness of life, you might get something out of it. It all boils down to an excessive casualness, not relating with yourself as having any dignity, any confidence. The only thing that matters to you is to stay alive, to have a roof over your head and food to eat. That's all that matters. Anything beyond that level is completely disregarded. Anything extra is regarded as a hassle.

Any effort to bow, to sit, to maintain your dignity, to keep your head and

shoulders up, is a hassle. It's a hassle to be friendly to Mr. Joe Schmidt in the street, who says, "Hello, how are you?" You don't feel anything for him, so you don't even bother to answer. You never even hear Mr. Joe Schmidt saying, "Hello, how are you?" You just say, "Fuck off." You simply don't believe in any sense of fundamental dignity. You believe in the wretchedness of the world rather than the sacredness of the world.

Meritorious Karma

Next we have the **ten meritorious deeds** of karma, which are very simple. They are just the reverse of the ten evil acts. Instead of taking life, for instance, you develop **respect for life**, you have some sense of gentleness. Instead of stealing, you practice **generosity**. In your sexual conduct, you practice some kind of **sexual wholesomeness**, friendship. Instead of telling lies, you tell the truth. You practice **truthfulness** and develop some sense of wholesome speech. Instead of intrigue, you practice **straightforwardness**. Instead of harsh words, you practice **inscrutability**, or good wisdom. Instead of useless speech, or gossip, you develop **simplicity**. You speak very simply, and what you say is meaningful. Instead of wishful thinking, greediness, you have some sense of **openness**. Instead of destructive thoughts, bad feelings, you practice **gentleness**. Instead of disbelieving in sacredness, you commit yourself to **understanding sacredness**.

Those are the ten wholesome thoughts. Nevertheless, you should regard all of them as still producing further suffering, further karma. Whether you act virtuously or whether you act in a degraded manner, you are still producing pain and suffering until you realize the other possibility, until you grab the other end of the stick, which we discussed yesterday quite vividly.

I have decided not to talk today about the third category of the kunjung of karma, what we have called, "following a steady course," because it gets rather long-winded. We will talk more about karma tomorrow. Let me run through the whole thing briefly in order to make sure that you have understood. Maybe somebody else should do it; that would be much better. Anybody else? Can anybody run through the whole thing? [Pause.] Okay. Well, if you don't do it, maybe I should. The origin of suffering is divided into two main sections: The first one is the kunjung of kleshas, and the second one is the kunjung of karma. The first one consists of the six root kleshas, followed by the twenty subsidiary kleshas, which we didn't discuss. The second level is the kunjung of karma, which we have divided into three sections: unmeritorious karma, meritorious karma, and unmovability, or following a steady course (which we haven't discussed). The ten unmeritorious and meritorious acts are subdivided into three sections: three acts connected with body, four with speech, and three with mind. It seems quite simple, actually. So let us have a discussion.

QUESTION: You talked about the basic tendency towards pain which arose out of bewilderment. Is that the wrong end of the stick?

VAJRACARYA: Yes, indeed. Suffering is already the wrong end of the stick. Therefore, the origin of suffering has to be much more the wrong end of the stick.

Q: You said something about the kunjung of karma having to do with a very raw kind of anger. Is that also part of the basic tendency towards pain?

V: Absolutely. You haven't had the pain yet, you see. That is how you get pain. These are the originators of pain.

Q: Where does that basic tendency come from? I mean, why? Why not pleasure?

V: The basic tendency does not come from either pain or pleasure. It comes from wanting to bury your head in yourself, which has nothing to do with pain or pleasure, particularly. It's just a general sense of wanting to smell your own wickedness. You would rather stick with your family than go out and meet strangers.

Q: So it isn't really that you're choosing pain.

V: No, not necessarily. The *result* is pain, obviously, but what you are doing is just preferring to relate with your own nest, which happens to be a bad choice. You start with ignorance, which is very self-snug, like living in a cocoon. You have embedded yourself in it. It is as if you would rather let a gigantic growth keep developing in you than be operated on and feel better. The operation is too painful. It's too big a deal to do anything about it. You even take pride in that, which is looking for some kind of pleasure, but which turns out to be pain.

Q: Rinpoche, why do we prefer to do that? It seems like we haven't gotten to mahayana yet.

V: We haven't. Certainly not.

