

mind is always seeking zones of safety, and these zones of safety are continually falling apart. Then we scramble to get another zone of safety back together again. We spend all our energy and waste our lives trying to recreate these zones of safety, which are always falling apart. That's the essence of samsara—the cycle of suffering that comes from continuing to seek happiness in all the wrong places.

### *Weather and the Four Noble Truths*

In the Buddha's first teaching—called the four noble truths—he talked about suffering. The first noble truth says that it's part of being human to feel discomfort. Nothing in its essence is one way or the other. All around us the wind, the fire, the earth, the water, are always taking on different qualities; they're like magicians. We also change like the weather. We ebb and flow like the tides, we wax and wane like the moon. We fail to see that like the weather, we are fluid, not solid. And so we suffer.

The second noble truth says that resistance is the fundamental operating mechanism of what we call ego, that resisting life causes suffering. Traditionally it's said that the cause of suffering is clinging to our narrow view, which is to say, we are addicted to ME. We resist that we change and flow like the weather, that we have the same energy as all living things. When we resist, we dig in our heels. We make ourselves really solid. Resisting is what's called ego.

The third noble truth says that suffering ceases when we let go of trying to maintain the huge ME at any cost. This is what we practice in meditation. When we let go of the thinking and the story line, we're left just sitting with the quality and the energy of whatever particular "weather" we've been trying to resist.

The essence of the fourth noble truth is that we can use everything we do to help us to realize that we're part of the energy that creates everything. If we learn to sit still like a mountain in a hurricane, unprotected from the truth and vividness and the immediacy of simply being part of life, then we are not this separate being who has to have things turn out our way. When we stop resisting and let the weather simply flow through us, we can live our lives completely. It's up to us.

### *The Facts of Life: Impermanence*

According to the Buddha, the lives of all beings are marked by three characteristics: impermanence, egolessness, and suffering or dissatisfaction. Recognizing these qualities to be real and true in our own experience helps us to relax with things as they are. The first mark is impermanence. That nothing is static or fixed, that all is fleeting and changing, is the first mark of existence. We don't have to be mystics or physicists to know this. Yet at the level of personal experience, we resist this basic fact. It means that life isn't always going to go our way. It means there's loss as well as gain. And we don't like that.

We know that all is impermanent; we know that everything wears out. Although we can buy this truth intellectually, emotionally we have a deep-rooted aversion to it. We want permanence; we expect permanence. Our natural tendency is to seek security; we believe we can find it. We experience impermanence at the everyday level as frustration. We use our daily activity as a shield

against the fundamental ambiguity of our situation, expending tremendous energy trying to ward off impermanence and death. We don't like it that our bodies change shape. We don't like it that we age. We are afraid of wrinkles and sagging skin. We use health products as if we actually believe that *our* skin, *our* hair, *our* eyes and teeth, might somehow miraculously escape the truth of impermanence.

The Buddhist teachings aspire to set us free from this limited way of relating to impermanence. They encourage us to relax gradually and wholeheartedly into the ordinary and obvious truth of change. Acknowledging this truth doesn't mean that we're looking on the dark side. What it means is that we begin to understand that we're not the only one who can't keep it all together. We no longer believe that there are people who have managed to avoid uncertainty.

## *Not Cause*

Learning not to cause harm is a basic Buddhist teaching. It is to heal. Not harming ourselves in an enlightened society. This is the world. It starts with some of the most fundamental aggressive fundamental harm we can do. Ignorant by not having the courage at ourselves honestly and

The ground of not causing harm is a sense of clear seeing with what it is we see. This is what But mindfulness doesn't just helps us relate with all the see and hear and smell with ears or our noses. It's a life estly to the immediacy of ourselves enough not to