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Dharma Path & Goal

‘There will be lots of time for questions because I’ve not much to say’

Dharma

The word Dharma is actually a Sanskrit word as you know, and it has many different meanings. One of the meanings of Dharma is ‘path’. The actual word is made from the root word *Dharun*: “to hold”; something that would hold you from falling down. That’s how Dharma is explained.

From a Buddhist perspective when you say practice Dharma it does not mean to practice Buddhism only. I remember one time somewhere in Europe when I was participating in an inauguration of a big Buddhist centre. It was a new centre and there were lots of people including the local people, the church, and the priests. It is a very Catholic area, and the Lama in charge was giving a talk in Tibetan. He was saying “let us all practice Dharma,” and the translator was saying “let us all practice Buddhism.” My heart fell in my mouth, because from the Buddhist point of view, when you say practice Dharma it doesn’t mean practice Buddhism.

Anybody can practice Dharma whether you are a Buddhist or whether you are not Buddhist, or whether you have any faith or you don’t have any faith, because practicing Dharma is very much related to what kind of a person you are. If you are a good, positive

person, and the way you act is with kindness, with compassion, something positive, you would say he's kind of a Dharmic person.

That's why, when His Holiness the Dalai Lama was asked, well, nobody asked but he himself said: "If somebody asked me what's my religion? I say my religion is compassion, loving kindness". That is what is meant by Dharma. So the Dharma here actually means something that brings well being. I think that's the word I would use: well being, peace, happiness, even reducing the negative actions which would lessen the problems and pain and sufferings for the people.

Any kind of action that I do to be of benefit and help to other people and myself, and inspired with positive intentions and emotions like love, compassion, generosity; you know, trust, these kind of things are called Dharma. Because that is what the main thing is from the Buddhist point of view, the main... you can say purpose, of life. The purpose of life is not seen as something that is kind of already given to me, or that I have to find out what it is. It's not something like that.

From a Buddhist point of view, the purpose of life is something *I* would make, *I* would find myself, by trying to understand and trying to see what is the most important thing for me. What is the most important thing that I wish to happen? And this is understood as, you know, the main thing. If we look deeply inside ourselves, what is it that we wish? I think that the first and most important thing that we'll find is we don't wish to suffer, you know. I don't wish to have pain and problems, I would like to be free from these. And

then, that is more or less the same with everybody. As I do not want to have pain and problems, suffering and miseries, in the same way I understand with everybody, nobody would wish that. And I would wish to be happy, to be joyful, to be well, to have the highest possible, the best thing - what ever that may be. And I also know that is what everybody wishes.

Usually we don't express it in this way. If you ask a young child or even an adolescent or even a grown up what they wish, they would probably say 'I wish to *become* something, I like to *become* a millionaire', or 'I like to *become* whatever, maybe *not* the Prime Minister, but whatever. Or 'I would like to *become* a doctor, I would like to become an engineer', or whatever.

In India sometimes they say 'I want to be Gabbar Singh'. Do you know who Gabbar Singh is? Gabbar Singh is a famous film character, a daku. Do you know what a daku is? You don't know? A daku is a robber, a bad guy. This is a film, an Indian film and he is kind of acting very badly. He would say that if children cry at night 500 kilometres away from here, if you say 'don't cry otherwise *Gabbar Sing* will come!' they will immediately stop crying. That's one of his dialogues but it's very nice in Hindi anyway.

So what I'm trying to say is that even if somebody is saying 'I want to be Gabbar Singh', why does he want to be Gabbar Singh? Because he thinks that if you are Gabbar Singh everything is okay, it's very good, it's very good for me. Everything is solved because everybody is afraid of you or something. But it's not about being Gabbar Singh, it's not

about becoming a millionaire, you know. What you want to become is not the main thing, but what you think will happen if you become that, that is the main thing. So if I say “I want to become something”, it’s because I think if that happens then all my problems will be solved and I will be free, I will be very happy.

