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I will talk just briefly and simply about the Four Noble Truths. This is the first teaching that the Buddha gave after he attained enlightenment. He walked from Bodhgaya to Sarnath and saw his five old companions whom he had done the ascetic practices with and taught them the Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths form the basic structure for all the Buddha's teachings. I think if we have a good understanding of these four, then when we hear different teachings we know how they fit together, why the Buddha taught them and where they go in the schema.

The Four Noble Truths are:

1. The truth of suffering
2. The truth of the cause or origin of suffering
3. The truth of the cessation of suffering
4. The truth of the path that leads to cessation

The first two talk about our current state – our present situation where everything is not wonderful in our lives – and the causes for it. The last two talk about our potential and that a liberated state exists, and a path to that liberated state.

I think the Buddha was very skilful in presenting all four and not just the last two, because many people come to the Dharma and they want to completely block out their whole life experience. "I just want to have light and love and bliss! Do not tell me about suffering. Do not tell me about anger. Just tell me how to get some kind of super-duper experience." So they are looking for the last two Noble Truths without wanting to look at the first two.

We cannot do that because we have to first cultivate the proper motivation for practicing the path that leads to the cessation. If we do not have the proper motivation, which comes from hearing about suffering and the causes of suffering, then we are not doing a spiritual practice at all. We are just seeking thrills and fun.

I say this because a lot of people come to the Dharma and their motivation is not very clear. This is especially true when coming to Tibetan Dharma where there is so much pomp, ceremony, color and exotica. People are attracted towards that and yet the whole purpose of all of it is to free us of suffering. But some people do not realize that and they just want the thrill: "Oh this is interesting! There is so much exciting stuff in Tibetan Buddhism." So, I think facing the problems in our life and their causes is very important so that we cultivate a sincere Dharma motivation. If we have that, our practice will go well and we will be able to have a sustained practice. The whole thing depends on the motivation because if our motivation is not strong enough, after a while we give up the practice.

First Noble Truth – The Truth Of Suffering

The First Noble Truth is the truth of dukka, which is sometimes translated as suffering or misery, but actually, this is not a very good translation. When the Buddha talked about dukka, the word suffering is not a good translation because in English when we say 'suffering' we think, "My stomach hurts." Or, "I am depressed." That is one level of dukka, but it is not really what dukka is all about. Because even animals do not like the suffering of stomachaches. Renouncing stomachaches is not what renouncing dukka is about.

Dukka means something more like unsatisfactory experiences and the fact that everything is not completely wonderful in our life. It is important to understand that, because if we just think of suffering on a gross level, then we might say, "What did the Buddha mean when he said life is suffering? Life is not all suffering. It is beautiful weather outside. I am with my friends. We just had a good meal so, what suffering?" But the 'ouch' kind of suffering is not all that there is to the first Noble Truth. It is a much deeper kind of thing. It is the unsatisfactory nature within which we live.

Three Kinds Of Suffering

1. Gross Suffering

Often, they talk about three kinds of suffering or three kinds of ways in which things are unsatisfactory. The first one is gross suffering. That is the 'ouch' suffering: "My stomach hurts. My feelings are hurt. I am depressed. I did not get what I wanted." Even animals renounce that. No big deal about not wanting that kind of suffering. All sentient beings do not want that.

2. Changeable Suffering

The second kind of suffering is called changeable suffering. This is referring to the fact that things that initially bring us happiness are still in the nature of suffering, and if we continue to do them long enough, they turn into the gross kind of suffering.

Examples of Changeable Suffering

Eating

For instance, we just had this wonderful meal. At the beginning of the meal, there is a little bit of the gross suffering of hunger. Then we start to eat and it tastes so good and we experience what we would call happiness. We think happiness is in the eating of the food. But if we had kept on eating, eventually that feeling of happiness would have become suffering because our stomach would have hurt. What this shows is that the act of eating itself does not bring happiness. The kind of happiness that we get from eating is not a stable kind of happiness because if it were, then the more we ate, the happier we would be. But instead, at a certain level the more we eat, the more miserable we become.

So that is a very gross example of how what we call happiness changes into suffering. There are many situations like this in our life that I think are very important to contemplate clearly. If we do not have a good insight into this, we can very easily get taken away by attachment to this kind of worldly happiness.