Q: We've talked about basic goodness in our classes.

V: Well, basic goodness hasn't come up yet. Basic goodness is like getting up and taking a shower, which wakes you up. But you would rather not do that, even though you have a bathroom next door. You prefer to doze in your bed, sleep some more. That is what we're talking about.

Q: What's curious to me is where that comes from. Why do we prefer to stay in bed?

V: Because it's less hassle. You don't have to sacrifice anything; you don't give anything up. You can just swim around in your vomit, which is much easier, you know. You prefer to be untidy, which is much more "organic." It feels good to be organic, you know. It is connected with some sort of hippie notion: you don't take a shower, you don't wash, you don't go to the barber and cut your hair. You don't bother with these hassles. You just grow a long beard and long hair, and you kick around with your own little pleasure. That's precisely it.

Q: Well, something seems to be missing for me in terms of understanding that. I guess I want to get back to the bottom line of the whole thing.

V: That is what we are talking about. This is as bottom line as we could get; there is no other.

Q: Okay. Well, I'll wait until we get to mahayana. Then I'd like to work on those two.

V: That sounds very tricky, actually. This is it. This is it. This is as bottom as we can actually get to the basic notion of samsara. And you wait for the mahayana, okay? [Laughter.]

Q: I'm interested in the two types of kunjung. You associated the second with karma. But isn't the first one, the kunjung of kleshas, also karmic?

V: Yes, in some sense kleshas are also karmic, but they are purely mental events. The second type of kunjung is much more karmic because it involves making decisions and actually doing something with the phenomenal world—dealing with others. The kleshas are one's state of being, one's state of mind. Passion, aggression, anger, arrogance, and ignorance all are internal situations. But the second type of kunjung is acting upon others as a result of passion, aggression, and so forth. So the first situation is an embryonic expression of the second.

Q: I have a question about the flickering of thoughts, and how much we actually experience their origin. At what stage do we experience the nidana chain or the way thoughts arise?

V: Right now, all the time. Otherwise it wouldn't be truth, it would be just theory. It should be particularly true for people like yourself and all the others who have decided to take part in this seminary, who have somewhat opened up and who are somewhat intrigued, who would like to study. You have that basic openness already; you are a captive, raw audience. Everybody is somewhat unskinned from that point of view, which is good. So with that special privilege, I am sure that everybody will be able to start right at the beginning, or right at the end. There is no problem; everybody is ripe. Some were too ripe, and they ran away. They tried to grow thicker skins, but we will see what happens with them as we go on.

Q: Rinpoche, what is sacredness?

V: What do you think? You tell me first.

Q: Well, you said that it is something that has a second meaning. It seems to be something that has more significance than just a superficial appearance.

V: I wouldn't say it has a second meaning; I would say that it has a first meaning. The second meaning is secular, and the first meaning is sacred. It is fresh and uncontaminated and precise and brilliant and wakeful and soothing and good. When you touch sacredness, it feels like touching gold or diamonds. That's the closest analogy I can find: that when you touch it, it feels like a good diamond, good gold.

Q: It can't be recognized intellectually?

V: Yes, it can. And it can be recognized intuitively as well. It's like the sunrise. The sunrise is sacred because you see the sun rising; it shines into your eyes. Sometimes it is too brilliant to look at, but it's there anyway; whereas fireflies are secular, they don't shine too brightly.

Q: Rinpoche, last night when you were talking about the wrong end of the stick and the right end of the stick, you said that the right end of the stick had to do with lots of discipline. Tonight, when you were talking about meritorious karma, you said that it would still be producing pain unless we realized the possibility of working from the

right end of the stick. But somehow, the way you gave the list, it seemed to me to be highly disciplined action.

V: Not necessarily. We are talking about just lukewarm possibilities. You are simply not running into trouble. Instead of speeding at seventy-five miles an hour, you just do your regular fifty miles an hour.

Q: You mean sort of a cautious approach?

V: Yes. It's just basically being a disciplined person, rather than a particularly realized person. It's like being a Jewish mother who would never commit any offense. It's like being a good citizen who is willing to salute the American flag. There are lots of good citizens, particularly in Colebrook. Those people are not particularly inspired to create wicked karma, they are even trying to become good. Their goodness might have some kind of stupidity in it at the same time—but they are harmless people, the silent majority.

