

"This wonderful book presents the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism in a way that is completely fresh and original while at the same time never losing contact with the traditional sources." —PEMA CHÖDRÖN

# The TRUTH of SUFFERING

— and the —  
PATH of LIBERATION



CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA

*Edited by Judith L. Lief*

In practicing buddhadharma, you cannot bypass anything. You have to begin with the hinayana and the first noble truth. Having done so, mahayana and vajrayana will come along naturally. We have to be genuine parents: instead of adopting a child who is sixty years old because we want to be the mother or father of somebody who is already accomplished, we prefer to conceive our child within our marriage. We would like to watch the birth of our child and its growth, so that finally we will have a child who is competent and good because of our training.

The progression of hinayana, mahayana, and vajrayana is well taught by the Buddha and by the lineage. If you don't have a basic foundation of hinayana, you will not understand the mahayana teachings of benevolence and loving kindness. You won't know who is being benevolent to what. You first have to experience reality, things as they are. It is like painting. First, you have to have a canvas; then, once you have the canvas properly prepared, you can paint on it—but it takes a while. The vajrayana is regarded as the final product of the best beginning; therefore, understanding the hinayana and practicing shamatha discipline are very important and powerful. You have to stick with what you have—the fact that your body, speech, and mind are in pain. The reality is that we are all trapped in samsaric neurosis, everybody, without exception. It is best that you work with reality rather than with ideals. That is a good place to begin.

## CHAPTER 2

### Dissecting the Experience of Suffering

*The first noble truth, the truth of suffering, is the first real insight of the hinayana practitioner. It is quite delightful that such a practitioner actually has the guts, bravery, and clarity to see pain in such a precise and subtle way. We can actually divide pain into sections and dissect it. We can see it as it is, which is quite victorious. That is why it is called the truth of suffering.*

THE PATH OF DHARMA consists of both qualities and consequences. In the Buddhist nontheistic discipline, we always work with what is there. We look into our own experience: how we feel, who we are, what we are. In doing so, we find that our basic existence is fundamentally awake and possible; but at the same time there are a lot of obstacles. The primary obstacles are ego and its habitual patterns, which manifest in all sorts of ways, most vividly and visibly in our experience of ourselves. However, before we look further into who we are or what we are, we first need to examine our fundamental notion of “self.” This is also known as studying the four noble truths: the truth of suffering, the truth of the origin of suffering, the truth of the cessation of suffering, and the truth of the path.

The four noble truths are divided into two sections. The first two truths—the truth of suffering and the origin of suffering—are studies of the samsaric version of ourselves and the reasons we arrived in certain situations or came to particular conclusions about ourselves. The second two truths—the truth of cessation and the truth of the path—are studies of how we could go beyond that or overcome it. They are related with the journey and

with the potentiality of nirvana, freedom, and emancipation. Suffering is regarded as the result of samsara, and the origin of suffering as the cause of samsara. The path is regarded as the cause of nirvana, and cessation of suffering is the result. In this regard, samsara means ongoing agony, and nirvana means transcending agony and such problems as bewilderment, dissatisfaction, and anxiety.

The first noble truth is the truth of suffering. The Sanskrit word for suffering is *duhkha*. *Duhkha* could also be translated as “misery,” “restlessness,” “uneasiness.” It is frustration. The Tibetan word for suffering is *dug-ngal*. *Dug* means “reduced into a lower level”—“wretchedness” may be the closest English word—and *ngal* means “perpetuating”; so *dug-ngal* has the sense of perpetuating that wretchedness. The quality of *dug-ngal* is that you have done a bad job already, and you are thriving on it and perpetuating it. It is like sticking your finger in your wound. We don’t particularly *have* to suffer, but that is the way we go about our business. We start at the wrong end of the stick, and we get suffering—and it’s terrible! That is not a very intelligent thing to do.

You might ask, “Who has the authority to say such a thing?” We find that the only authority who has a perspective on the whole thing is the Buddha. He discovered this; therefore, it is called the first noble truth. It is very noble and very true. He actually realized why we go about our bad job, and he pointed that out to us, which is the second noble truth. We begin to understand that and to agree with him, because we experience that there is an alternative. There is a possibility of taking another approach altogether. There is a possibility of saving ourselves from such misery and pain. It is not only possible, but it has been experienced and realized by lots of other people.