Fulfilling Our Wishes

So for example, when we are young we may feel, "I am always under my parents' control. I do not have much money. I cannot wait until I grow up and then I can have my own money. Then I can do what I want and I do not have to listen to my parents. That is freedom. That is happiness!"

So when you turn eighteen you start out to do that, "I am going to get an education and then I will get my job." And you start having an income and you start doing whatever you want and you feel so good and proud of yourself – "I am a success!" And then you just keep doing it and doing it and doing it and your job starts to get boring. It begins to feel like you are in a rut and you are dissatisfied with how much you earn. You have your freedom and you go here and there. You do this and you do that, but you still feel dissatisfied.

So again, what this is showing us is that the initial feeling of happiness that we think came from a particular behavior or activity is not real happiness, because if we keep doing it, we become more and more miserable. It is like the person who gets a promotion. At the beginning it is great and they feel, "Now I have new status in the company and now my family thinks I am very big." But in the end that job just becomes dreary because you have to work so many hours of overtime, the boss criticizes you and there are all these new problems that come with it.

Relationships

It is the same thing with relationships. We get lonely, so there is the suffering of loneliness. We think, "If only there was some wonderful man I could be with, especially a 'Dharma' man and not just an ordinary man..." One of the women in Seattle's Dharma Friendship Foundation calls them 'Buddha boys'. [laughter] So we dream, "Oh, Buddha boy is going to come and we will have this wonderful relationship. He will understand me and we will develop our Dharma practice together." It starts out like that but after a while, you quarrel. He wants to get up and meditate early and you want to sleep. Or you want to get up and meditate early and he wants to sleep. Or he wants to do one practice and you want to do another practice. Then this thing that you thought was going to be so topnotch and superior turns out not to be like that at all.

I just had a situation with one of my students who had taken a vow of celibacy. Then he met this woman and without even consulting me, he gave back his vow of celibacy. He did it because "She is in the Dharma and we sit and do our mantra together before we talk." It feels good to him now, but I am sure that in a couple of months he is going to be writing me about how they quarrel and everything else.

So the thing is, with the second kind of suffering, what appears to be happiness is not in the nature of happiness because if we keep on with the same thing, be it the job, or the relationship, or eating, eventually it becomes the cause of gross suffering.

People of other religions such as Christian monastics and Hindu swamis also renounce this level of suffering, this changeable suffering. A lot of these people see that in worldly things there is no ultimate happiness and they want to renounce that. So this is a step up from the first suffering, which was renounced also by animals. But it is not a complete kind of renunciation.

3. Pervasive Compounded Suffering

Complete renunciation includes the third suffering, which is called pervasive compounded suffering. This means, just the fact of having a body and mind which are under the influence of our afflictions [Note: 'afflictions' is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'disturbing attitudes'] and karma, just that alone and just being in that situation, is something that eventually produces misery. It is something that is unsatisfactory at the end of the day. Why? We may not even be feeling suffering now. We may not be flipped out on some kind of extravaganza happiness right now (the second kind of suffering). We may be just having a neutral feeling right now. But all it takes is the slightest little thing for this neutral feeling to change into gross suffering.

September-11 Event

A very interesting situation happened in America, the September 11 event. America's happiness turned to suffering. The basis for tremendous suffering was already there in the situation, but nobody saw it and everybody just remained complacent, "Oh our country is so wonderful. Things are so nice here." Then like this [snap of fingers], within a half an hour of three planes crashing into major buildings, the whole country changed.

So it is kind of like that with this third suffering. Even if you are in a neutral state, the slightest little thing can happen and we are in gross suffering. All we need to do is walk outside, step on some broken glass and we are suffering. Or somebody comes in the room and calls us a name and we suffer.

All this happens because we are under the influence of ignorance, all of the other afflictions* and karma. As long as we are under their influence, there is no way we can ever have a state of lasting happiness because they are the causes and conditions for more and more unhappiness. So it is only when we see this pervasive compounded suffering and renounce that, that we are really doing something that is uniquely Buddhist.

The Importance of Renouncing the Third Kind of Suffering

You see people who do great meditation developing incredible states of single-pointedness. They have renounced the first two kinds of suffering – the ‘ouch’ suffering and the changeable suffering – and they get into these experiences of single-pointedness and they say it is incredibly blissful. They can then get stuck in those blissful states and even create the karma to be born in one of the form realm concentrations or formless realm concentrations and stay there for eons. But when that karma finishes, the only place they have to go is down into the realms of grosser suffering.