Q: I thought that traditionally it is said that the cause of suffering is desire. Is that just a bad translation, or is that the Theravadin approach to it?

V: Sure, desire. Ignorance and desire are the causes of suffering. It is not a bad translation; it is a very good translation.

Q: Is desire different from lust or craving?

V: Desire means lust. It is that which ignites.

Q: But you can't live without desire, right? Some kind of desire?

V: You could.

Q: I—I can't picture a state in which you—[laughter]

V: I beg your pardon?

Q: It's hard to picture a state of being in which you don't have some desire for food or to go for a walk or—

V: That wouldn't be desire.

Q: What would it be? Some kind of motivation?

V: Yes. There could be just pure motivation; it doesn't have to be desire. Desire means wanting to build yourself up. You can take a walk with the desire of building yourself up, or you can take a walk without trying to build yourself up. You could just take a walk, very simply, very straightforwardly, which would be very opening. There doesn't have to be a second meaning all the time. You don't have to philosophize about the whole thing.

I can't resist having a question from the Polack.

Q: I can't resist asking a question. My question is about disbelieving sacredness. I have a feeling it has something to do with people who prefer to hang onto the wings of the airplane with the fungus. [Laughter.] Is it something of the sort?

V: I think that is a good idea. It's actually a surprisingly good idea. The people who don't want to get into the cabin don't believe in the sacredness of life. They would like to take the same flight, but they don't want to get into it. Well said, Polack.

Well, this is the end.

Talk One

The Birth of Karma

We have to look into the mechanism of karma and its functions before we get into the consequences of karma, its useful action, or its energy. Karma is a Sanskrit word which means "creation" or "action"---an act which produces further acts. That action consists of, or survives on, a certain basic pattern or ground.

When we talk about karma we are not talking about an individual or entity, some "karmic" force that is separate from the existing world energy. Instead we mean an inter-dependent situation. For instance, the karma of fire is heat. So we cannot point to some thing and say that "this" is the karma of fire. We can only talk about the fuel and the flame and how the intensity of the flame depends on the fuel. So karma is an abstract concept, from this point of view.

We are talking about karmic situations, to begin with, not abstract cosmic laws, abstract principles of morality or anything like that. We are talking about before morality begins, before cosmic law begins. Before any of that, there is some energy which creates volitional action--and that is the origin of karma. In other words, the very idea of karma begins from the idea of confusion, chaos, ignorance. In order for a function to be a karmic function, we have to have the meeting of two situations. That brings a spark of light, so to speak. It is like rubbing two sticks together to produce fire. We have to have a basic environment to produce a karmic situation; there must be some kind of sympathetic environment for

that to take place. That sympathetic environment is ignorance. So karma is based on our psychological state, rather than on anything else. And our original psychological state, our karmic situation, develops and is born from ignorance.

We have a basic totality of ignorance, which contains a tendency to disbelieve in energy. There is a tendency to disbelieve in separateness as well as to disbelieve in the totality of the original dharmadhatu or whatever we would like to call it. Actually, it's not so much a tendency to disbelieve in the totality as such, but more likely, to be precise, a tendency to disbelieve in individuality, or in the particular sparks that could occur in the realm of energy--or the realm of intelligence, compassion, or wisdom. There is a tendency to disbelieve that whatever flashes occur in this particular outer space are separate entities. At that point, the very fact of not believing in separate entities produces further separateness, because that very idea of disbelieving in them is a threat. This is so because we are trying to maintain some kind of solidarity with the origin [the totality of ignorance]. But in maintaining that solidarity, the origin automatically becomes a separate thing from what we ourselves are.

So although we have developed an awareness of the mother, so to speak, we don't want to regard ourselves as children of that particular mother. But since we refuse to believe that we are children, we already have a conflict with the mother. Since we are reacting to the mother rather than to anything else, that already means that we are children. Trying to believe that we are not children does not at all negate the fact that we have a mother. In fact, it only further confirms the existence of the mother. It confirms that we are some thing, some body, trying to cut ourselves off from our mother. That kind of situation goes on.

Traditionally there are three types of ignorance (according to the abhidharma, the maha ati texts, and so forth). First, there is ignorance of itself, or in other words, ignorance of totality. This is a totally ignoring situation, in which you ignore both the mother and the son, so to speak.