So therefore, if you go deeply, it’s this: that I wish to be happy, I wish to be free from suffering and problems and pain. So that is my main kind of wish, and that would be my objective, my main purpose. Also because I know that everybody wants to become like that, therefore my purpose should be that I want to be free from suffering of all kinds, not only me but all sentient beings because they would also like that.

And actually, in a way, that’s not only what we should be, but that is what it is, because nobody wants to see somebody suffering. Anybody who sees somebody having lots of problems, unless you are really, really cruel, nobody likes that; people feel bad when they see that somebody is having lots of problems and pain and suffering. We all have, all human beings, and maybe not only all human beings, maybe all beings, have compassion.

Maybe you have seen this recent TV documentary? It was about a lioness, you saw this? There was this lioness and I think she killed a deer and then the baby deer, but a fawn was left. And then the lioness became very moved by this, and she kind of looked after this fawn and then the lioness stopped eating meat. You haven’t seen this? It was on BBC, maybe not BBC; I think it was on this animal channel.

And then, eventually, even if the lion could not eat anything, (the lion only eats meat, and doesn't eat grass) because she refused to eat any meat she became more and more weak, completely weaker and weaker and weaker. And even *then* she refused to eat meat and just looked after this fawn, and at the end died of hunger. Of course another lion came and ate that fawn also because she couldn't protect her anymore. But I thought that shows that even animals such as lions can feel compassion.

So therefore there is compassion in beings which we all have, human beings especially, have compassion. That's what we wish, we wish to be free from problems for ourselves, but not only for ourselves but for others as well. This is especially for our near and dear ones, but even others who are not very near to us we don't want to see them having problems, and suffering or things like that. So therefore, if we really look into our hearts it is more or less the same; that we wish to be free from suffering, pain and problems for ourselves as well as other people. And if I can do that, that would be my purpose, that would be the highest purpose.

So therefore now, what is it that we have to do? What is it that we have to do to obtain, attain or be able to do that? That's why we try to learn how to do that. Any kind of ways, or any kind of means, any kind of methods, or any kind of path that would help us on that is called a Dharma. So therefore Dharma is not a name for a particular religion, or a particular tradition or way of life. The Dharma means: any means, path, methods, understanding, practices, or trainings that would help us to bring that or to increase that, is called Dharma.

How a person becomes, whether with one person we say 'a good Karma or a bad Karma', does not depend on what he believes. You can be a Buddhist all your life, you can *say* you are a Buddhist all your life and be going to the temple every day. But if your actions or your thoughts are not Dharmic, then you don't have any positive deeds. From a Buddhist point of view it is not that I am a Buddhist or I am follower of Buddha, or I am this or I am that; that does not matter. You can believe in Buddha, but that doesn't save us nor make much difference. That's why, from a Buddhist point of view they say "we need to understand and then train ourselves", not just believing as believing alone is not enough.

Sometimes we have this problem with Tibetans for instance. Traditional Buddhists sometimes have this problem: they say 'Oh yes, it's said by Buddha, oh it must be true'. But that's finished now when they say 'said by Buddha, it must be true' that's finished, and that doesn't work from a Buddhist point.

Because we have to understand and you have to train yourself, you have to practice; you have to integrate it with your life. You have to reduce your negative actions and increase your positive actions: actions of body, speech and mind. What do you mean by positive action and negative action? Positive action means something that's good, that's beneficial, that's helpful to myself and others: that's positive action. Then it is what action, thought or speech brings more benefit and wellbeing to myself and others, now or in the long run. That is also called a positive action.

An action that brings pain, suffering and problems for myself and others, now and in the long run, is called a negative action. So therefore, whether it is good or not good, positive or not, Dharma or not Dharma, does not depend on your beliefs, but depends upon your actions. So therefore, the Dharma understanding is to try to understand: what are the actions? What is the, you know, that which would bring more wellbeing, more benefit to myself and others? And what are the actions, thoughts and speech that would bring more harm?