The reason why those meditators get stuck in those upper realms is that they have not renounced this third kind of suffering, the suffering of being under the influence of afflictions* and karma. They have renounced ‘ouch’ and they have renounced worldly pleasure. But they have not seen that the cause of all of that is the ignorance. They have not renounced the ignorance and the whole state of being under the influence of the ignorance and karma. So, many get stuck in the blissful realms of meditation and concentration.

You can see this in Dharma practitioners too. When we come into the Dharma, one part of us thinks, “Yes I want Dharma happiness. But I also want worldly happiness and I am going to practice the Dharma as long as I feel good. As soon as Dharma stops making me feel good, I am going to stop practicing it. When I was confused and had all these emotional problems, I met the Dharma and the Dharma solved my problems. It was so helpful. But now that I feel good again, I have no need to practice the Dharma.” And so they give up. You see this all the time.

Or you come into the Dharma because you have some gross suffering like a relative died and you are trying to make sense of it. So you come into the Dharma and the Dharma helps you do that. Then you start doing some meditation and have these wonderful experiences. Maybe you are doing Vajrasattva meditation and experiencing bliss with the nectar flowing into you. But then after a while, all that bliss in your meditation goes away and you just have to look at how angry you are. Then it is more like, “This practice is not so interesting anymore. I like doing Vajrasattva when it fills me up with bliss and I feel so good. But now I do not want to look at my anger. This practice is causing my anger. I had better stop doing Vajrasattva because it is making me angry.” And they just stop practicing.

The Importance of Clear Motivation

The whole reason this happens to people is because their motivation has not been very clear. Their motivation has been renouncing the ‘ouch’ kind of suffering and a little bit of the second kind of suffering. They are not even renouncing the second one completely and are definitely not renouncing the third kind of suffering.

If we really understand what being in samsara means, what it means to have a body and mind that is under the influence of ignorance and karma, if we really understood that, then our Dharma motivation would never flag. It would never become dormant because, until we are liberated from that, we see that there is no kind of plateau or resting place.

So it is very, very important, and I see more and more in my years of being in the Dharma, how important understanding suffering is, to gain the proper motivation. And I see how important the proper motivation is, to be able to do sustained practice. Since sustained practice is the whole key to realizations, you have got to do it this way.

So this has been a little bit about the first Noble Truth – suffering or dukka.

Second Noble Truth – The Truth Of The Origin Of Suffering

Then we realize, “Okay. I am in this state and it is unsatisfactory. What causes this?” The Buddha said that the cause of this is our own afflictions* and the actions that we do motivated by those. But normally in the world this is not what we see as the cause of our suffering.

Blaming Other People

What do we usually see as the cause of our suffering? Usually we see the cause as the other person. Is this not true? “I am unhappy. Why am I unhappy? Because you do not appreciate me and you do

not praise me and you forgot to give me a birthday present.” Or, “You gave somebody else the promotion but not me.” Or, “You like my brother more than you like me.”

We are unhappy about how other people treat us, or we are unhappy because we do not have the material things that we want. “The cause of my misery is that I do not have the dress and the jewelry I want. I have these ugly clothes. I wish I had nice clothes because then people would look at me because I am wearing nice clothes.” We are unhappy because we are not attractive and we do not look good. Or we are unhappy because we do not have a good education. It is always something outside that we blame for our misery. We never look inside.

Blaming A Higher Power

Sometimes if people are a little bit religious and they believe in a creator God, they blame God for their problems. “Why am I suffering? It is God's will.” If they have faith, they say it in a positive tone. But what kind of God would wish its creations to suffer? That does not make much sense. Or people get mad at God, “I was so kind and faithful to God and now this happened.”

Sometimes you can see how people look at Buddha like God. “I made all these offerings to the Buddha and now I got sick. How come? I made all these offerings to the Buddha; did I not create enough good karma? Shouldn't Buddha bless me with good health?” It is like people are not understanding what the real cause of happiness is. They are still expecting it to come from outside. “I made all these offerings to Buddha. Buddha should now make my suffering go away.” Or, “God should make my suffering go away.”

