

KHENPO NGAWANG DHAMCHOE

The Four Noble Truths



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Preface



The Four Noble Truths is one of four booklets that serve as readings on The Hinayana. The Hinayana is one of the main traditions of Buddhism and the subject of the first year of The Autumn Buddhist Philosophy Course. There are four booklets in The Hinayana series – *The Four Common Foundations*, *The Four Noble Truths*, *Refuge and Bodhicitta including the precepts and vows*, and *Shamatha and Vipassana*. The Hinayana refers to a system of thought based on the sutras, one that leads its followers ultimately from suffering to self-liberation. Its practitioners are generally concerned with the achievement of nirvana as an arhat or pratyekabuddha.

The Four Noble Truths provides the framework for liberating insight on the nature of life. They show that there is suffering; there is an origin to suffering; there is cessation of suffering; and there is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.

The booklets are based on the recorded teachings of Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe. Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe is one of the most highly qualified Tibetan Buddhist Sakya Lamas in Australia. He is highly respected in Australia and internationally for his profound knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism, the clarity and inspirational qualities of his teachings, and his understanding of the western mind.

Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe has been a monk for more than 40 years. At the age of nine, he entered the Sakya monastery in Bir, India, and remained there for 10 years. When Khenpo was 19, the principal of Sakya College in Dehradun, His Eminence Khenchen Appey Rinpoche, asked for the Sakya monastery to send senior monks to join the Sakya College. Sakya College is one of the most famous Tibetan Philosophical Institutes in India. It was established by His Holiness the 41st Sakya Trizin and His Eminence Khenchen Appey Rinpoche.

Khenpo was chosen. He studied at the Sakya college for just over 10 years, from 1979 to 1990. In his sixth year he was nominated as the Discipline Master. This was a challenging role, as some of the monks, including his peers, were older than him. In Khenpo's seventh year he was appointed a Teacher's Assistant, and in the eighth year he studied for the degree of Kacho Pa – the equivalent to a Bachelor of Arts, requiring intensive study. In Khenpo's ninth and tenth years he studied for the degree of Loppon, equivalent to a PhD degree. At the same time he taught and conducted examinations at the college.

In 1994 His Holiness the 41st Sakya Trizin appointed Khenpo as resident teacher at Sakya Tharpa Ling, a Buddhist centre in Sydney, following the passing of the 14th Gyalsay Tulku Rinpoche. In 2002, His Holiness bestowed on him the title of khenpo, or abbot, in recognition of his teaching ability. The bestowal of the term Khenpo recognises something considered rare and precious as in the name Rinpoche. His Holiness the 41st Sakya Trizin

recognised Khenpo's special qualities and deep understanding of Buddhist philosophies, both in sutra and tantra, and held an Enthronement Ceremony in the Bir Monastery Northern India, promoting Khenpo from the term Loppon to Khenpo in March 2002.

The term 'khenpo' has at least three meanings in Tibetan Buddhism: a scholar who has completed an extensive course of study in sutra and tantra, a senior Lama who can give ordinations, and the head of a monastery. The khenpos have been the main channels for keeping the purity of Buddha's teachings alive from generation to generation within the Tibetan monastic tradition.

Since 2017 Khenpo has lived and taught at Kamalashila Tibetan Buddhist Centre near Tilba on the South Coast of New South Wales. He travels to many countries to spread the Dharma.

From 2017 to 2019, Khenpo taught the first component of the Seven Year Complete Path for senior students which was coordinated by the International Buddhist Academy in Kathmandu under the strict guidance and the program developed by His Holiness the 42nd Sakya Trizin. In 2019, he began to develop The Autumn Buddhist Philosophy Course, a three-year program teaching the main concepts and practices of the three main traditions of Buddhism – Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana. The inaugural program is scheduled to start in 2022.

There are many to thank for *The Hinayana Booklets* but here we would like to thank Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe for his precious teachings which he has given so generously and diligently to his students over so many years. They have greatly helped his students to understand and apply the Dharma in their lives.

*May the precious Dharma continue down through the ages
to guide countless beings on the Path.*

Acknowledgements

We have many to thank for their work on the series entitled The Hinayana Booklets. *The Four Noble Truths* was prepared over two years and with many hours of work by both transcribers and editors. *The Four Noble Truths* was originally transcribed and edited in 2004 by Ani Tenpa Sangmo, assisted by Ann Kelly and Franky O'Connor. It was revised in 2021 by Lael Morrissey, Carole Kayrooz and Robert Garran. Transcribers painstakingly noted down the words of Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe which were drawn from different recorded sessions. This took many hours and sometimes weeks of work. Editors then substantively reviewed the overall structure, content and flow of the manuscript. The Hinayana Booklets will be updated again at the end of 2022 to include a Glossary and Index.

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The person who first taught The Four Noble Truths we call the Buddha. Buddha first taught The Four Noble Truths to five masters, the companions who become his first disciples.

Buddha gained full enlightenment when he was about 30. After he obtained full enlightenment, he tried to share his experience and wisdom with others who were interested in being like him. However, at that time he discovered that it was very hard to explain his experience, because his experience and understanding were so profound, they were beyond ordinary people's thoughts. His experiences were free from all other experiences and very profound. Just hearing that profound wisdom immediately reduced one's stress and suffering and increased one's joy.

Buddha is not inherent in existence – he is not that kind of person. In Sanskrit the word Buddha is made of two words with two different kinds of meaning.

One is 'awakened' and one is 'gain' – awakened from delusions or ignorance,

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and gain knowledge or omniscience. So once free from all our defilements and having gained wisdom, that state one can call the Buddha. Therefore, Buddha is not just one person, Buddhism teaches that everyone has the same potential to be a Buddha. How do we become a Buddha? Through the practice of meditation and by following, in our daily life, the path Buddha shows us.

Buddha spent many lifetimes to obtain omniscience. He obtained enlightenment over 2600 years ago in a place in India called Bodhgaya, now a pilgrimage site. I have been there many times and have also taken Australian groups there. Some who were non-Buddhist and even those who were not strong practitioners mention the special energy of Bodhgaya. Just to be there is to feel very calm and peaceful. Buddha did not accidentally gain enlightenment there – he chose that specific place, which has very strong energy, to open one up to very strong realisations. Whoever goes there can feel this.