The first noble truth, the truth of suffering, is a necessary and quite delightful topic. The truth of suffering is very true and very frank, quite painfully so—and surprisingly, it is quite humorous. In order for us to understand who we are and what we are doing with ourselves, it is absolutely necessary for us to realize how we

torture ourselves. The torturing process we impose on ourselves is a habitual pattern, or ape instinct. It is somewhat dependent on, or produced by, our previous lives; and at the same time, we both sustain that process and sow further karmic seeds. It is as if we were in an airplane, already flying, but while we were on board we began to plan ahead. We would like to book our next ticket so that when we reach our destination, we can immediately take off and go somewhere else. By organizing ourselves in that way, we do not actually have to stop anywhere. We are constantly booking tickets all over the place, and as a consequence we are traveling all the time. We have nowhere to stop and we don’t particularly want to stop. Even if we do stop at an airport hotel, our immediate tendency is to get restless and want to fly again. So we call down to the desk and ask them to book another reservation to go somewhere else. We do that constantly, and that traveling begins to produce a lot of pain and tremendous suffering.

In terms of the notion of self, we are not actually one individual entity per se, but just a collection of what are known as the five *skandhas*, or five heaps of being (form, feeling, perception-impulse, concept, and consciousness). Within this collection, each mental event that takes place is caused by a previous one; so if we have a thought, it was produced by a previous thought. Likewise, if we are in a particular location, we were forced to be there by a previous experience; and while we are there, we produce further mental events, which perpetuate our trip into the future. We try to produce continuity. That is what is known as karma or volitional action; and from volitional action arises suffering.

The first noble truth, the truth of suffering, is the first real insight of the hinayana practitioner. It is quite delightful that such a practitioner has the guts, bravery, and clarity to see pain in such a precise and subtle way. We can actually divide pain into sections and dissect it. We can see it as it is, which is quite victorious. If we were stuck in our pain, we would have no way to talk about it. However, by telling the story of pain, we are not perpetuating pain. Instead, we have a chance to know what suffering is all about. That is quite good.

## The Eight Types of Suffering

All together, we have eight kinds of suffering: birth, old age, sickness, death, coming across what is not desirable, not being able to hold on to what is desirable, not getting what we want, and general misery. Whether subtle or crude, all pain fits into those eight categories. The first four—birth, old age, sickness, and death—are based on the results of previous karma; therefore, they are called “inherited suffering.” These four types of suffering are simply the hassles that are involved in being alive. The next three—coming across what is not desirable, not being able to hold on to what is desirable, and not getting what we want—are referred to as “the suffering of the period between birth and death”; and the last is simply called, “general misery.”

### *Inherited Suffering*

1. BIRTH. First there is the pain of birth. When a child is born, we celebrate its coming into our world; but at the same time, that child has gone through a lot of hassles. It is painful being born—being pushed around and pulled out. The first suffering, that of birth, may not seem valid, since nobody remembers his or her birth. It may seem purely a concept that once you were in your mother’s womb feeling very comfortable swimming in warm milk and honey, sucking your thumb, or whatever you might have been doing in there. You may have conveniently forgotten your birth. But the idea is that there was a feeling of satisfaction, and then you were thrust out and had to take some kind of leap, which must have been painful.

Although you may have forgotten your birth, if you do remember or if you have watched a child experiencing the pain of birth, you see that it is very literal, ordinary, and quite frightening. As you are born, you are experiencing your first exposure to the world, which consists of hot and cold and all kinds of inconveniences. The world is beginning to try to wake you up, attempting to make you a grown-up person, but your feeling as an infant is not like that: it is a tremendous struggle. The only thing you can do is cry and rave in resentment at the discomfort.

Because you can’t talk, you can’t explain yourself; there is a sense of ignorance and inadequacy.