By understanding that, how can we reduce the negative, and how can we increase the more positive things like compassion? Compassion is regarded as very positive. Being hateful and angry is regarded as negative because we can see how it would result if we keep on with that. Therefore, it is learning how to, from the Dharma point of view, look at the way we see things, the way we work with our emotions, and the way we work with our habits. It is three things actually, three things which are mainly the most important things.

First it is how we see things, how we understand things, how we react. That's the first thing. To try to look at what we do, how we react and how we react with our emotions, with our thoughts, and also with our actions which are very much based on how our view is, how we see things in a particular way. So therefore, *the view* is said to be very important from Buddhist point of view. *The view* is about understanding things as they really are, that's the view. Trying to see things as they really are, not misunderstanding,

nor seeing things as *not* the way they are, but trying to see things as they really are. Also, it is trying to see every thing as they are, trying to see myself as I am. It is *the view* that is the basis of Buddhist philosophy, that's why we try to understand the nature of things.

When we say nature of things we mean not the nature of things like *the nature of water is flowing, or the nature of fire is burning*. We try to see the more common, more deeper nature of things. Like for instance we say 'the nature of everything is interdependent, or dependant arising'. Dependant arising is the word that means if you look in to anything, anything that is there, is it an independent thing or an interdependent or dependant thing? And this is the understanding that if there is anything, it's a dependant thing because it's made of many things. It's made of many elements, it's made of many causes and conditions, so therefore it's a dependant thing.

And if you look at one element of that, it's also a dependant thing. Like that in any of them, if you go deeper and deeper, or tinnier and tinnier anywhere you look. So therefore it is a bit like the philosophy of interdependence or dependant arising. Interdependence is not saying everybody is kind of related to each other or everybody is connected, that's not it. To see and ask what is my nature, what am I?

From Buddhist point of view it's a very important thing to understand the question: 'what am I?' I don't want to go too much into it as His Holiness The Dalai Lama will tell you about that. It is said that if we understand deeply what we are, then we can be free from

fear; and if I really understand deeply what I am, there is no need to have any fear of anything, nor any need to have fear *for* anything.

So therefore understanding ourselves, understanding the nature of ourselves, and understanding the nature of everything else, becomes very important. When you understand that, and if you can go deeply into the view, if you see that everything is a dependant arising, then everything moves on due to their impermanence. Things all change, and that things change all the time anyway. If you see this deeply, then it's more easy to kind of let go of whatever arises in our mind.

Generally we have lots of fear, lots of insecurity and we all have this insecurity, we all have fear, and therefore we get very upset, we get angry, we get all sorts of negative feelings. We become greedy, we become dissatisfied and if it becomes very strong then we become very disturbed. Now, what can we do about these things? Is there anything we can do about that or not? Like we said before, the main thing is that this is the main Buddhist thing; the understanding or the reason why we have to understand that the nature of things is not just an academic kind of interest. Nor is it that we have to see what is what because it is interesting to know. We have to try to understand the way things are because if we understand clearly then it might help us to have fewer problems.

So therefore, if we can see how our mind functions and how we react negatively, with fear, with too much craving, with misunderstanding; if you see this clearly then you know deeply all these feelings are a temporary thing, it's coming and going. This moment I

may feel kind of angry, unpleasant, and then that goes and another moment I feel a little bit something better or something else. My mind is not something all the time, feeling or seeing or experiencing the same thing.

All my feelings, my emotions, my thoughts, are always changing. So therefore, if I can see the way I am, for instance one example I can give you is that we wish to be secure. I wish to be secure, everybody wishes to be secure. Now we try to secure ourselves, everybody tries to be secure themselves. But secure from what? From changing? Can we really be secure? Can we prevent ourselves from becoming old? Or can we prevent ourselves from dying? We can't see anybody who is much older than 100 years. So therefore it's not really possible that we can be totally secure ourselves. And when we understand deeply that it is not really possible to secure ourselves because everything is changing momentarily, then we deeply understand that there is nothing called 'really secure'.