Buddha tried his best to teach to some of the people, but no one could understand his experience. He became discouraged and almost abandoned his teachings to go back to his home to continue to meditate. During that time a few beings from the heavenly realms – some deities, heavenly kings and Brahmins, some high spirit-beings that had some kind of clairvoyance to read other people's minds – discovered that if Buddha withdrew his teachings, then all that knowledge would be lost to these current eons. All the kings requested Buddha to continue his teachings because in their wisdom they saw this as the right time to teach the Dharma. Buddha accepted their offer and started to give his teachings.

Everything Buddha said has connections and has interdependencies. The reason he gave his teachings was not to show off but because every one of us is deserving of happiness and peace. These can only be gained when we have wisdom. Without wisdom, one cannot gain true happiness. To gain happiness we must develop wisdom, and to develop wisdom Buddha taught the wisdom teachings.

Buddha taught in India in a place called Saranath. You can still go there today and see the place where he taught. This is still an especially important place in India. The first people Buddha taught became his five main disciples.

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These were men he met before he obtained full enlightenment. Before Buddha obtained enlightenment, he did six years of meditation with five others who were Hindu masters. At that time, he thought someone could only find liberation or gain enlightenment through meditation alone. Each day he ate only one grain of rice and after six years he almost died and did not achieve any kind of liberation. So, Buddha stopped fasting and started to eat food and drink water and to take care of his health. He followed the middle path, that is, not one of extremes.

While some people think meditation is the most important thing needed to calm the mind and bring peace, liberation does not come from meditation alone – it must be combined with other things. Meditation combined with wisdom is one method to calm one’s mind and bring peace. When we are not doing meditation, such as in our general and everyday life, it is important to cultivate love and compassion.

Love and compassion combined with meditation make up what is called the middle path, which leads us to happiness and peace. Buddha meditated for six years with the five Hindu masters, but then they disconnected from him because he took a different path. Buddha became mindful about loving-kindness and compassion and continued to meditate, with the result that he obtained full enlightenment. After he obtained enlightenment, Buddha went to Varanasi to give teachings.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

At first Buddha taught the five masters, his previous companions who become his first disciples. He taught them what are called The Four Noble Truths or sometimes called the Higher Truths; ‘higher’ means they have extraordinary qualities that distinguish them from ordinary truths. There are two different kinds of truth – ordinary truth and ultimate truth. Here we are talking about the ultimate truth where enlightened beings see reality through their meditations and not just through their intellect. This is the reason for the name “Noble Truths”.

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

The Four Noble Truths are:

1. the Truth of Suffering
2. the Truth of Cause
3. the Truth of Cessation
4. the Truth of the Path

Before I give an account of the Four Noble Truths, I need to explain how they are taught according to the three schools of Buddhism.

THE THREE SCHOOLS OF BUDDHISM

There has never been just one school of Buddhism. There were, during the Buddha's time, and still are, three different schools. The first school is the Theravada School, the second is the Mahayana School, and the third is the Vajrayana School. The Theravada School is known as the 'Theravadayana' and the Sanskrit word 'yana' means responsibility. There are two main responsibilities – responsibility of oneself and responsibility of oneself and others. A person, who carries just his or her own responsibility is called Theravadayana, that is, a practitioner who is seeking one's own liberation. This person carries less responsibility (just looking after oneself) and sometimes is also called Hinayana or 'Lesser Vehicle'. The second and third schools, or Mahayana and Vajrayana, are called 'Great Vehicle'. They are called the Great Vehicle because they carry both responsibilities, that is, the responsibility of looking after oneself as well as others.

Buddha taught these three different types of teaching because human beings have three different states of mind. Some are more interested in looking after themselves and not so much interested in looking after others. So, for them, Buddha taught the first, Theravada or (Hinayana) type of teachings. For someone who is born with a great heart, a very kind heart who thinks 'it is not just myself who is important, others are important too', Buddha taught the Mahayana teachings. Lastly, for a follower of Mahayana who wants to help others but wants to achieve this quickly, Buddha taught the Vajrayana or very secret teachings.

We must choose for ourselves the one of these three methods which suits

us best, instead of others telling us what to choose. Some Buddhists say that when Buddha gave these different teachings, he opened up a supermarket. When you go to the supermarket everything is there, whatever you need, you can buy it. Similarly, Buddha gave all these teachings, and whatever fits for you, whatever is more important for you, you take that and apply it in your daily life. This is the reason Buddha taught the teachings of these three different schools.

Sometimes people think that if they study Theravada then there is a difference between it and Mahayana, and that this could cause problems between themselves and the followers of Mahayana. In the opposite manner, those who study Mahayana may think there is a problem with the Hinayana way and, similarly, a person who only studies Vajrayana may also think that within Hinayana and Mahayana there are problems. But this thinking only comes from lack of understanding. If you study all the three schools there are no contradictions – they all have the Four Noble Truths and Buddha taught them all.

You will often hear about ‘Turning the Wheel of Dharma’. This refers to the ‘Wheel’ of teachings. Teachings are like a vehicle; they transport you or move you along the spiritual journey. In the same way Buddha gained wisdom and understanding through his own practice, then taught this to others so they could achieve the same realisation. That is, transporting one sort of knowledge into another. Buddha himself taught or transferred his wisdom and knowledge 2600 years ago to his five disciples.

The disciples also passed down the teachings to other masters and so on right down to the present moment. Each master gains honest teachings so whatever knowledge he gains and whatever teachings he gives are not just given because he studies the book, they come from the transmissions right back to the Buddha. Even with my teaching, I am not just reading out the text from the book. I received transmissions from my masters and their masters, right back to the Buddha. The whole lineage system is particularly important in Tibetan Buddhism.

If you have a lineage then the lineage transmission is authentic. The teachings from a true lineage are much more powerful than if you just study

in the university. There are big differences between someone who studies but does not have the lineage and someone who does. There is the passing down one to another without interruption – it never stopped – from Buddha right up until now. So, we can always find out or name each master right back to the Buddha to establish the lineage.

THE FIRST NOBLE TRUTH – THE TRUTH OF SUFFERING

Some people get despondent about there being so much suffering. We all have a certain amount of suffering in our lives, and when we come to the Buddhist centre, we are looking for some peace and happiness. If Buddhism only talked about suffering and did not talk about an antidote, you would have a right to complain. But with Buddhism, firstly, it is important to understand what suffering is, and after we understand our suffering, we can think ‘what is the remedy’ – if you do not know about the suffering then you will not be interested in the remedy. Buddhism is like studying medicine. The first thing they teach you is not medicine, because if you do not know about illness or sickness or disease then there is no point to study medicine because you will not know what to use or how to use it. Once you know all about the sickness, then you can research to produce the medicine to cure this sickness.