The second type of ignorance is ignorance of certain discomforts. You ignore discomfort. But in this case, the discomfort is not quite as sharp or precise as the discomforts we generally talk about. This discomfort is some vague sense of there being something we don't really

want to get into. We have a very vague feeling that there is a possibility of getting somewhere, and that vagueness is a threat, from that point of view. We have not even made up our mind whether we want to get into it or out of it. We haven't made up our mind because we want to be able to regard situations as either threatening or pleasurable. So because there's some uncertainty, that produces total alarm--a nonexistent, transparent alarm. And because of its nonexistent quality, it is extremely threatening. So there's something happening which is uncertain, even to the point of certainty. And we wonder whether we should be at all threatened by it or not. It is so uncertain, so vague, extraordinarily vague.

That vagueness itself becomes haunting. There is something, but we are not quite certain whether that something is a thing or a nonthing. That question becomes a problem. And even if that question doesn't arise, because it doesn't arise, it becomes a problem. So there's a total haunted situation, which is at the same time a certain state of peacefulness, tranquillity. But the very existence of the experience of tranquillity, even in the faintest subconscious of subconscious of subconscious sense, is extremely threatening. We feel that something's not quite right, and we don't want to give into it. But that decision not to give in doesn't make any difference at all. There's something extraordinarily vague and uncertain. And that uncertainty and vagueness has become a thing.

Then there's the third type of ignorance, which is called ignorance of concept, ignorance of the mere act of labeling. But this doesn't mean ignorance of mere labeling alone. In fact, this ignorance becomes very subtle, because we have already suffered from the problem of vagueness. That vagueness provides us with the inspiration to take some step in deciding whether we should be for or against it. And eventually that notion of "for or against" becomes more important than maintaining the validity of the vagueness. At that point one begins to give birth to a faint suggestion of aggression, or pushing away; a faint suggestion of magnetizing or passion; and a faint suggestion of playing deaf and dumb, or ignoring the whole thing and just sailing along. Those three suggestions come up at the same time as the vagueness, along with the primordial, primeval haunted situation of ignorance that has developed already. But because of that uncertainty, because of the possibility of taking some step to make yourself into I or myself or ego, this is different altogether from the other types of ignorance. In this ignorance you take the approach that, "I am what I am. I exist be-

cause my aspects exist"--rather than, "because my projections exist." So at this point you have developed a possible way of starting, of taking some kind of step. That step involves experiencing the space in which you can extend your aggression, your passion or your ignorance into the visible world. In other words, you can make the whole world visible, as far as your confusion's concerned. And from that point of view of confusion, you definitely decide to step out and create a world of your own.

At that point, there's a tendency to make a very faint leap. That leap is similar to what mothers experience in giving birth to a child. They experience such a leap each time they push and breathe. In the process of giving birth to a child, each push becomes a heroic effort. You actually have to give birth to your child, which you want very much to get out of your body. And you are making a definite statement: "I am going to have this child. And I'm going to make it come out of my body." This particular type of push that mothers experience in labor is like the birth of karma. It is like the birth of karma because the push to give birth to the world of passion, aggression or ignorance is accompanied by a sense of continuity. If you push and give birth, then an extension of you continues. So you push not so much because, "I want to get rid of this child" but because, "I am going to create this new life out of my body. This particular child is going to be my child; I'm going to be its mother." So there is a sense of ownership, or sense of continuity. In other words: "This is my world; I'm going to get into this, my world." With this extra effort, or push, we try to become brave within the vagueness of ignorance. And at that point, we have created karma, volitional action.

The volitional action of karma cannot be born unless there is some doubt about one's existence, one's own existence. The harder you push to give birth, that much more doubt comes back to you and reinforces your pushing. So all the time there is feedback: "Possibly you could give birth, quite possibly this is your death." Those two thoughts alternate constantly. They are not even thoughts at this point, but just faint sense perceptions of some kind. They are very faint and vague subconscious experiences of possibly doing something: "If I did do something, would this be a valid act or not?" So the birth of karma does exist. It starts when we decide to come out of our confusion and participate in the living world. When we decide to mind our business and to make ourself an angry person, passionate person, ignorant person, or whatever,

then we have given birth to karma.