When I deeply understand that there is nothing 'really secure', what is there to secure? My idea is that I have to secure myself, and finally you don't really have total security. So therefore to want to secure myself totally, completely, wishing to be secure and just trying to be secure, you see the futility of that. And therefore if you see it deeply, then you understand that everything changes; so therefore it's not just I and myself that change, everything changes. So therefore you can see the nature of things deeply, and from there you can get some kind of stability, and understanding.

It's not only me who is having changes, it's everybody who is changing. Deeply, if you look there is nothing. If I understand deeply, there is nothing there to secure because I am always changing, my mind is changing, my emotions are changing, my thoughts are changing; and therefore if I feel this in my experience, this is because what I am is my experience. So if I feel something good now, that comes and also goes. If I feel something not so good, that also comes and goes. So therefore, if I can learn, that's actually the main practice, what we call meditation; is that I experience something that comes and that goes.

Emotions come and go, a thought comes and goes and a kind of a good feeling comes and goes, a kind of unpleasant feeling also comes and goes. So if I can understand this and deeply let it happen, if a good thought comes or pleasant thought or pleasant sensation comes I say it's okay: it's a good sensation, it's a pleasant sensation, it's coming and it's going and it's okay. And if a not so nice sensation comes, a little bit of agitation, a little bit of fear, a little bit of whatever comes, it's also okay it's coming, let it go, it goes. And if I can do this, if I can let myself do this, if I can allow; I can learn how this kind of flow of feelings, sensations, emotions, whatever - positive or negative, comes and goes without totally overcoming or overpowering myself. If I can do that, then in a way I've made my mind stable, I've made my mind peaceful and I've learnt how to kind of free myself from my own thoughts and emotions. This is because I am my experience, it is what I am and if I can deal with my experiences, I've learnt a way of dealing with my emotions. I think from the Buddhist point of view it's very important, it's all about learning how to deal with myself, my emotions, my habits, my attitudes, as I said before.

So therefore, with some understanding, with the view on how to integrate that understanding into our life, that's a meditation. Meditation is on how to integrate and make that understanding a part of my actual reaction, becoming *used* to that way of seeing. Because we might have an understanding we might see that this is the right way, this is true. Like for instance if I understand deeply that when something happens, or is not happening, I worry, I worry because *I worry* (laughs).

Worry is something that you can do anytime, nothing needs to happen, everything is going first class, and you can still worry. And when everything is going wrong you can also worry, you can worry more. So you can worry just about any time, it doesn't matter whatever. And worrying is not very pleasant, it's unpleasant. Now, if I deeply understand that worrying is not useful, because the more I worry, the more unhappy and disturbed I become, the more I worry. It is unpleasant and even if I worry my head off it doesn't prevent anything from happening. It doesn't prevent negative things from happening, so therefore it's useless. Now I understand that, but still I worry. So now how can I change that? I need to bring that kind of understanding into a deeper level of my consciousness so that I would *react* like that. So how would I do that?

I have to repeat, I have to remind myself: 'Today I am worrying'. Now first I have to understand deeply that just worrying is no use. It doesn't prevent bad things from happening, it doesn't help me to be any happier, and it doesn't do anything good. And then, on top of that, it does all bad things. I can be worrying and worrying and do nothing

really, with no action. Usually I worry, worry, worry and when I'm worrying, actually I'm not doing anything to actually prevent things from happening. In my not worrying I could be thinking clearly and then maybe I can do something to prevent things happening, to make things better. But if I worry, then my whole time and emotion is just wasted in it.

So the more deeply I see that, the more I'm convinced that it is not useful to worry. But it is better not to worry, and to use that time and energy in a constructive way. But because it's my habit, I don't do that. So what I have to do is I have to remind myself, every time I start to worry to say 'no use'.