First, we must learn about all the sorts of suffering. Once we understand suffering then we need to think about whether it is curable or not. If you cannot heal the suffering, then there is no point in studying it. If it is something that you can cure, then it is valuable to study it first.

Therefore, studying is the first stage and healing is the second stage. To heal the sickness or illness you need to know what caused the sickness. Firstly we need to understand suffering and secondly, we need to know what the cause of the suffering is.

Most of the time modern people do not look or spend time trying to identify the cause of suffering. Whenever suffering or difficulties arise people are more likely to move away from or ignore their problems. For example, if you have a problem with your job or environment you do not look at what is

causing it, you just immediately want to change jobs. You go somewhere else to find another job and then you have a similar problem and again you try to escape. You can escape everywhere, but this will not help you find the cause of the suffering. No matter how much you change your job, no matter how much you change your food or clothes, you are not going to end the problem. Sometimes the problems are even going to increase because of your lack of understanding of what is causing the suffering. We always try to avoid the result rather than find the cause and this way we are never going to fix the problem. We must look deeper at what really is causing this unpleasantness and suffering.

Suffering is the first truth.

THE SECOND NOBLE TRUTH – THE TRUTH OF THE CAUSE OF SUFFERING

Secondly, we have to understand the cause of suffering. The cause is the negative thoughts and emotions, negative mind, that arises within us. For example, maybe you have problems with communication – you have to think about what part of this is your problem and what part of this is coming from others. Usually, we do not think about our part, and we are always blaming others. For the sake of one's own need to feel good we are always blaming or criticising others. But there is no guarantee that other people are always the cause of your problems. Maybe it is your own problem. If you do not sit and think about that then you will never know your own mistakes and if you carry your own mistakes wherever you go then you will always have that problem. The problem is not coming from outside, from others, the problem is within you. Because you do not understand your own mistakes, then you have a tendency to complain or criticise others – as soon as you recognise your own mistakes you have a better chance of minimising or reducing that particular cause of suffering.

The cause of suffering is the second truth.

THE THIRD NOBLE TRUTH – THE TRUTH OF CESSATION OF SUFFERING

You need to be aware when you have a negative mind. You need to know that you are having negative thoughts and emotions in order to do something about them. This requires mindfulness. Then you can apply specific antidotes to address them as soon as they arise. If you keep on applying the antidotes one day you will feel all the problems are gone. In our example of communicating with others, you will no longer have any problem with communications.

We call that state, when reached, cessation – we are free from the problems.

The third truth is that suffering can cease, and we can be free of it.

THE FOURTH NOBLE TRUTH – THE TRUTH OF THE PATH

Once we know the cause of the problems we experience then we need to think about how to remedy that problem. We need to think about how I can improve my communication skills, what is a better way to communicate with others. We need to deeply search for the antidote of the problem.

The truth of the path is like the remedy, the antidote to one's own mistakes or problems. The fourth step is taking the path of action. The means by which we achieve an end to suffering is the fourth truth, the truth of the path.

Buddha taught The Four Noble or Enlightened Truths in this order. Ordinarily we would not understand such great realisations and enlightenments. It was only the great masters who researched, experimented, and meditated on these who discovered what is the cause and what is the result of suffering. These two, and the application of the antidote to the defilement (when we have found the antidote), bring the result, and the result is true peace, lasting peace, and happiness. So lasting peace and happiness can only be gained when one is free from the cause and the result of suffering. If someone only has the feeling of suffering all their life, then they cannot find truth and happiness. For this reason, it is especially important to study The Four Noble Truths.

SUBTLE AND GROSS LEVELS OF SUFFERING

Human beings only understand suffering on a very gross level. That is, when you lose your job, lose your partner, or lose your loved ones, the state you are in is suffering. That is what we know – the gross level of suffering. But we don't know the very subtle level of suffering. The subtle state of suffering is the actual cause of the grievous gross level of suffering. The gross level is not what is happening immediately, such as when you are parting from a partner, the gross level is the result. Before that you were already accumulating day-by-day misunderstandings between you and the other person; they built up bit by bit. However, these were not recognised at the time. It was only when you got truly angry with that person because you were separating that the depression, negative emotions and all the gross level feelings arose. But they did not come without the subtle state, so this is particularly important.

There are three states – first negative emotions arise and most times we don't recognise them. When extremely negative feelings such as anger or jealousy arise, we just let them – so that when we allow them to arise continuously, they begin to dominate and become very settled in your mind. Once you settle down with that negative anger or jealousy then that dominates your mind. Once you dominate your mind with anger or jealousy then it brings much suffering into your life. This is the second stage – first stage is the arising; the second stage is when the feelings becoming settled. If you don't do anything then it settles down and once it settles down, then it occupies your life – this is the third stage.

For example, if someone is a terrorist when they first come to the country and you don't recognise them as a terrorist or ignore them, you allow them to come in. Then, because they have been allowed in, they establish their organisation and plans and decide what they are going to do. Once they are settled down and comfortable then they start to complete their plans, the bombing and killing of people. So, there are three stages, and the same three stages are in our mental life, because in our minds there are terrorists too. There is an inner terrorist and an outer terrorist. The inner terrorist is our own negative emotions, so it is very important to recognise them as a terrorist

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as soon as they arise because they cause harm to you and others. Anger causes harm more to you than to the other person. Your own experience will have shown you how much harm anger causes you. You may think that when you get angry you beat others by saying the wrong thing or shouting harsh words at them – it hurts others, but it hurts you more than them. This is the real terrorist in your life, it is not other people at all.

As soon as these negative emotions arise, we must make them feel unwelcome – not allow them to come, to enter your mind. It is much easier to stop them at the beginning point, at the point of arising. For example, think about an immigration point. Somebody applies for a visa and at that moment you have the control as to whether you are going to approve that visa or not. At that moment you have the power to say yes or no, but if you don't examine them very carefully and you give them permission to enter the country, then you have lost control because they have already been approved to come in and you don't know what they will do or where they will act.

Likewise, when anger is almost coming in, it is like a migrant – are you going to give it a visa or not? If you give the visa, then what is the anger going to do? When the anger arises, you do not know what it is going to do, how it is going to be expressed. From your own past experiences how many times did you allow anger into your mind? And how much damage did it do to your life and how many unhappy feelings did it cause between you and your family? Think of all these things and that way you may be less inclined to let anger arise at the very beginning. If in the beginning no anger arises then anger cannot do any damage to yourself or others. It is especially important to not allow anger to arise, once we allow it to arise then it is very hard to defeat it, to chase it out. We all know this problem, once you allow negative emotions to come into this country like a terrorist and they settle down it is extremely hard to make them go back to their own country as they are living in a very skilful form so that you don't recognise or think they are terrorists. They are very nice and friendly, but they are always terrorising.