More generally, the pain of birth is based on your resistance to relating with the new demands that come at you from the world. Although it applies, first of all, to your physical birth, or the literal pain of being born, the pain of birth could also apply to your ordinary life as a grownup. That is, you are always trying to settle down in a situation in which you think that at last you’ve got it made. You have planned everything down to the last minute, and you don’t want to change your scheme. Just like an infant settling down in its mother’s womb, you don’t think you ever have to come out: you do not want to deal with the hassle of being born.

This type of birth takes place all the time. In your relationships, you have decided how to deal with your friends and your lovers; economically, you feel that you have reached a comfortable level: you are able to buy a comfortable home, complete with dishwasher, refrigerator, telephone, air-conditioning, and what have you. You feel that you could stay in this womb for a long time; but then somebody comes along somewhere, and through no fault of your own—or maybe it *is* your fault—pulls the rug out from under your feet. All that careful planning you have gone through to try to remain in the womb has been interrupted. At that point, you begin to freak out right and left, talking to your friends, your lawyer, your spiritual adviser, and your financier. You wiggle around all over the place, as if you had grown ten arms and twenty legs.

You don’t want to be born into the next world, but unfortunately, the situation is such that you *are* born into the next world. You might be able to save yourself a little piece, a tiny corner, but that little piece causes you so much hassle that it doesn’t satisfy you all that much. Being unable to settle down in a situation is painful. You think you can settle down, but the minute you begin, you are exposed and given another birth. It is just like a baby being pushed out of its mother’s womb and exposed to another world. We are not able to settle down. That is the truth.

2. **OLD AGE.** The second form of inherited suffering is the pain of old age. It is very inconvenient to be old. Suddenly you are incapable of doing all kinds of things, goodness knows what. Also, when you are old, you feel that you no longer have time. You no longer look forward to future situations. When you were young, you could see the whole world evolving, but now you do not have the fun and games of watching the upcoming sixty years.

Old age does not purely refer to being old; it refers to aging, to a person progressing from infancy to old age. It is the process of things in your life slowly being changed. Over time, there is less kick taking place, less discovery or rediscovery of the world. You keep trying, but things become familiar, they have already been experienced. You may think you should try something outrageous just once, so you try that, too; but nothing really happens. It is not so much that something is wrong with your mind or with yourself, but something is wrong with your having a human body that is getting old.

An old body is physically unable to relate with things properly. As a child, you explored how to manipulate your fingers, your legs, your feet, your head, your eyes, your nose, your mouth, your ears, your hands. But at this point, everything in your system has already been explored, whatever you can use to entertain yourself on the bodily level. You haven't anything left to explore. You already know what kind of taste you are going to experience if you taste a certain thing. If you smell something, you already know exactly what it is going to smell like. You know what you are going to see, what you are going to hear, and what you are going to feel.

As we get older, we are not getting the entertainment we used to get out of things. We have already experienced practically everything that exists in our world. An old person who just came out of Tibet might experience phenomena like taking a sauna, or watching movies, or watching television as interesting, but the novelty quickly wears off. New entertainment presented

to older people lasts only for a few days; whereas, for growing-up people, it might last a few years. On the day we first fell in love with somebody, it was very beautiful, but we do not get that feeling back. The day you first had ice cream was amazing, and the first day you experienced maple syrup was fantastic and great—but you have done all those things already.

Aging is very unpleasant. We realize that we have collected so much that we have become like old chimneys: all kinds of things have gone through us, and we have collected an immense thickness of soot. We are hassled and we do not want to go any further. I do not mean to insult anybody, but that is old age. And although some old people actually hold together very well, they are trying too hard.

The suffering of aging could apply to the psychological experience of aging as well as to physical aging. Initially, there is the feeling that you can do anything you want. You are appreciating your youth, dexterity, glamour, and fitness, but then you begin to find that your usual tricks no longer apply. You begin to decay, to crumble. You can't see, you can't hear, you can't walk, and you can't appreciate the things you used to enjoy. Once upon a time there was that good feeling. You could enjoy things, and certain things used to feel great. But if you try to repeat them now, in old age, your tongue is numb, your eyes are dull, your hearing is weak—your sense perceptions do not work well. The pain of old age refers to that general experience of decay.