We have a saying, a Shantideva saying: 'If it can be changed, there is no *need* to worry. If it cannot be changed, there is no *use* worrying.' So you repeat this 'if it can be changed... if it cannot be changed ,' (laughs). You can take a mala if you like! I don't think that will help as it's not like taking a mala and saying it without thinking. But every time I'm trying to do that I remind myself and I kind of become aware or mindful that this is happening and this need not happen. So I do it again and again and again and again and again, then, slowly and slowly and slowly, you know, and it's not easy. Changing habits is not easy at all. But it is possible and that's why from the Buddhist point of view it is said that oneself can transform. This is the basis of the whole practice of Dharma, or practice of any kind of things which are mainly on the spiritual path, that there is a possibility to transform. There is potential to transform, but how do you do that?

We have to understand and then we have to do it, apply it. Remind ourselves again and again and again. Of course, if you wouldn't change it in the first go you know, even if we understand, and that is when we shouldn't be frustrated. That's when we need patience, we need *lots* of patience for ourselves. If I say 'I've been meditating for the last few years and still nothing is happening then I must be doing something wrong,' then it's not going to change too much (laughs). It's not about that, as change is something is very difficult. But if you think that change *has* to happen because it has to happen, without that change happening it's too bad, too difficult, too troublesome, and too painful. Then we have to do it by reminding ourselves. And when we make a mistake we don't have to feel too guilty about it.

When we do something that is not right, even if we know it was not right or not good, we should say 'okay, so what?' We have been doing this all the time, nothing new, why should we be shocked about that? That's something that we have been doing all the time and we do again now, so what is wrong? We don't need to feel too bad about it. But, if you did a little bit right, then this time I have found that I was not worrying, and I can say 'Okay, that's very good, I congratulate myself!' We need to congratulate ourselves: if I don't congratulate myself, who will? So we have to appreciate ourselves and then try again and do again and again and then, slowly, slowly, we change and that's the way to progress. Also that way we reduce what we think is bad for ourselves and we increase what we think is good. That's why we talk about developing compassion and wisdom and abilities to help other beings.

It is three things: Compassion, wisdom, and through that, the ability to help other beings. The more we can do that the better it becomes. The more we reduce our own suffering and pain and by helping others, there is learning how to help other beings more and more. And actually in life, I think this is very important, and I think we all feel this, but maybe we all do not understand this. This is something very common, and if I feel that I'm doing something for other beings, if I'm doing something that benefits other beings, then I feel my life is purposeful, my life has a meaning. If I feel I am doing nothing that is helping or benefiting anybody, I usually feel my mind and my life are not very meaningful or purposeful. I think this is very common in all human beings, and I see this and I think you would also see this as a main kind of human *instinct* if you can call it that. The more you are doing something beneficial for others you feel you are doing something purposeful, something meaningful with your life.

So therefore, by working for the benefit of others or at least having that intention and working with that kind of motivation, it becomes something which I think is very important in our mind, in our experience. So therefore, working for the benefit of ourselves *and* other people becomes a very important goal, a very important kind of purpose. And actually Dharma is about that: trying to first learn how to do that, slowly, step by step, intellectually as well as practically, because to do it practically is more difficult. It's very easy to learn intellectually, but to learn it in a kind of experiential way is very difficult.

Like it is very easy to say ‘Relax’, for instance *relax*: we use this word very frequently and everybody wants to be relaxed, at ease, not stressed. Relaxed is what? Not stressed? Not what? Not too tight, not stressed, not anxious, not tense. We don’t want to be all these things, we want to be relaxed. But it is not easy to relax by saying ‘I should relax’ as this doesn’t make me relaxed. I need to learn how to relax, although it’s a very simple thing: ‘relax’ (laughs). But it’s not that easy to relax because of our habits, we’re not used to it. So practically, to learn how to relax takes time and we have to exercise that little by little to learn, like how we learn anything. Like with learning how to play music, we need to do it little by little. Even with driving a car, the theory is very easy: ‘drive your car, oh yes... this is the key, you put the key in the ignition and then you just put the accelerator down and then the car goes. Then put on the brake, it stops, and there is this wheel that’s finished’. But when you actually come to do it it’s not like that (laughs). You have to learn and learn and learn, and exercise and exercise and exercise. I have got a driving licence, but I don’t know how to drive (laughs), it’s very difficult. I always do what I should not do, even if I know I should not do it. When I took the driving test for the first time, which I failed miserably, I did exactly that. I knew I should not do that. I was getting out of my car park and then I steered too much, so even my tester, the examiner said ‘Don’t turn so much because you might hit the next car’. I still steered too much and hit the next car (laughs). I knew I failed then and there but he didn’t fail me. He was very nice and he allowed me to go forward. But I didn’t stop there, I went ahead and then I had to stop because I had to go in through the main street. Then I did stop, but when I started again I went on second gear (laughs) and then I went ahead, but he didn’t say anything. Then he said ‘turn right’, so I was going to turn right and there was a red traffic