It is the same with our anger, deep in our minds we are very friendly to others because we think our anger is protecting us and defeating others. But anger is not protecting us – anger causes more damage to our lives –

anger is one of the most 'terrorist' of all feelings. Therefore, it is particularly important to not let it arise. This again is a matter of practice and training. Intellectually when you listen you know what I have told you but practically it is hard because you are not used to discouraging anger. Once you know that it is important to apply this knowledge in your everyday life eventually you can be a master at defeating 'the anger-arising mind'. But it takes time, and again, 'takes time' means the time taken depends on one's own treatment and how diligent you are to stop the negative thought. If you are strenuous in this it takes a much shorter time to overcome one's anger. If you are not so diligent and only try occasionally, this is not constant training of one's mind and of course it takes a much longer time. Practice and training is really up to the individual.

So, all the suffering on the gross level is coming from the subtle level of sufferings. We only know the gross level and we do not understand the subtle level. Subtle level understanding is that as soon as a negative feeling or thought starts to arise, that is the subtle level. But we do not notice so we just allow it to arise and build up until one day there is a big explosion. And this will cause a lot of suffering. The subtle state is a much deeper state.

MEDITATION

Most people think that meditation is just to relax or calm your mind. This is true but it is also more than that. The more you calm your mind, the more you reduce the negative emotions and that is what brings you a more relaxed mind. For instance, if you are extremely hot and to cool down you go to have a shower and as soon as you have the shower this makes you feel cooler. But very shortly, perhaps in one to two hours you get hot again because the shower has only helped for a short time. If you then turn on the air conditioning however, you stay cool. In the same way if you meditate thinking only about having some peace you will not go into the subtle level – if you don't uproot the cause of suffering – then there is only a short-term benefit of peace and the next day again you come back to the same stress and worry. It is not going to uproot one's problems.

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Alternatively, if through the practice of meditation, you think deeply that stress and worry come from deep within this or that cause, and if you recognise negative emotions and thoughts and do not allow them to arise, then you go into the deeper state of identifying the root cause of your suffering. It is similar to if you have an unwanted tree in the back yard or garden. No matter how much you chop it, it always grows back. When you chop for the short term, it is okay but then it starts to grow back again. More importantly if you uproot it, then it does not grow back again. To uproot the cause of the problem we have to go through the meditation, we have to go into a deeper state to what really causes the foundations of these problems. So, in this way, one day we will have uprooted all the causes and conditions and then we can realise lasting peace, lasting happiness.

This is achievable. If it was not achievable, then there would be no point in meditating. These things are achievable because everything is interdependent, including causes and conditions. The nature of causes and conditions is not like inherently existent phenomena. They are impermanent and they are exhaustible. If something is inherently existent then you cannot change it. No matter what you do it is always going to be there. Because the nature of causes and conditions is exhaustible their nature is impermanence. If you withdraw one condition, then you will never grow things. To grow something, you need many causes and conditions – not just one. For instance, to grow one type of fruit tree, the seed alone is not enough. The seed also needs the right kind of soil, the right time and the right conditions. If you have all these causes and conditions, then you will be able to grow this fruit tree. If you miss one of them, then it will not grow, or if it does, it will be very unhealthy. Whether the tree is healthy or unhealthy depends on all the conditions and causes to be complete.

Emotions are the same. Emotions have many forms, that is, we can have very weak or strong negative emotions. They have their own complete causes and conditions. Weak negative emotions arise from ignorance or lack of wisdom. If you always continue to behave or act in the same way, then you have very weak emotions that cause little harm in your life or the lives of others.

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Through meditation we can change the conditions that cause negative emotions. The more you change the negative causes and conditions then even if the negative emotions arise, they will be very weak. They hurt and cause harm, but this is lessened and is a minor harmfulness to yourself and others. The whole point of meditation is to minimise the causes and conditions of negative emotions. If you can do that, then the more you meditate the more you can find benefits beyond a short-term fix of your problems.

Buddhist meditation brings not just day-to-day calm. Buddhist meditation goes deeper and uproots the cause and condition of the emotions. This is the meaning of meditation. If you do not distinguish the different types of meditation, then it is possible you might think – ‘I did 10 years meditation and I still have the same problems’.

Lots of people have this experience. Because just doing meditation alone is not a guarantee that you are going to be free of problems. You need to know the right instructions; you need to know the right way to meditate. If you meditate the right way, following the instructions, then it really can help you. Again, from a medical viewpoint – if you go to see the right doctor and follow his or her instructions and take the medicine at the right time then there is a better chance of curing your sickness.

Many people don't go to a doctor and instead just follow their friends' advice to try this or that medication. But maybe their sickness and yours is not the same, maybe they are different. So if you never go to see a doctor but just follow your friend or a book then no matter how many times you take the medicine there is no guarantee that it will heal your sickness. Sometimes it may even cause harm because you have followed the wrong instructions. The person may not have meant to harm you, but they are not the right person, that is, they do not have the knowledge and experience to heal you. That is why you need to visit a registered doctor to give you a prescription.

It is the same in Buddhism. Some people just read a book and then follow that. Whether this will be effective depends on who wrote the book. Sometimes people get a little bit of understanding from studying Buddhism or meditation or spirituality as a hobby, because they are interested. Then they write books on the subject. The people who read them don't know the

qualifications of the writer or even who they are. Just because I read this book and follow this meditation does not mean I will gain realisations. Therefore, it is important to find someone that you know is a qualified Buddhist teacher, just as you would with a medical doctor, so you know that they will be the best able to cure one's sickness.

GROSS STATES OF SUFFERING

The meaning of meditation is to find the main causes of suffering. Suffering has four natures. The nature of suffering is impermanence, the nature of suffering is suffering, the nature of suffering is emptiness and the nature of suffering is selflessness. These natures of suffering ordinary people cannot understand. Only the meditator or enlightened being can discover the nature of suffering.

The developing nature of suffering becomes apparent when we experience negative emotions or physical sickness. Suffering is not just immediately there; it takes time to build. Suffering is like fruit and fruit takes time to grow. You are not going plant a tree and have fruit on it at that very moment. It may take three or four years for the tree to grow fruit. Likewise, our current experience of suffering is not an instant result, it took a while to develop. For instance, we have many different kinds of problems including old age and sickness; all these different kinds of problems are due to impermanence. Impermanence leads us to suffering.