Traditionally, the birth of karma is symbolized by a potter throwing a pot. The potter's wheel goes on and on constantly, and finally, in the process of going on and on, he produces a pot. Such a pot could hold things: water, flour, food or whatever. Likewise, we have to produce, or we have produced, a tremendous container. We have created a tremendous vessel in which things could be accommodated and which we could use to mark the outlines or boundaries of our own territory--what belongs to you, what belongs to me and so forth.

The basic starting point of karma is ignorance, the ignoring of messages. And ignoring messages becomes putting out messages at the same time--which becomes a constant subconscious act. That seems to be the starting point of karma, the birth of karma, so to speak.

QUESTION: I don't understand disbelief in individuality. Could you say something more about that?

RINPOCHE: To support your belief in individuality, you have to put out some energy, some action. And each time you do so you get threatened that your putting out of energy may not be a valid thing. That constantly feeds back to you, so you get feedback of feedback of feedback of feedback. And finally you become hardened by the constant churning and churning and churning.

Q: How does this relate to the creative impulse?

R: It is the impulse of something. In a sense you can't even say impulse, at this point. It is a tendency to create, rather than impulse. There is some direction to make something solid, but there is uncertainty as well. Therefore one tends to do it very slyly.

Q: When does a baby begin to create karma?

R: A baby already has its previous life, so it doesn't begin to create karma at birth, particularly. I mean, babies eventually wake up from their confusion, from their physical mobility problems and their problems with their brain and muscle functioning. They learn how to walk, how to suck, and how to throw things about. But that doesn't mean they are innocent at the beginning. A baby is not produced as a primordial situation. They have a continuity of karma from their previous birth. Babies wake up to that when they recover from the physical sickness of being babies, so to speak. As their bodies begin to devel-

Talk One

op, their minds begin to wake up to their previous hang-ups, whatever they may be.

I think that it is misleading to talk about a child as an absolutely innocent person all the time. That denies altogether the idea of reincarnation, the rebirth principle. So a child is not regarded as particularly innocent. But he does have to recover from the sickness of his body, so to speak. A child's body is not fully functioning, therefore his mind can't fully relate as a synchronizing mechanism. It's a reciprocal situation, mind and body.

Q: You said there was originally a spark of energy, and then there was a tendency to doubt the individuality of that spark. And you said something about holding onto the original nonseparate state, which produced a more heavy-handed kind of individuality. I couldn't follow the steps that you went through, how the individuality became heavy-handed rather than simply individuality.

R: Well, individuality becomes heavy-handed because you don't want to become individuals.

Q: And so you hold onto the original situation.

R: The original totality. But at the same time, by holding onto the original totality you are separating yourself from it. So you don't want to do that. [Laughs]

Q: How is holding onto the original totality holding onto separateness?

R: When you hang onto something, hold onto something, that is automatically an expression of separateness, whether you try to relate with that or not. That doesn't necessarily mean you are actually separate from the origin. But you misinterpret, and you begin to admire the totality. And the admiration of totality brings bewilderment. You are uncertain in a very, very faint unconscious way, who is who, what is what. But there is something to hang onto-- loss of ego, so to speak.

Q: Do you see bewilderment and separateness as part of the same thing, the same process?

R: Well, they are almost synonyms from this point of view.

Q: What does individuality mean in terms of all this? Usually when you speak about this original state, it seems as if the separateness, or ignoring the separateness, is the problem.

R: Well, there's much more to it than that. We should get into it deeper. Ignoring the separateness is a problem but trying to become one with it is also a problem, because there is some twist involved. You see what I mean? Wanting to become one with it is the seed of samsara, the seed of spiritual materialism--which is already set up from very early life, the earliest, early part of your life. [Laughs] It is set up when you could hardly even be called "you."

Q: Is this the same point at which the five skandhas emerge?

R: That's the first skandha of form. Form means touchable objects and some kind of relationship of this-and-that. So, in other words, we could say that the karmic creation comes from the realm of form.

Q: Can there be a sense of totality without the appreciation of the totality which produces confusion? Could there be a sense of totality which wouldn't produce this bewilderment?

R: Well, as long as there's a sense of totality, you are separate already. Of course, there is the possibility of not even having a sense of totality at all, but simply being contained in it--you know, spontaneously existing.

Q: But isn't that nonawareness?