light, and a separate street which I could go down, but I stopped. He said 'you can actually go', so then I went. Now I was on the highway, and the *minimum* speed is 40mph - I went at 20mph (laughs). And then he said 'turn right' and I turned right and there was another red light and I had to stop, but I didn't stop, I went on (laughs) and nearly had an accident! Then he said 'maybe it is better that we go back' (laughs).

So you do everything you *know* you should not do, and that's where the training comes in, that's where the practice, what we call practice, comes in. We call it meditation, we call it practice which is that. What we *know* we should do and should *not* do, then kind of practicing to do that and actually doing that, then reminding ourselves if you don't do it, we say 'ok, this time I didn't do it (laughs). But next time do it a little better', and with training so that it becomes easy after some time.

I have seen people who know how to drive well and they say sometimes I was being driven by somebody here. He says 'to drive a car is very relaxing'. I say 'err... is it (laughs)?' It is if you are used to it, but if you are not used to it, it is the most difficult thing. You kind of hold this so tightly, it's like this after driving a little bit.

So the practice is working on that slowly. And then we need to relax in that. The practice is the one thing, and always when we practice we have to make friends with the practice in a relaxed way so that we can do it more and more. That's why we have to relax and do it, we have to be patient, and we have to be what we call diligent.

From the Buddhist point of view diligence means not seriously working hard. It means diligence is joy in doing positive things: joyfully, because we understand that is the way, and is good for me and good for others, and that's why I should try to work on that. Therefore I should be *happy* in doing that, happily doing that, joyfully doing that and if I succeed then I become happier. If I don't, and I make a mistake, it's no big deal because I have made them all the time. So therefore relax in it joyfully and lightly, because if you cannot meditate lightly you cannot meditate or practice at all.

So therefore, taking it seriously means that it is important but not in a serious way meaning that 'I have to do this...' you know, because if you take it too seriously, then firstly it doesn't work. Secondly it becomes a burden and then you have to leave it sooner or later. So that's what the whole practice is about and therefore the Buddhist whole kind of way of practicing Dharma is included in these three words: *The View, The Meditation, The Action*.

View is the understanding, meditation is the practicing, using it again and again, and what you have to do is then coming out. This understanding has to come out in some way in how we act: our habits change, our reactions change, our emotions change. If our reactions, emotions and habits transform, then we are transformed. So it's all about becoming a better person, a kinder person, a person who can easily live with anybody. I think that's more or less the way, the goal.

Questions:

Q: The preciousness of the human life with human beings on top of a hierarchal system is sometimes talked about. You talked about animals having compassion even though we have more ability with our mind to think about our actions. I still wonder about the whole system of re-birth, so could you please speak about where animals fit into it?

A: Maybe human beings have more intellect, capacities, and more ability to do good things, as well as more abilities to do bad things. But when we say ‘The Precious Human Life’, I don’t see it in exactly that way, that human beings are more higher and better. I see it as a way to learn how to appreciate what we have. I sometimes said that if the Buddha were teaching frogs he would have said ‘Precious Frog Life’ because frogs have to think (laughs) that they have to appreciate what they have, and we have to appreciate what we have. And if you don’t appreciate what you have, then it’s as good as not having that. So I think that is the main understanding of ‘Precious Human Life’: we have this preciousness which we have to appreciate, and to take advantage of that. That’s the main idea.