As well as having four natures, suffering then has three different types: suffering of suffering, suffering of change and suffering as the base of all phenomena. What people generally describe as suffering is suffering of the first type – the suffering of suffering. That is, when we experience anger, or some kind of negative emotion or when we are tired or with a headache and so forth, the suffering that you feel then is the suffering of suffering.

People do not generally understand the suffering of change. If we take the example of going to a party, the suffering of change will be experienced even in this seemingly positive event. If you were told going to a party was suffering you would find it hard to accept or understand this. A party is

usually where you go to enjoy, have fun, or celebrate something. It is nice to do and can bring happiness. But Buddhism also says this can cause suffering. Of course, when you go to a party you do lots of nice things such as laugh and talk, but at the same time you lose energy, you become exhausted, and when you get home you are very tired. Also, at the party you drink too much and eat too much and the next day you have a headache and a sore stomach. While at the party you might gossip about each other. What you say can be hurtful to someone you know. Then once you get over these things you may say – ‘Oh, I had such a great time’, but at the same time you are exhausted and depressed. This kind of happiness is fleeting; it never lasts; it is not there forever. This is what we call the suffering of change.

Another example is when you go to the shopping centre and spend lots of money on nice clothes; at that moment you feel really great – ‘Oh, I’ve just found my favourite dress’ or shirt or shoes, but then soon you are not happy with them anymore. Because if you were genuinely happy with that item, then you should want to wear it all the time – but after a short time, you are not interested in it anymore and just put it in your cupboard and forget about it and want to buy something else. In this way lasting happiness is not found. Still another example, this time with food, one day you eat Thai food, and this becomes your favourite, and you don’t want to eat anything else, and you always go to that Thai restaurant. But after a few weeks or months you don’t want to go there anymore and may say, ‘I am sick of eating Thai food’ and you don’t even like the smell anymore. But the food has not changed, it is your mind that has changed with your emotions.

This is suffering of change. A lot of our sufferings come from the suffering of change. It is when we feel, ‘Oh I like this very much’ and we do that thing all the time and then we get tired of it. It is the same as when you meet a new partner – a boyfriend or girlfriend. At first everything is perfect and beautiful, then maybe a few months later you start arguing and then one day you say ‘I don’t want to stay with this person all of my life’ – but they are still the same person you have known – they have not changed. Because of the suffering of change, when we find something nice, we become so excited, and then our clinging too much to that thing creates more suffering.

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Most of what is hurtful comes from one's loved ones. If you have enemies right at the beginning, they are going to hurt you, but they will hurt you less than the hurt that comes from one's loved ones. If a loved one causes hurt, then it is a more serious wound than the hurt received from one who does not know you so well. The stronger the emotions or clinging you have to someone the more hurt they can cause you. Because you love that person, you cling to that person. The feeling and the clinging causes more hurt. You cling to the closeness of the person. Due to the clinging, if the one you love beats you with a stick, and then an enemy beats you with a stick, the beating from your loved one will hurt most. The stick brings the same pain, and the same energy is used, but feeling-wise, where the clinging and attachment to the love exists, the pain is different. Buddhism says the cause of our suffering is not the outer pain, the bottom line is that the cause of suffering is our own mind.

The mind is everything if we are talking about peace and happiness, these are states of mind. If we are talking about suffering and negative emotions, these are also states of mind. The mind is extremely important in Buddhism. A definition of Buddhism is 'to look inward'. Rather than looking outward, we look inward because every happiness and every suffering is arising from your own mind. If you do not recognise this, then you may try to buy happiness outside. We think, 'if I have a nice house, I am going to be happy'. People build houses, but no matter how beautiful the house is, they do not find happiness in that. Then they worry 'why am I so unhappy?' 'Oh, I lack in clothes,' and then you go shopping, but still you cannot buy happiness outside. If you could buy happiness then you would think that the many rich people who can afford to buy so many pairs of shoes and clothes must be incredibly happy, but instead you see that many are very unhappy. Happiness is not something that you can buy. When you do not understand this, you can spend so much money trying to find happiness; but no matter how much money we spend happiness is not found. All that is found is more stress. When we buy things it is OK but when you get the bill you get a headache.

The simple way to get happiness is from one's own mind. Think about what it is you really need, really want. If you keep your mind uncluttered by

many wants, you will experience a healthier happiness than when your mind is complicated. The more complicated your mind is, the more stressful life is. The result is more unhappiness. In this way the changing nature of suffering is very hard to recognise; and this is one of the real causes of suffering – the suffering of change.

SUBTLE STATES OF SUFFERING

Thirdly, we talk about suffering as the base of all phenomena. This is a much more subtle state of suffering. Subtle changes, subtle impermanence, is like when you have something new and you love it very much, but then it gets older and then you dislike it. Getting older is that subtle state of impermanence, just like the way we become old; we are not born with old age. Then time goes by, and we get older and older and this getting older occurs moment by moment. A minute is 60 seconds and each second, we are not the same person. We are changing continuously; we are a continuation from when we are born until we die. Although we call ourselves by the same name all our life, we are in a state of continuous change and never remain the same person. If we remained the same as in the past moment then we would be stagnating, we would never change.

It is at the gross level that our body and our thinking originate. We are always moving forward, rather than backward. For this reason, nothing remains as before, we are always in a state of change. Even when you go back home today there will already have been changes. These changes are often subtle changes that we cannot understand, our eye-consciousness cannot see. But we can see them 10 years later or 20 years later, even though the changes don't just happen 20 years later, they are happening every moment, every second is one of change.

Again, we understand this through meditation. Through meditation we can see that there are two different kinds of eyes – the inner and the outer. The outer eye is where our eye consciousness can see visible forms, but the inner eye can see the subtle state of form. In this way, meditation develops the inner state of the eye. This inner state of the eye is called wisdom.

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Wisdom has nothing to do with the physical eye consciousness or physical form. The inner eye is the most important. The inner eye can really develop wisdom. The definition of wisdom is to be able to distinguish what to adopt and what to abandon. True wisdom will distinguish what is right and what is wrong. If you cannot distinguish right from wrong, then everyone will be saying, 'I am doing the right thing' but, they are not sure if they are doing right or wrong. The only way to tell is from the result. The result will show you. If you continue to do the right thing then it is guaranteed to bring you peace and happiness. If you continue to develop peace and happiness, then you know you are doing the right thing. If you think 'I am doing right' but the result is suffering or a negative emotion and unhappiness, then what you did was wrong, because the right thing cannot bring the wrong result.