So we either blame other people, who may be the object that helped spark our misery, but are not the real cause of it, or we blame God or some other kind of external superior being which does not really exist. If you say the word ‘Buddha’ but you have the conception ‘God’, that Buddha you are speaking about does not exist. A Buddha who is omnipotent, who can buzz into your world and change everything so it goes the way your ego wants it to, that Buddha does not exist. [laughter]

Afflictions* And Negative Karma are the Cause of Our Problems

Attachment

Most of the time we are not very clear about what really causes our problems. When I came into Buddhism, one of the things that made me wake up was the Buddha talking about suffering coming from inside and the role that our own afflictions* play in bringing about suffering. Because when we start to look we see, “If I have a lot of attachment, I am setting myself up to suffer. If I am craving something and do not get that thing, I am going to be unhappy. The unhappiness does not come because I did not get what I wanted. The unhappiness comes because I was attached to getting it.”

It is very good to look at our life and make many examples from it so we can see from our own experience how attachment sets us up to suffer even in this life. This is hard to see because usually when we are attached to something, if we get it we say, “Now I am happy. Isn't this wonderful?”

Say you are unhappy living in one place and you move to another place, “Oh, this is good. This is the cause of my happiness.” But that is not the cause of the happiness and the initial place was not the cause of the suffering. It is our afflictions* and negative karma that are the ultimate cause of those things.

Afflictions* and negative karma cause our problems in a couple of ways. In one way, the afflictions* cause our problems even right now in this life. Like I was saying, the attachment is a setup for suffering. If I am attached to somebody and somebody does not like me as much as I want them to like me, then I am unhappy because my ego is not getting the strokes that it wants. I have some expectation in my mind about, “Gee, this person should treat me this way. It feels so good when they do, but they are not doing it.” So I become unhappy.

Attachment and Expectations

We can see right there that it is because I have those expectations, that I am led to being unhappy about not getting what I wanted. If I did not have all those erroneous expectations, then I would be satisfied with how the person treated me. But because I have a whole list of criteria in my own mind about how people should treat me, when they do not treat me that way I get upset. “They should be

nice to me. They should bow down to me. Maybe not physically, that does not look good, but they should definitely respect me and think I am wonderful. They should do what I want. They should see my good qualities and point them out to me and to other people. They should give me presents and appreciate me. They should go out of their way to be nice to me.”

We have this whole list of criteria in our mind of how everybody should treat us and if they do not treat us that way, we blame them instead of realizing that it is not reasonable to expect other people to go by our list of criteria. So we start to see how the attachment breeds all these unrealistic expectations and produces the unhappiness. Right here in this life we can see how the attachment produces suffering.

Attachment to Wealth

Attachment also produces suffering because under its influence, we do negative actions. Our minds might think, “I am attached to having a lot of wealth because if I am wealthy, then people respect me. If I visit the monastery they will treat me nicely, better than they treat the beggars. If I go anywhere in the world people will treat me nicely because I am wealthy. So I am attached to having wealth. Also, it gives me freedom. I can do what I want and go here and there.”

In order to get our wealth, we cheat people in our business. We overcharge them just a little bit. When we clock in at work and arrive at 9:15 a.m., we say we arrived at nine. We leave at 4:30 p.m., but say we left at five. Perhaps we use things that belong to our employer for our own personal use, so that we save the extra money we would have spent on those things and thus accumulate that wealth for ourselves.

So the point is, under the influence of attachment we create a lot of negative actions. These negative actions leave imprints on our mindstream and these imprints produce more suffering in future lives because these imprints influence the situations that we find ourselves born into in future lives. So in this example where we cheat a lot of people, then we will get born in a situation where we are cheated, or where we are in a lower socio-economic group and other people take advantage of us monetarily.

Anger

We can look at anger in the same two ways. First, anger causes us suffering. It causes us immediate suffering because when we are angry, we are not happy at all. In fact, we are quite miserable when angry. Even though we might be right, we are still very miserable. Second, anger causes us suffering because we yell and scream at people, or we treat people rudely, or we turn a cold shoulder to them because we are angry and these create negative karma which causes us to be born in a lower realm. Even if we are born as humans, it causes all sorts of unfortunate things to happen to us.

Recognizing and Accepting the Real Cause of Our Suffering

So that is how the Buddha explained that the real cause of our suffering comes from our mind. Initially when we hear this, we might be a little shocked because it is actually much easier to blame other people for our suffering than take responsibility ourselves. Is that not true? If my suffering is somebody else's fault, then....