3. **SICKNESS.** The third form of inherited suffering is the pain of sickness. Sickness is common to both old and young. There are all kinds of physical and semiphysical or psychological sicknesses. Sickness is largely based on the occasional panic that something might be terribly wrong with you or that you might die. It depends on how much of a hypochondriac you are. There are also occasional little polite sicknesses. You may say, "I have a cold, but I'm sure I'll get over it. I'm well, thank you, otherwise." But it is not so lighthearted as you express in your social conversation. Something more is taking place.

Sickness is an inconvenience: when you are really sick, your body becomes so much in the way that you wish you could give up the whole thing. In particular, when you check into the hospital, you feel that you have been pushed into a world full of broken glass and sharp metal points. The atmosphere of “hospitality” in hospitals is very irritating. It is not an experience of comfort and lightness. There is a sense of being helpless. One of the big themes in the Western world is to be active and helpful to yourself and not to depend on anything or anyone else, including tying your own shoelaces. So there is a lot of resentment toward that condition of helplessness.

We may experience sickness as discomfort. If we do not get good toast for breakfast, it is so irritating. The suffering of sickness includes all kinds of habitual expectations that no longer get met. Once upon a time, we used to get the things we wanted, and now they are discontinued. We would like to check with our doctor so that we can get our habitual patterns back. We want our own particular habits to keep happening, and we do not want to give anything up, viewing that as a sign of weakness. We are even threatened by not getting good toast with butter on it. We feel that the rug has been pulled out from under our feet, and a sudden panic takes place. That is a problem that the Occidental world is particularly prone to, because we are so pleasure-oriented.

Sickness, while it is largely based on pain and unfamiliarity, is also based on resentment. You resent not being entertained; and if you are thrown into unreasonable situations, such as jail, you resent the authorities. The first signs of death also tend to occur to you in sickness. When you are sick, you feel physically dejected by life, with all sorts of complaints, aches, and pains. When you get attacked by sickness, you begin to feel the loss of the beautiful wings and the nice feathers you used to have. Everything is disheveled. You can't even smile or laugh at your own jokes. You are completely demoralized and under attack.

4. **DEATH.** Last but not least is the pain of death. Death is the sense of not having any opportunity to continue further in your

life or your endeavor—the sense of total threat. You cannot even complain: there is no authority to complain to about death. When you die, you suffer because you cannot continue with what you want to do, or finish the unfinished work you feel you have to accomplish. There is the potential of fundamental desolation.

Death requires you to completely leave everything that you love in life, including your one and only beloved ballpoint pen. You leave all of those things. You cannot do your little habitual patterns; you cannot meet your friends anymore. You lose everything—every single item that you possess and everything you like, including the clothes you bought and your little tube of toothpaste, and the soap you like to use to wash your hands or face. All the things you personally like, all the things you appreciate for the sake of keeping yourself company, everything you enjoy in this life—every one of them completely goes. You are gone, and you cannot have them anymore. So death includes the pain of separation.

There is a further sense of pain associated with death, in that you have identified yourself so completely with your body. You can imagine losing the people you associate yourself with—your wife or husband or your closest friend—and you can imagine that when you lose your best friend or your wife or husband, you will feel completely freaked out. You can imagine such possibilities taking place in your life, but can you imagine losing your own body? When you die, you not only lose your wife or husband or friend, but you lose your body. It's terrible, absolutely ghastly. Nobody imposes that on you; you impose it on yourself. You could say, “I didn't take care of my body. I didn't eat the right food and I drank too much. I had too many cigarettes.” But that does not solve the problem.

Eternally saying goodbye to our own body is very difficult. We would like to keep our body intact. If we have a cavity in our tooth or a cut in our body, we can go to our doctor and get fixed. However, when we die, that body will no longer exist. It is going to be buried or burnt and reduced to ashes. The whole thing is going to disappear, and you will have no way to identify yourself:

you won't have any credit cards, and you won't have your calling cards or your driver's license. You will have no way to identify yourself if you bump into somebody who might know you.

Death is a question of leaving everything that you want, everything you so preciously possessed and hung on to—including the dharma, quite possibly. It is questionable whether you will have enough memories and imprints in your mind to return to a new situation where the Buddhist teachings are flourishing. The level of your confusion is so high that you will probably end up being a donkey. I don't want to freak you out, particularly, but that is the truth. It is the first noble truth, the straight truth, which is why we can afford to discuss these subtleties. But death is not so subtle—it is terrible to die, absolutely terrible.