RESULTS

In Buddhism this is an especially important point. If you do the right thing it brings the right result; if you do the wrong thing, you get the wrong result. Every seed is loyal to its own result. A specific seed cannot produce a different result. For example, if you plant an orange seed it is going to grow into an orange tree, not an apple tree. So, if you plant an orange seed but expect to get an apple then you are going to be disappointed – 'I planted an apple seed, so why did this seed become an orange tree?' – an apple seed did not bring an orange, it was a mistake. Likewise, when you think you are doing the right thing but get negative results then you get angry with yourself – 'I work so hard so why am I stuck with so many negative results?' This is the answer – you will only get the right results when you understand about right and wrong. In this way, wisdom is important.

IMPERMANENCE

Wisdom, as we have mentioned, is knowing that doing the right thing will bring the right result and doing the wrong thing will bring the wrong result. These are pervasive phenomena. The nature of pervasive phenomena is that

every compound phenomenon is impermanent. Compound phenomena are whatever depends on cause and conditions. You cannot find any compound phenomena that exist permanently. This is a very vast Buddhist view. That is, everything is impermanent. Impermanence is the reason that suffering comes when meeting one's loved ones. If you do not realise this, then you will cling onto wanting to be with them forever; but because their nature is impermanence you cannot have them forever. This would be impossible. If you think 'I want to be with them forever' then the only thing you will build is your own suffering. The object is not what is causing the suffering, it is your misunderstanding that causes suffering.

Something inherently built or created to last forever does not exist. Even Mt Everest, which is such a huge mountain, that it seems will last forever, one day will change. Remember that millions of years ago, Mt Everest did not exist. Because of geological pressures, elements changed and Mt Everest emerged. Who knows, in a few million years there may be another Mt Everest in another part of the world. If something as vast as Mt Everest can change then compared with that, our lives are exceedingly small – you cannot find anything everlasting. This is the reality – everything is changeable. So, you cannot find any compound phenomena that is lasting.

EMPTINESS

The reason that everything is impermanent is because everything is emptiness. 'Emptiness' in Buddhism is a key topic, and it is extremely hard to understand. Most people understand emptiness as nothingness, and they get frightened about this. Emptiness is not nothingness; it is not nihilism. Emptiness is about everything because the emptiness we are talking about is that you cannot find any single object without it depending on others. Everything exists because it depends on others. I exist because I am dependent on many causes and conditions and without them, I would not be here today. It's the same as this house. This house is dependent on many things – cement, wood, and so on; things put together in this shape are named 'house'. If you try to research and analyse which of these materials is the house, you will not find

the house in these elements. When we put them all together we give the label 'house'. The house is no other than all these materials put together. It is the same as a car. If you analyse which part makes up the car – the engine, body, the steering, or the wheels – we cannot find a car. The individual parts do not make a car – not until they are all put together and then we give the label 'car'. So, the mind thinks 'Oh, this is a car' but what we think is a car is just the label – there is no outside existence of car. If we think it exists out there then we must point out which part makes it a car – the body, the wheels, or windows, which one is the car? Without all this there is no car, 'car' is just a label.

The emptiness we talk about is the ultimate nature – we are not talking about the relative or conventional nature of the car. In conventional nature the car exists. When we have all the parts and when we do not analyse, then the car exists. But when we truly analyse then we will not find the car. So ultimately the car is emptiness.

BENEFITS OF UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF EMPTINESS

The benefits of understanding the concept of emptiness are that when we have a difficulty or suffering, our fear is that it will last forever. However, as soon as we think about the causes and conditions, then the suffering is like the nature of emptiness – that is, many things have come together to cause the suffering. Without these causes and conditions, we would not have suffering. These causes and conditions change, so the nature of suffering is emptiness. For example, the suffering of sickness has many conditions. Think about food poisoning; for food poisoning we need food, ignorance in not recognising that the food is poisoned, we need to eat the food and then get sick in the body and mind. All these come together to produce the sickness. However, if you separate all these things there is no sickness. Poisoned food has not got sickness by itself – when it meets your body and your mind, then it produces sickness. Other than that, there is no sickness, so the nature of sickness is emptiness. Sickness does not exist of its own accord. Sickness

needs all these variables to come together first.

Emptiness is something especially useful, because if you don't allow all the causes and conditions to come together, to become complete, then there will never be any sickness or suffering. If you allow the causes and conditions to come together there is going to be suffering, there is going to be depression or negative emotions. In this way, in Buddhist practice you try not to allow the causes and conditions to arise – we always defend against the conditions. If your defence works, then the causes and conditions for suffering will never arise. This is the whole point of Buddhism training of the mind, not to allow these causes and conditions to arise. For this reason, discipline is one of the most important practices.

If you discipline the mind you will not allow the negative thoughts and negative emotions to arise. The more disciplined you are, the less likely it is that the negativities will arise. Lack of discipline comes from thinking 'I can say what I like'. But this does not work. Because if you speak freely, you might say lots of wrong things with wrong expression and gossip. You can notice now when you go to parties or when you are talking to others that 90 per cent of what we are talking about are meaningless things, 90 per cent of what is said, is gossip. This causes lots of problems.

Discipline means, that when you have something important to say, you can speak; if it is not important it is better not to speak. Also, if you are silent there is less chance of getting into trouble. The more you say, the greater the chance of trouble. This is also part of discipline. However, if you live in a different culture, it is often hard. For instance, when you live in western culture, if you go to a party and don't talk, people think there is something wrong with you. They don't realise that you are disciplining your mind. It is OK to talk when you are at a party, but do it with mindfulness. You can talk, socialise and so forth, but make sure when you are talking that you have awareness.

Discipline does not mean that you cannot talk at a party, it means talking based on your own boundaries. So, you make a commitment about your speech and while you talk within your pledge there is no problem. But if you say something beyond your commitment then it will cause a problem. This

is especially important – to make your own commitment about what is right and what is wrong. These are things you can also learn from others.

Think about how much someone else's wrong speech has hurt you. That person then becomes your teacher. Wrong speech can teach you what sort of effect these words can have on people, so from that experience you can think – 'I don't want to use this word for others, because someone else used this word to hurt me so I don't want to use this word and hurt others'. This way you learn from others and learn from yourself. If you have wisdom, everyone is one's teacher. Everyone is one's supporter, teaching us, giving us meaningful opportunities.