It is interesting that while we are miserable suffering and we definitely want to be out of this suffering, we do not want to give up our negative mind and change either our own behavior or our own mind to get ourselves out of the suffering. We are quite content to stay there and blame it on somebody else. “My feelings are so hurt because so-and-so did not treat me proper.” If we look deeply within, we are hurt because we have a bunch of false misconceptions and expectations. But rather than change our expectations and own up to the fact that we are not the most important one in the world, it is instead just much easier to stay mentally here and go, “Oh, they do not appreciate me. They treat me rudely, etcetera, etcetera.”

It is quite interesting how this works. One part of us wants to stop suffering and the other part does not want to change so that we can actually stop suffering. It is just much easier if we blame somebody else. If we blame others, then we can be an innocent victim and not have to do anything except suffer and feel sorry for ourselves. “I have hepatitis because those people did not wash the food well. It is their fault I have hepatitis. Maybe I should sue them and file a court case, poor me!”

It is true that the other people may not have washed the food properly and we may not have been particularly attached, or angry, when we ate the food. But if we look at it, the reason we are sick is the result of our own negative karma created in past lives where we probably did not treat other people very well on a physical level and we caused them physical misery. So now here we are with physical misery. But instead of accepting that, we just bellyache about the person who did not wash the vegetables as the cause of our hepatitis.

We continue to do this even when we are Buddhists and understand that suffering comes from our mind. We still continue to blame others rather than take responsibility and say, "This is due to my own negative karma. This is due to the negative mental states I have had that created the karma." This way of thinking is a wonderful thing, because it means we have some power and control over our situation. Because if everything indeed were somebody else's fault, then there would be absolutely nothing we could do about it. We could never get ourselves out of suffering, because we could never change the world and everybody in it to be what we want them to be. That is impossible.

Suffering can be Eliminated by Transforming Our Mind

The fact that suffering actually comes from our own mind means that it is possible to change it because it is possible to change our own mind. Other people's minds we cannot change. The external environment we can influence, but we cannot dramatically change it. But our own mind is the one thing that we can change if we practice the teachings. So knowing that suffering comes from inside is, I think, actually very precious because it gives us the feeling of control and power that we can do something about our situation, that we are not a victim and we do not have to just sit there passively and wait until something happens so that we feel better.

Attachment, Anger and Ignorance are Based on False Conceptions

If we say that the cause of suffering is the afflictions* and karma, then we have to ask, "Can these causes be eliminated?" That is the next thing we examine. If we start looking closely at our own attachment, anger and ignorance we see how they are all based on misconceptions.

Anger

The thing that is very tricky about them when they are active in our mind is that they do not seem like they are misconceptions. They seem correct. When we are angry, the furthest thing from our mind is the thought that this is a misconception. When we are angry we think, "I am right. You are wrong. You change. I am not wrong so don't tell me my anger is wrong. Don't tell me I am misperceiving the situation. Don't tell me I have false expectations. I am right!"

If we look closely, we see that the anger is based upon a false conception. First of all, it is looking at the situation narrowly and only through the veil of me and my perspective and what makes me happy. Second of all, it is also based on this very strong and distorted feeling of a self, of an 'I'. "Here I am. People need to treat *me* this way; they are causing *me* to suffer." So the 'I' appears very, very strong and very solid.

The situation that we are perceiving seems to be objective, out there and unrelated to our mind. We see the person or the object, whatever it is that is making us unhappy, as out there, solid, existing in and of itself. Even the feeling of unhappiness is solid and seems to exist under its own power. So when we are angry everything appears so solid to us, as if everything in the situation was able to set itself up.

Ignorance

This view is the view of ignorance. Grasping at everything being solid like that is what ignorance does. In fact, things are not so solid. It feels like there is a real 'I' that is miserable, unhappy and offended, but if we examine closely and try and find who that self is, we cannot identify it. If we say, "My problem is causing me so much misery," and start analyzing and looking at what exactly the problem is, we cannot find one thing we can draw a line around to say, "That is it." So we see that every part of the situation, although it appears solid to us, actually is not. In that way, we see that the anger is based on misconception because it is based on the misconception that everything is solid and has its own essence. In Dharma language, we say it exists inherently.