You think you can fight against death. You call the doctors, priests, and philosophers and ask them for help. You look for a philosopher who has the philosophy that death doesn't exist. You look for a very competent doctor, one who has fought death millions of times, hoping you could be a candidate to be one of those who never has to go through with death. You go to a priest, who gives you communion and tells you that you will gain everlasting life. This may sound humorous, but I am afraid it is really terrifying when we come to think of it. It is terrible.

In your ordinary, everyday life you experience situations similar to death all the time. Death is an exaggeration of the previous three types of suffering. You start with birth, and having been born, you begin to settle down. You tend to put up with old age as an understandable and ongoing process, and you can relate with sickness as a natural situation. But finally you find that the whole scheme is going to end. You realize that nothing lasts very long. You are going to be dropped very abruptly, and you're going to be suddenly without breath. That is quite shocking!

### *Suffering of the Period between Birth and Death*

Having discussed the inherited suffering of birth, old age, sickness, and death, we come to the second level of suffering. This

level of suffering is related to our psychological situation and is connected with the period between birth and death. It has three categories: coming across what is not desirable; not being able to hold on to what is desirable; and not getting what we want. We are never satisfied. We are constantly speeding around and always trying very, very hard. We never give up. We always try to get the few leftover peanuts out of the corner of the can.

**5. COMING ACROSS WHAT IS NOT DESIRABLE.** The first category is the pain of coming across what is not desirable. Our attitude to life is usually quite naive: we think that we can avoid meeting ugly or undesirable situations. Usually we are quite tricky and quite successful at avoiding such things. Some people have tremendous problems and experience one disaster after another, but they still try to avoid them. Other people have led their lives quite successfully, but even they sometimes find that their tricks don't work. They are suddenly confronted with a situation that is completely the opposite of what they want. They say, "Terrible! Good heavens! I didn't expect that! What happened?" Then, quite conveniently, they blame somebody else, if they have a scheming enough style of thinking; and if they don't, they just freak out with their mouths open.

**6. NOT BEING ABLE TO HOLD ON TO WHAT IS DESIRABLE.** The second category is the opposite of that. It is the pain of trying to hold on to what is desirable, fantastic, lovely, splendid, terrific. It is as if you are trying to hold on to a good situation, and suddenly there is a leak. What you are holding in your arms and cherishing so much begins to fizzle out like a balloon. When that occurs, you begin to be very resentful or try to see it as somebody else's problem.

**7. NOT GETTING WHAT YOU WANT.** Underlying the previous two categories is the third, which is that, on the whole, we can't get what we want. That is the case. You might say, "One day I'm going to become a great movie star, a millionaire, a great

scholar, or at least a decent person. I would like to lead my life happily ever after. I have this plan. I'm going to be either a saint or a sinner, but I'm going to be happy." However, none of those situations happen. And even if you do become a great movie star or a millionaire, something else crops up, so that being such a person doesn't help. You begin to realize that there are further problems with your life and that, on the whole, your life is very grim. Nothing will satisfy you. Nothing will be wish-fulfilling at all, absolutely not. Something is not quite working. Whether you are smart or dumb, it doesn't make much difference: things don't quite work. That creates tremendous anxiety, chaos, and dissatisfaction.

### *General Misery*

8. ALL-PERVASIVE SUFFERING. The last category, all-pervasive suffering—is quite a different form of suffering altogether. The previous seven were understandable situations of pain and suffering. Number eight is not worse, but more subtle. It is the subtle sense of general misery and dissatisfaction that goes on all the time—completely all the time. This general misery that exists in us is not recognized; there is just a sense that we are in our own way. We feel that we are an obstacle to ourselves and to our own success. There is a sense of heaviness, hollowness, and wretchedness, which is eternal. If you are having the greatest time in your life, a moment of fantastic enjoyment, there's still an edge to it. Things are not one hundred percent fulfilled. You can't fully relax without referring to the past or the future. A big sigh has been taking place all the time, ever since you were born.