SIX TYPES OF BEINGS

There is no need to be discouraged about suffering because, first, we need to know all about suffering and then we can find out about the antidote, how to apply the remedy. In the matter of suffering, it is not just about feelings as most people think. Suffering is something changeable, something impermanent. It is changeable like an animate object or an inanimate object. An animate object is a form being – not just a human being.

In Buddhism there are six different types of beings. There are three fortunate and three unfortunate beings. The fortunate beings are those that have a better chance to go on to produce happiness. Fortunate does not mean everyone will reach full enlightenment but rather that we have the mental capacity to do good things. In that way we are fortunate. Unfortunate does not mean beings that are suffering all the time but that they do not have the capacity of mind to make themselves and others, happy.

The three types of fortunate beings in Buddhism are the gods, demigods and human beings. God in Buddhism is different to the God of Christianity. Here we are talking about gods as a kind of supreme being but still they are not free from the law of suffering. They still have karmic realms. Their mental capacity can make them happy. They can develop good causes and conditions for happiness and, in this, they are very fortunate. The demi-god is somewhere between the gods and human beings. They also have the mental

capacity to bring forth happiness.

Then human beings are also called fortunate, not because they have permanent happiness – human beings have lots of suffering – but everyone who is suffering has the mental capacity to be happy. However, they are not happy because they do not have the right causes and conditions. They create the causes and conditions if they really want to. For instance, if you have no food, you can still go out and ask someone else. Tell him or her you are suffering because you are hungry. Human beings can communicate with others, and somebody will give you food.

Also, if you have a mental depression then with your own skill you can meditate to solve your own problem. Someone who has not got that kind of understanding or practice can go to another person, a family member or therapist who can help. Talking to this person will give you support. Human beings, no matter how they are suffering, if they really communicate, they will find that there will be someone to help.

Most of our suffering is because out of ego we do not want to talk. Ego causes a lot of unnecessary suffering because we do not want to talk, we want to keep the problem to ourselves, we hide that we have problems and do not want to talk to anyone. Outside it looks as if you have no cares, but inside you have lots of problems. The more you do not express the problems, the more you keep them in and suppress them, the more the unhappiness will develop and eventually the unhappiness can lead to suicide.

There are two main reasons most people commit suicide. One reason is that they express things, but no one supports them, the second reason is they do not express the problems, are always hiding, then one day it is all too much for them and they commit suicide. Of course, there are many other reasons, for instance, a person does not have any problems, but then suddenly is divorced and without thinking, they go and kill themselves. However, I think that the first two reasons are the main ones – not gaining support or not expressing problems. These can lead to suicide. So, at these times it is important not to limit yourself.

A kind of limitation could be that you have an expectation perhaps that one person is going to support you and if they don't then the thought is 'Oh

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well no one is going to support me'. This is not true. If you do not get support where you expect it, then you need to go outside your expectations, because there will always be someone to support you. You need to reach out to the community where there are many people available and organisations to help. Sometimes people do not know these organisations and sometimes people don't accept help. It is particularly important to express your need for help to the right person when you need help.

The form we call 'human beings' have many types of difficulties in their lives. The most common difficulties are birth, old age, sickness, and death. The fact that we are all getting older is something we can all understand. As we get older our minds get less sharp, we are less strong, we cannot hear or see things as well. We all experience this kind of suffering. When we get sick, we also have similar problems. We don't have much energy, our mind is kind of depressed – this kind of suffering we can understand. These are common sufferings everyone must go through. Once born, no one can escape this, everyone goes through this form of suffering.

Another form of suffering is due to the many partings we go through from our loved ones, our parents, our grandparents and sometimes our children. Again, what we are talking about is natural, we are not talking about individual negative experiences. We all must go through this. Also, on a day-to-day basis, there are the times that we need to care for, see or listen to people who we dislike, people who you don't want to keep hearing or seeing but who you will see in your environment every day – someone like your boss or secretary, someone that you don't have much choice about seeing. This is a kind of suffering, and because of the circumstances (job, money) there is no escape. Love also brings suffering based on expectations and attachments. We have expectations about being so close to someone forever. We do not know how to let go. Not letting go is attachment and 80 per cent of a person's suffering comes from attachment.

ATTACHMENT

Buddhism says that the antidote for attachment is detachment. Sometimes people misunderstand detachment. People think that detachment means we must ignore or give up. People think to practise detachment, you have to give up your job. That is not so, you can have the job, have whatever you like but you do so with less clinging, less attachment. Sometimes we think it is impossible to live without clinging. But this again is a matter of your thinking, your practice.

At the beginning, attachment is not extraordinarily strong, we build up the attachment over time. Beginning with a little bit then continually thinking 'Oh, this is great' builds up attachment until there is a very solid clinging to that possession or person. If you can control that strong clinging, then you can minimise it bit by bit. Everything is reversible; what moved forward can move backwards. Forwards is a small clinging that continually gets stronger and stronger until one day you have a strong clinging to that possession or person. Then in the reverse – one day you have less clinging and when you have less clinging then, you have fewer problems.

Most of our problems come because we are clinging to something – and that becomes an extremely sensitive issue with us. When you have so much attachment, you are overly sensitive. If someone gets a little bit annoyed, then we get hurt and unhappy. This sensitivity comes from that strong clinging or attachment. Our strength comes from less clinging – if you have less clinging, then no one can make you upset. All this being upset and sensitive comes from that attachment or clinging or craving. These are the truths of suffering.

There is no need to give up home and family or job. We can have them but with less clinging. With less clinging what you have will be more enjoyable. For instance, when you first met your partner, you both thought it was genuinely nice not to have a lot of clinging. Then as time went by you get more possessive – this is my girlfriend or my boyfriend. The more you cling, the more sensitivity arises; this is nature. Without clinging, life is more enjoyable. As soon as you start clinging to one another, lots of troubles arise.

NATURE OF PHENOMENA

Human beings have so many types of difficulties in their lives that we cannot talk about every individual problem, but we can sum up the main problems – such as suffering from the parting of one’s loved ones. With this there is no choice; this is nature. If you understand nature, it helps while you go through all the grief of parting. For instance, I know the nature of this flower – it is impermanent and it is not going to be fresh all the time. If you really understand this, not just with your intellect but also from experience, then one day when the flower dies, you may feel a bit sad, but not for long because you know this is impermanence. If you do not understand impermanence and one day somebody destroys this flower, you will have a long time of suffering. There is always change. The weather is a good example. Our expectations about the weather cause so many problems in our life. During the week you work so hard and think you will have a nice weekend by the beach. Then the weekend comes and the weather is overcast and very cold and you are disappointed and get upset because you think ‘Oh I wanted to have a picnic’ or whatever, and then it suddenly rains and your disappointment turns to anger and frustration. But if you really think about it there is no point in getting angry or upset because no one deliberately created this to spoil your plans or your party. The weather by nature depends on the causes and conditions that make clouds or rain, so if you understand nature then there is no point in being angry.