Q: I still have within this a question of how can a dog, or another dog or fox, do a positive action that brings him supposedly to a human life? How does the evolution happen for something that’s less? How does the animal become a human being? They say human beings fall down to the animal realm or other realms if they do negative actions, but how does something move up, I don’t understand that at all?

A: That's very easy; the lion we just talked about is a good example.

Q: But it's so rare.

A: It's not so very rare if you look into the kind of behaviour of the animals also. Sometimes you will see that animals behave better than human beings, sometimes they try to protect themselves, and in a flock of animals there is always one who is watching and making signs to them. Look at the ants, if one of the ants finds something like a nice little bit to eat, it immediately runs and informs everybody, no?

Q: Is that just their nature, or is that compassion? It seems to be their nature, not anything mental.

A: What do you mean by nature?

Q: I thought that was the difference between us and them - that we think through...

A: That is what we are putting on them: that everything which an animal does we are saying 'oh it's their nature, their instinct, they just have to do it that way', and what we do we do it properly. That's not the case. Animals think, and make distinctions between friend and not friend, what is right and wrong, and they try this way and that way, not just go straight ahead. We can see animals and they make lots of decisions.

Sometimes of course they make the wrong decision but they have their own way of sensing and thing. I think it's very clear if you look at them and watch them more clearly, that they have their mind and their feelings. If there is a little danger they will run away,

or try to run away because they're afraid, you can see very clearly they are afraid. You can also see very clearly they don't want pain, they don't want pain at all, and you can see that clearly. It's more or less very similar in many ways I think.

And that's why I say about doing good things: Dharma practice is not necessarily a conceptual thing. So if you're doing a positive thing, meaning with kindness, with compassion, wishing to help others, then that's Dharma practice, and that's a positive deed whether it's the animal or human being or whoever.

Q: I have a question about the action that you said. Because if you are in some situations, even if you try to control yourself as best you can, you can find it very difficult to decide how to act or react because you're not in control of the situation. I want to give you an example: We just came by plane today and we saw a child in the plane crying 'Waaa! Mama! Mama! Mama! Mama!' The mother started to really hit the child. It was not really hard but you could see that the aggression between both of them was quite high, and I just was sitting there. Okay, what can you do? Can you go to the mother and say 'Oh, it's better to not hit your child?' Probably she would be even more aggressive; so sometimes or quite often we face situations where it's not really clear what is a good action, what is really peaceful, or an action which you try from loving kindness.

A: Yes, it is like this. Now in that situation you can be acting in 2 or 3 different ways and it can still be a positive action, or you can be acting in 2 or 3 ways and it can be negative. That's why from the Buddhist point of view, motivation becomes very important. Now

suppose you think with good motivation, always with compassion and are really concerned to help the mother and the child, then you go and you try to do something; you say whatever, and do your best. There is no ‘this is the one that is totally right and the rest is wrong’; that’s not the Buddhist way of saying things. There is no one that is totally right and the rest is wrong, it’s not like that. If you went and talked to the child or the mother then maybe it improves or maybe not, but if you did it with a good intention, you did a good action.

Or maybe you said something bad to the mother, like ‘You should not hit...’ Then maybe if you said it with fairly good intention, the mother might say ‘okay,’ or maybe she will become more angry, but we don’t know. That is not the point: the point is, and this is very important from the Buddhist point of view, that when you do an action, whether it’s positive or negative, it doesn’t mean that it will actually happen. The intended action will be exactly the way you wish it, or sometimes it will not, sometimes it will be. This is because the result depends on many elements like we talked about, this dependant arising, that everything is dependant on many reasons and many causes and conditions. So therefore, what you try to do may not exactly result in the desired effect. But, if you did it with your best intention, then from your point of view your action was positive because the result depended on many other things, not only your action.