General misery, or all-pervasive suffering, is based on the inheritance of neurosis. Even when we experience joy or pleasure in our lifetime, if we do at all, that pleasure has a tinge of sourness in it. In other words, sourness is part of the definition of pleasure. We cannot experience just one thing, without having some contrast to it. That is the highest experience of spirituality: there is a little bit of sweet and sour always.

All-pervasive suffering is connected with constant movement: flickering thoughts, latching onto one situation after another, or constantly changing subjects. It is like getting out of a car and walking into a building, and getting out of the building and walking into a car, and being hungry and settling down in a restaurant and eating food, and going back. It is connected with what you are doing right now.

Our life consists of a lot of shifts. After boredom, such shifts may seem pleasurable and entertaining. For instance, if we have had a long ride, getting out of the car is good; getting out of the car and walking into a restaurant is better; ordering food is better still; and ordering some liquor or dessert is best of all, great. At such times, things seem good, and you are experiencing nothing wrong in your life. Everything is ideal, fine. There is nothing to complain about and everything is solid and fantastic. But even in that kind of feeling, an element of pain still exists. That sense of satisfaction is largely based on no longer feeling the pain that you experienced before.

It is questionable how much we are dealing with previous experiences and how much we are ready to deal with life in terms of oncoming new experiences. Quite possibly, we will find that we fit even new experiences into our old categories. In doing so, we do not experience satisfaction, but pain. In Buddhism, satisfaction is minute. When we are satisfied, we may have a sense of accomplishment and self-snugness; but at the same time, there is also a sense of that being questionable. So we are never fully satisfied.

This last form of suffering, general misery, is supposedly so subtle that it can only be perceived by realized ones. Only they have a sense of contrast to that anxiety, a sense of the absence of anxiety. However, although it has been said that this form of suffering is very difficult for people to understand, it is not really all that sophisticated. It is actually very simple. The point is that ordinarily you are immune to your own suffering. You have been suffering for such a long time that you don't notice it unless you are attacked by very vivid or very big problems. In



that way, you are like somebody who is very heavy. A three-hundred-pound person may be quite jolly and happy because he feels that all that weight is part of his body. He doesn't feel that carrying this big heavy weight is particularly painful until he begins to have shortened breath or thoughts of heart problems. Likewise, you are immune to your own suffering. Since you carry your burden of suffering with you all the time, you have grown accustomed to it. You have learned to live with it. On the whole, even though you carry this burden of fixation, which constantly perpetuates your mental events of disaster, you do not recognize it. You are immune to the disaster of the *kleshas*—the negative, unwholesome mental confusions of aggression, passion, and ignorance that make you stupid and keep you wandering around. You are immune to the general sense of suffering that takes place all the time.

### Three Patterns of Suffering

The eight types of suffering were previously divided into inherited suffering, the suffering of the period between birth and death, and general misery. However, suffering can also be described in terms of three patterns: the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change, and all-pervasive suffering.

The suffering of suffering includes the categories of birth, old age, sickness, death, and coming across what is not desirable. It is known as the suffering of suffering because first you have birth, which is terribly painful, and on top of that you have sickness, old age, and death. Having been born, you get all of that lumped on you; and on top of that, you come across things that are not desirable. Since all of those sufferings are piled up in that way, this is called the suffering of suffering. An analogy is that you have cancer, and on top of that you go bankrupt, and your house collapses on you.

The suffering of change includes two categories: trying to hold on to what is desirable; and not getting—or not knowing—what you want.<sup>1</sup> In the first case, you discover something desir-

able and then it is gone. In the second, you are unable to discover what you want, which causes you tremendous anxiety. Either you fail to find out what you really want or it keeps changing. An analogy for the suffering of change is being at your wedding reception and having a bomb explode in the middle of the dining room table. A milder analogy is having a great dinner and finding that the dessert is a disaster. The suffering of changeability includes anything that has a good beginning and a sour ending.

All-pervasive suffering is the eighth type of suffering, or general misery. Our condition is basically wretched because of the burden of the five *skandhas*, which perpetuate our neuroses and our habitual thought patterns. Because of that, we begin to find that, on the whole, we have never experienced any real happiness.