KARMA

For this reason, a practitioner is very relaxed about things – if there are good things they accept them, if there are bad things happening, they just accept it. This is because they understand causes and conditions – everything is dependent on causes and conditions. But sometimes with our own lives, we must be careful not to blame ourselves regarding karma. Both Buddhists and Christians are similar in this way. Christians often say – ‘if something bad happens then God is punishing me; if something good happens then God is

rewarding me'. Buddhists say whatever happened is caused by karma. When bad things happen, they say 'Oh my karma'; they say the same thing when good things happen. But the difference between Buddhism and Christianity is that Buddhists have knowledge and can control their karma. With Christians this is out of their control, it comes from God only. If you have bad karma, you can change that to good karma – you can take control. If you don't control your karma, then karma will take control of your life. It's like an Aboriginal boomerang that comes back when you throw it. Karma is the same; if you do good deeds, good will come back to you and if you do bad deeds, it also will come back to you. So, we are the creator of our own happiness and suffering, it is not possible for someone else to control these. It is entirely in your own power, it is your mind and actions that control your own happiness and suffering.

Therefore, if you change your mind and actions then you change your karma. Karma is no other than your own mind and actions, so if you change your mind and thinking, if you change negative actions into positive actions, then you change negative karma into positive karma. Changing karma brings the right results, it brings lasting peace and happiness. In this way karma is changeable, karma is not something that is fixed forever. If something good happens you don't expect only good things are going to happen forever and the same if bad things happen – you don't think only bad things are going to happen forever. It is the same with the sky. If it is overcast, we don't expect it to be overcast for a whole month. It might change in a few hours due to a change in the wind direction. If there is enough wind, the clouds will blow away and the sun will come. If it is very sunny, you do not necessarily expect that it will be sunny for the whole weekend, because suddenly wind or clouds may come.

However, you can be happy for longer periods if you continue to do good things because those good things create happiness. However, whenever unexplained good things happen and you don't know the cause, but just expect to be like this forever, if you don't accumulate virtuous causes and conditions, then that happiness is not going to last. This is important, because everything is dependent on causes and conditions, and with this understanding, we have

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more freedom to choose to be happy and to know how to live life free from difficulties. This is the only real freedom. Real freedom is to understand the causes and conditions. Then, based on the times, you do good things and wish to be happy – if you don't want to do bad things then you continuously need to avoid the bad things and that way you can gain whatever you wish.

In this way, as I mentioned, suffering is like the experience of parting from one's loved ones. In nature, once you have come together there is nothing to cause the parting – nothing to part, nothing to come. Like death, if you are born there is no way you can escape from death no matter how powerful a person you are. If you are an enormously powerful person in this world, you can order many people to do this or that, but when the time comes for death you cannot order death to wait because you are not ready. No one can postpone death – it is natural and part of reality. So, if we come together, one day we must separate. There is no way we can live forever or live forever together because that is not part of nature. But the important point is that while we are together, we need to be nice to each other, we need to be kind to each other.

If we are kind and nice, then when it is time for someone to part from us, although we might still be upset, we do not regret the parting. We had our lives together which was genuinely nice and now it is time to go and to be separate. There is nothing of import outstanding between each other. But if you ruin the life you had and there were complicated matters between both of you then there will be a double regret – double demerit points – for you when you separate. One set when you part and another when you think back and say to yourself 'Oh, I did bad things then'. If you do good things together then you will only have the single suffering at the parting. This is especially important, and not only when parting from your loved ones but also when you are parting from your own life. We are born, therefore we must die, so there is also parting from one's own life. It is good to do some preparation now and then. It is good to meditate about impermanence to lessen attachment to our bodies and this worldly existence. Meditate on how in 100 years none of us will be here, what will the world be like without us in it, how will we feel when we know we are dying. Can we picture ourselves as

just our remnants – decaying skin and bone? Do we have faith in the bardo and reincarnation?

From meditation comes wisdom, with wisdom we can lessen the causes of our suffering, when the causes of suffering are fewer, then we can realise peace and happiness, and this is the goal of understanding The Four Noble Truths.

SUMMARY

The Four Noble Truths are the foundation of Buddhist teachings because they are what Buddha taught first. Whether you practise the Theravada, Mahayana, or Vajrayana school of Buddhism they all teach the same Four Noble Truths. Also, it is important to remember that there is a conventional truth and an ultimate truth. Conventional truth is realised with the outer senses and ultimate truth is realised with the inner senses, which are developed with meditation practice. Happiness is something we all want to achieve, and suffering is something we all want to leave. The Four Noble Truths teach us how to do this by describing the relationship between causes and events. We have suffering, and it arises from somewhere – from its own causes and conditions. Also, we have happiness, and it too has causes and conditions.

The First Noble Truth (The Truth of Suffering) is to recognise suffering exists, that the human state involves frustration, painful experiences, and un-satisfactoriness. Once the state of suffering is recognised, only then can we look at the causes and conditions that give rise to suffering. Buddhism teaches that there is a way out of suffering, it is possible to free oneself from it, but, to do so, it is crucial to first have insight into the existence of suffering.

The Second Noble Truth (The Truth of the Cause) states that even with this wish to be free from suffering, our minds create the conditions for more suffering because we do not know how to create the causes of happiness. This is because we are ignorant of the way causes and results relate to each other. We have many emotions and thoughts, which come from this ignorance and give rise to blaming, hasty, aggressive, or judgmental actions. These create further disturbances of the mind and afflict us from within. We set up a chain

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of negativity. We are caught in a net of our own desires and attachments.

The Third Noble Truth (The Truth of Cessation) is that there is a solution, and the end result is nirvana or inner freedom – lasting peace and happiness. The possibility of the liberation from suffering exists for everyone – everyone has the potential to reach Buddhahood.

The Fourth Noble Truth (The Truth of the Path) describes the method for achieving freedom from suffering by leading a compassionate life of virtue, wisdom, and meditation. Buddha provided instructions on how to purify one's mind and heart by living a moral and enlightened life. This is about living the teachings day-to-day through everything you do. When the teachings are integrated into your life you will have an inner strength with which to cope with any problem. No one else can provide this inner strength – only you – that is why the Buddha says you must be your own master.