R: Not at all. It's awareness of itself rather than awareness of some thing. You can't even say awareness of itself, actually, but awareness of it, or awareness of dot-dot-dot.

Q: The vague haunting feelings that you were talking about--do they refer to ignorance?

R: You feel haunted because you feel you might have lost your ground, which is the ground of ignorance, yes. You feel you have lost your ground totally. In other words, it doesn't do to deal only with one situation at a time, but you feel you have to deal with all areas simultaneously in order to protect yourself and make sense out of what's happening. That's the ignorance. In other words, ignorance is very manipulative. Ignorance is localized intelligence rather than stupidity.

Q: You say there's a process that starts very early and continues. You're not talking about a specific time, are you?

Talk One

R: Well, that provides the background of our psychology constantly. We do that all the time.

Q: When on the path does that sense of vagueness and discomfort end? That seems to be the focal point.

R: That seems to be the focal point, definitely so. Yes, of course. But that's the end of the path. [Laughter]

Q: I've heard the phrase, "burning up karma." But it sounds like an impossibility since karma is such a universal presence. Does this have any meaning for you, "burning up karma"?

R: I don't think so, actually. You can't just fight karma, or burn it up, at all. It's impossible. But you could relate with karma. That's possible, not by producing more karmic incidents, but by treading on your karma as the current situation and going forth. You can't burn up karma. This has nothing to do with short-circuiting.

Q: Wouldn't that be the same as not creating more karma?

R: Not creating karma quite possibly creates further karma. It could be dependent on how you do it. It is not a very simple matter, actually. You think you are going ahead, but karma is approaching behind you. And it's very, very tricky. You can't just purely do good in order to burn out karma, or purely do bad in order to burn out karma.

Q: This might be the wrong way to express it, but if you're not creating more karma, doesn't the karma catch up and get worked out?

R: Well, if you're not creating further karma, which means that your ignorance is no longer functioning--that's asking quite a lot. [Laughter]

Q: What is said about original karma? If karma is set in motion by ignorance, what is said about the very first step, maybe seven million lives ago?

R: What do you mean by that?

Q: Well it seems from what you're saying that karma exists on the ground of ignorance.

R: Yeah, sure.

Q: And then continues.

R: Yeah. What's the problem there?

Q: I was just wondering, I suppose--for karma to be set in motion, ignorance must arise at some point.

R: You mean, could we measure that point in time? A million years ago, four-hundred years ago, so forth?

Q: Whatever. That starting point that set karma in motion.

R: Well, you see, the whole point is that karma originates from a point when there is no concept. That could be right now or that could be hundreds of millions of millions of billions of years ago. That's purely up to you. You can't measure your karma by astrological or computerized prediction. At that point, the idea of time and space seems to become useless. We are not talking about time and space, instead we are talking about spacer and timer.

Q: Could a person survive physically if he never in his life generated any karma? Is karma necessary for physical survival?

R: This world is not regarded as a debt. But it could be a heavy debt if you are involved with your ignorance. So quite possibly there is an idea of free world, world without debt. From that point of view, the buddhas, bodhisattvas, whatever have you, function in the world without debt. It is possible.

Q: Do the phrases "good karma" and "bad karma" make any sense?

R: Well, at this point it doesn't really make sense. We are purely talking about the origin of the whole thing, the good or the bad. How the whole thing was manufactured, how the whole force began. It's as if we were talking about the creation of electricity. Whether you switch off the electricity or switch on the electricity, it's all part of the electrical game altogether.

Q: Can you talk about karma in nonhuman terms, let's say on the level of the apes, or rocks, or trees? Or is this just human?

R: Well, we need to discuss the creation of karma at the beginning, the ignorance and everything. We are not talking about the buddhist point of view, but point of view itself. Karma is not particularly anthropocentric; it's the totality of the whole thing. We could straighten ourselves out here. According to the buddhist tradition