There is one particular point that I would like to make: there is no such thing as real happiness. It's a myth. In the way we go about it, there is no such thing as real happiness at all. We've been striving so hard for it, trying all the time to cultivate so much goodness, so many pleasures—but we started at the wrong end of the stick from the very beginning. Something went wrong as we began ourselves. We are trying to entertain ourselves in the wrong way—by having an ego, by having fixation. But we can't get any pleasure out of fixation; and after that, the whole thing goes down the drain. However, we could start at the right end of the stick, without fixation, without clinging—that is always possible. That is what is called the second half of the four noble truths: the truth of cessation and the truth of the path.

By the way, the first noble truth is not quite the same as the theistic concept of original sin. You have not failed, and you are not being punished or thrown in jail. You just started at the wrong end of the stick. Therefore, what you experience is a general sense of pain, whose source you cannot find. If you could find out where it came from, you could probably solve it, but you haven't been able to do so. In contrast, the right end of the stick means starting properly, with lots of discipline. By

becoming more sensitive to all-pervasive suffering, you have a chance to overcome it.

All together, lots of hassles take place. Having been born is very painful, and having a body is also extraordinarily painful. On top of that, we are sick until we die. We die because we are sick. Since we were born, we have never been cured; otherwise, we could not die. In whatever we do, even at the highest level of pleasure, there is always a tinge of pain. So pain is almost the entire consistency of our life, the water we make our soup out of, our life in detail.

In regard to suffering, to pain and pleasure, whenever an element of sanity begins to take place, the neurotic pain is lessened and becomes somewhat less dramatic and personal. At the same time, because of the clarity of mind, the pain itself becomes more pronounced—not because the pain is more, but because the confusion is less. Therefore, with greater clarity, pain is experienced more harshly, more precisely and directly. According to the *abhidharma*, the Buddhist teachings on psychology and philosophy, the unwise feel pain as the stroke of a hair on the hand, but the wise feel pain as the stroke of a hair on the eye. So the wise feel much more pain, because they are freer from neurosis. They feel *real* pain and the real precision of pain. Jamgön Kongtrül says that the ultimate understanding of pain is that you cannot get rid of your pain, but you can have a higher understanding of pain. That seems to be how things go.

At this point, we are dealing with the brass-tacks level. At the beginning, at the hinayana level, Buddhism is somewhat crude, but it is presentable to people. There is the notion of pain and misery, and the notion that we can actually save ourselves from that misery if we practice the teachings. That may be crude, but it is true, and it makes sense to people. It is very real and honest. You can't psychologize the whole thing by saying, "You have pain, but regard it as nonexistence," and then just go about your philosophical discussion. That approach doesn't help very much, so you have to stick to the level of primitive truth. And if you look into it subtly, you realize that it is not all that primitive,

but it is very, very sophisticated. You have to present dharma as a workable situation; otherwise, it is not actually communicable to anybody, and it becomes a fairy tale. You could say, "Sit and practice. Then you will be out of your misery." It is not exactly a promise, or something you have up your sleeve, but it is true. Very simple.

In discussing the first noble truth, we are not saying that somebody should not be born, should never get sick, should never get old, and should never die. However, in regard to the *suffering* of those things, a person can experience death without pain, sickness without pain, old age without pain, and birth without pain. We are not concerned with going against the laws and norms of the phenomenal world. We would never have any Buddhists if they were not born. So I'm afraid that you are stuck with birth, death, old age, and sickness. You can overcome the pain aspect of it, but you cannot overcome the totality.

The hinayanists said that about the Buddha himself: that he was born and he died, so he was still subject to the samsaric norm, to some extent. He was purely *nirmanakaya*, or on the earth; he was not a superman. He was a good person, but he still had to stick with the worldly norms: he had to eat his food and he had to die. And we have the same situation. We're not trying to go beyond that. We're not trying to refute any scientific laws.

We can actually declare that, as nontheistic Buddhists, we can free the whole world from pain. That's the greatest news. And we are doing it properly, rather than by worshiping somebody or going into a trance. We are doing it methodically, scientifically, psychologically. Starting with ourselves, we are expanding that news to others in turn. It is very definite and ordinary—and at the same time, it is quite remarkable.