Attachment

It is the same thing with attachment. When I have attachment there is this feeling of a very strong me and of this wonderful person that I am so attached to, my Prince Charming on his white horse. He is real, out there, with his bags of gold and we see him as some solid entity. But who is Prince Charming? What is he really? What is it that we are really attached to? Are we attached to his body or his mind? If we cut open his body and we look at his liver and spleen – is that what we are attached to? Yuck! [laughter]

So, if we do just a little bit of analysis we can begin to see how the afflictions* are not based on anything real. They are based on hallucination. They are based on misperception and misconception. Because their foundation is something that is inaccurate, they are very unstable. If the foundation, the view upon which all these afflictions* are based, is not a correct view of reality, then as soon as we are able to gain the correct view of reality, then that ignorant view cannot stand there anymore. It has to go away. When it disappears, then the attachment, the jealousy and arrogance have nothing to stand on anymore, because they are all based on the ignorant view. When the ignorance is overcome, the afflictions* cannot arise.

So our question was, can these afflictions* – the pride, jealousy, laziness, etcetera – be eliminated? Well yes, they can because they are based on ignorance. Ignorance is an inaccurate conception. When we generate the wisdom that sees things accurately, then the ignorance cannot stand. Therefore, all those other afflictions* also cannot stand and the karma and the actions that we do based on them, does not happen. That is how we cut samsara.

Third Noble Truth – The Truth of the Cessation of Suffering

When we are able to cut samsara, it leads us to the third Noble Truth which is cessation. When we see that it is possible to eliminate the causes of suffering, we then come to see that true cessation exists and that there exists a state of actual freedom from the sufferings and their causes. This state of freedom is called nirvana or liberation. The state of liberation is a state of bliss that comes because all the sufferings and their causes have been eliminated. The mind is able to see reality directly and feel a sense of great joy at that.

Nirvana is Not Heaven

Nirvana or liberation is a state of having ceased each and every one of the afflictions* and each and every one of the sufferings. It is not a state like heaven, because what is the core of heaven? 'I', is it not? In a Christian sense heaven is portrayed to us as there being an "I" and I have all the sense pleasures and deluxe things that I want. But there is still this 'I' that is the most important one in the world, that is solid and exists inherently. And there are all these pleasures that also exist inherently from their own side. So the whole vision of heaven as it is presented to us, does not challenge the ignorance at all. So do not think of nirvana as a state of Christian heaven where you are going to have all the pleasures that you ever wanted, because the state of Christian heaven is based on the ignorant view, is it not?

Fourth Noble Truth - The Truth of the Path that Leads to Cessation

Now, how do we get there? How do we attain that cessation, that state of nirvana (which is the third Noble Truth)? We attain cessation of suffering by practicing the fourth Noble Truth which is the path. The path is the method of how to overcome the causes of our suffering and therefore the suffering itself, and how to attain liberation. So within this path, the Buddha talked about the three higher trainings – higher training in ethics, in concentration and in wisdom.

The Three Higher Trainings

1. Higher Training in Ethics

The higher training of ethics is the foundation and is based on keeping precepts and abandoning negative actions and doing positive actions. Morality, or ethical discipline, has got to be the basis because it is the easiest thing in the Dharma practice to do. Many people in the West do not think that way. They think, "I come to Dharma and I want to have a wowwy meditation experience." But then

they hear about ethics and stopping lying and stopping taking drugs and they go, “What are you talking about – stop lying? I have to lie. It is part of my business. What are you talking about – stop taking drugs? They make me feel good.”

People often expect to develop grand states of love, or concentration, or something, but they do not want to change the very way they relate to other people on a day-to-day basis. So they see their Dharma practice as something completely separate from their daily life. “In my daily life I can do whatever I want because that is worldly stuff. Dharma practice comes when I sit on my cushion and I have all my Tibetan style prayer sheets – the long kind that are printed in the Tibetan style so I can flip them – and I have my dorje and bell, I have my special Buddha statue, all my blessing cords, my blessed pills and all the signed letters from the lamas. This is my Dharma practice.” People think like that.

But Dharma practice is not separate from our life. Dharma practice is our life. So if we want to have some kind of meditation experience, we have to get our daily life together. There is no other way to do it because you never hear of a Buddha who lies, or a Buddha who is nasty, or a Buddha who goes out drinking because they want to get drunk. You never hear about that, do you? So we have to practice ethical discipline as the foundation of our life, and that essentially revolves around stopping the ten negative actions.