Talk One

we have six realms: the world of gods, jealous gods, human beings, hungry ghosts, animals and hell. So what we are talking about at this point has nothing to do with an anthropocentric approach at all, it's the totality of the whole thing. And as far as the rocks, the trees, the sky and mountains and rivers and whatever are concerned--they are all connected with that bouncing-back situation, that particular relationship. For instance, this tent has no karma as an individual concern. But because we put it up, because we sit underneath it, therefore the tent becomes our karma--not on its own, but because we are in it. It's very, very tricky. All kinds of trips are going on now with lots of ideas. For instance, people talk about plants: If they play music to the plants, they grow better; if they ignore them or say bad things about the plants, they grow worse and die. It purely depends on the attitude of the owner of the plant, you know. The plant is just a thing, just a thing. But the owner thinks, "Since I like Beethoven, maybe my plant would appreciate hearing Beethoven too"--although the plant has nothing to do with Beethoven at all; it's just a simple plant. For that matter, that chrysanthemum from Japan--should you play it Beethoven or Bob Dylan? It's tricky, because it's your plant.

Q: Rinpoche, it seems this whole process begins with a kind of spontaneous moving off balance in open space, which then gets more and more wild and more and more firm. As we tread the path and move back towards the open space, what is it that keeps that process from happening over and over again? How is it that we can be aware of--not be aware of, but be--open space without falling off balance all over again? How is it that the process doesn't keep happening? As we tread the path and move back towards the original open space, why doesn't the same thing occur again?

R: You mean, once we got back. Aah! That's a very interesting point. Because you have already stepped into the time situation, you are constantly being, now and now and now and now. Even the attainment of enlightenment, from that point of view, is the attainment of now rather than the attainment of totality. And because your attainment of totality is, as well, your attainment of absolute nowness, therefore you exclude the past and the future altogether. You see what I mean? In other words, you don't make the same mistake twice because it's such a gigantic mistake. Huge mistake. It makes a tremendous impression on you. It is a situation of total mistake and total awakensness at the same time. Nothing like that could happen twice from that point of view. And moreover, you are

going back to its origin, original situation, rather than manufacturing something. Once you go back to its origin, there is less chance of recurrence.

Q: In that origin, you can still see your mistake?

R: Yes. But then you become buddhas, or whatever, which means you are awakened from that hangover.

Q: You don't forget, there is still despair there?

R: You never forget your past. The past becomes your path. So therefore the path could be related to other people as the teaching of the doctrine.

Q: Rinpoche, you said that at the moment of the tendency to head for something, to make some sense of yourself, there is also a sense of death. Maybe nonsense, but the sense of death is there. Maybe in the hesitation. You said it as kind of a positive thing. Because of course, if you don't put forth something, then there is no self. It's only a false putting forth anyhow. So the sense of death at that point really has a very positive feeling to it, as if it's there all the time receiving what you are putting forth--that's your real potential sense of truth, isn't it?

R: Something too deliberate. As though you are playing a deliberate game of putting one thing after another. You see what I mean? And as long as you have worked out your logic closely at the beginning, therefore you follow your logical textbooks. And something has become very premeditated rather than spontaneous because there is no doubt involved. The whole thing has to be a freelance situation, so to speak, that you are self-employed. You have nothing to lose if you don't get your job, and you have nothing to gain. It's your good luck.

Q: What did you mean by the sense of death?

R: The sense of death is that there are constant possibilities of a lot happening. There are possibilities of this tent collapsing on our heads--any moment. It is true.

The Four Reminders

From, *a Guide to the Ngondro Refuge Practice*, by Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche

Preciousness of a Human Birth:

This human existence with all its freedoms and endowments is extremely difficult to attain.

It enables one to accomplish the meaning of one's being.

Having attained such a precious existence,

If one does not accomplish benefit at this time,

How could one achieve this perfect treasure in the future?

Impermanence:

The three realms are as impermanent as autumn clouds.

The births and deaths of beings are like a dance performance.

Flashing by like lightening in the sky, the life span of beings

Races swiftly like a waterfall over a steep mountain.

Karma:

When the time comes for even a king to depart,

Neither his riches nor loved ones, relatives and friends will follow.

Wherever beings abide, wherever they go,

Karma alone follows them like a shadow.

The tree realms blaze with the sufferings of old age and sickness,

And there is no protector from the raging flames of death.

Born into cyclic existence, beings dwell continually in ignorance,

Circling like bees trapped in a jar.

Truth of Suffering:

Overpowered by existence, craving and ignorance,

All beings – humans, gods and beings of the three lower realms –

Circle unwittingly in the six realms of existence

Like the spinning of a potter's wheel.