The Ten Negative Actions

The three physical ones: killing, stealing, unwise sexual behavior.

The four verbal ones: lying, creating disharmony, harsh words and gossip/idle talk.

The three mental ones: coveting, maliciousness and wrong views.

We pacify those as much as possible and do the opposite of them by preserving life, respecting property, using sexuality wisely and kindly, speaking truthfully and kindly and when appropriate, and so on. This is where taking precepts comes in. And why monastic ordination is something that is very conducive for practicing the path because when you take the precepts and keep them, it helps you abandon those actions. If you do not keep them, then it is just like everybody else. But if you do keep them, they act as a very strong reminder for what you do and do not want to do and it helps you stay focused.

The lay people’s vows also do this. You take the five precepts and you keep them. They act as a good reminder, so they help us prevent negativity and you create positive potential/merit by keeping them.

So this is the higher training in ethics.

2. Higher Training in Concentration

Concentration is developing a focused mind. We cannot develop concentration, which is subduing our mind, unless we develop ethical discipline, which subdues our body and speech. This is because our actions of body and speech, which are concerned with ethical discipline, come from the mind and subduing the mind is harder to do than subduing the body and speech. So we have to do ethical discipline as a foundation for concentration, because we have to stop the gross negativities before we can work with the subtle ones.

3. Higher Training in Wisdom

So we try and meditate and develop concentration, but neither of these two things actually cut the root of samsara that is the ignorance. The only thing that cuts the root of samsara is the wisdom. In particular, because there are many different kinds of wisdom, it has to be the wisdom that realizes that the object that ignorance grasps at, does not exist at all. This wisdom has to realize the opposite of what ignorance holds. There is the wisdom that understands impermanence and there is the wisdom that understands the lack of a self-sufficient person, but we have to develop the ignorance that understands the lack of inherent existence of all phenomena: our body, our mind and everything else. Only that wisdom can act as an antidote to the ignorance. That is what really cuts the root of samsara.

The Altruistic Intention: the Underlying Motivation for Practicing the Three Higher Trainings

We are Mahayana practitioners, or rather, we aspire to be Mahayana practitioners. We are not Mahayana practitioners yet, but we have some aspiration to go in that direction. We want to practice the three higher trainings, not just for our own benefit and our own liberation, but we want to practice

them so that we can stop our own samsara and our own cyclic existence and also so we can purify our mind of all defilements and their imprints. We want to purify our mind of even the slightest pollution in order that we can attain a state of full enlightenment where everything to be abandoned, has been abandoned, and everything to be developed, has been developed. With that state of full enlightenment we will have the clearest wisdom, the most unobstructive skill and power and the greatest compassion that will enable us to benefit everybody else in the same way that we want to benefit ourselves.

So the Mahayana idea is based on seeing that just as I want happiness, so does everybody else. Everyone wants not just the happiness of a cup of tea, but the happiness of full enlightenment. In the same way that I deserve happiness, so does everybody else. Just as I am going to work for my own happiness, I am also going to work for the happiness of everybody else. In addition we realize that all these other beings have been so kind to me. My whole opportunity to practice the Dharma comes from the kindness of others. So I cannot just practice the Dharma for my own benefit and ignore others. I cannot just get liberated for myself and forget about them going round and round in cyclic existence. I have to do something.

But as long as I am not a Buddha, I am going to have hindrances to being of benefit to them. Okay sure, as I progress on the path, I can eliminate those hindrances and I can become less selfish. I can have less anger. But it is not until I purify everything in my mind and develop all its capabilities that I am going to have the greatest skill, compassion and wisdom to benefit them. So therefore, I want to become a Buddha. That aspiration to become a Buddha for the benefit of all beings is the bodhicitta motivation that we want to cultivate as our underlying motivation for practicing ethics, concentration and wisdom.

That is a synopsis of the Four Noble Truths. You will see as you study different teachings that all teachings can all be fitted into the Four Noble Truths. They give you a very good way of understanding things. His Holiness always begins teachings by explaining the Four Noble Truths.

This teaching is based on the *Lamrim* or *The Gradual Path to Enlightenment*. Please refer to the following web-page for its outline and other transcripts or to listen to the audio recording of these talks: <http://www.thubtenchodron.org/GradualPathToEnlightenment/outline.html>

*'Afflictions' is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'disturbing attitudes and negative emotions'.