Maybe the child was sick, or the mother was not well, or maybe the mother was too frustrated. They may have both been afraid, maybe the child had a problem with his ear, you know how sometimes with air pressure and all kinds of other things, you know. So I

think oneself has to take it that way, but it does not mean that those who didn't do anything were totally wrong and only the person who was going and telling the mother not to hit the child was doing the right thing, you can't say that either. Maybe somebody was going to tell the mother 'You should not hit...!' since she is feeling a little bit disturbed because her child is crying, then it's not really very positive. So I think it has to be seen from that point.

Q: If I'm allowed to add one thing: sometimes if I see situations like this I say 'okay, samsara is like a lake and this is the ocean of...' and it's like a little bit of fatalism. So you just don't act at all, because if the odds are that you can't change it anyway, then whatever you do it will be either good or bad and then I don't act. So I just wanted to know if you would say if it were better to either just try it, go back, or just care about yourself and try to become a better person but without action?

A: I don't think it is like that. Samsara has lots of problems you know, the samsaric state of mind reacts with lots of aggression, aversion, craving, greed and ignorance so there's bound to be trouble, there's bound to be problems and that, in a way, is to be understood. Because if we don't understand this then we would feel too bad and be too overwhelmed by all the problems that we see, and say 'oh it should not be like this, everybody should be perfect', but everybody is not perfect. That's the basis of compassion, in that everybody is not perfect. So therefore they can make problems, troubles, and have all these negative things.

If somebody is angry with me, or if somebody makes a mistake, then why not? Even then, if you understand the samsaric nature of beings then you become more tolerant and understanding. So therefore it is important to understand, and that's also the basis of compassion. Not understanding is thinking we cannot do anything; of course we can do something. That's the main purpose of the teaching, in that the samsaric way of seeing has problems but that it can be changed, and that's the main teaching. It is not *fatalistic*, the main teaching is *optimistic* in that this samsaric way of being can definitely be changed, although it's not easy. It may not be easy, but it can be changed and that is the main message. So therefore it is not fatalistic, it is completely optimistic.

But, we cannot be too impatient about that. It's not about somebody having problems or the crying and wondering why somebody doesn't do anything about it. It's not like if you expect this to happen while you only make yourself more frustrated because maybe somebody will either do or not do it. Maybe somebody can do something, or maybe somebody cannot do anything at that moment. But you can do it, you can try. Anybody can try who has to try and there's nothing wrong in trying. If you feel that there is a chance to help, it is very good that you try. Nobody is saying you should not try, everybody should try.

Actually, this is something which I must mention: sometimes there are wrong impressions about karma. Sometimes they say 'oh, the karma, therefore we should not...', 'as somebody may have once said a very long time ago but in the wrong way; that if somebody is suffering you should not interfere because we should not interfere in

somebody's karma. That's totally wrong, that's not the Buddhist way of saying this. Karma can be changed, that's why it's called karma. Karma means action. Karma literally means action. So therefore it can be changed: a good karma can unbalance the bad karma and it can be reduced, changed, or improved. It can even be totally destroyed if you see the wisdom. If you have the wisdom, then the karma is totally destroyed, it is finished and there is no bad karma is left and that's why there is purification. Karma is not finished just by suffering, it has to be finished by doing positive things.

So therefore it's not true, it's not right from the Buddhist point of view that if somebody suffers you should not interfere. You *should* interfere, you can help and you can help to change the karma. You can help to make good karma and help in lots of many different ways. Otherwise why do Buddhas and Bodhisattvas try to help people if there is no need?

If you can't help anybody or there is no need to do anything then why try to do anything? It is possible to help and you should help when somebody is suffering and having problems. Even if you cannot help to change the problem at all you can still go and give moral support, a little bit of encouragement or kindness. That would help because then I would feel that I am not totally without support. I can get encouragement, a little bit of support, help, love, and kindness, you know, or anything that would help. Now, what was the main question?

Q: It was exactly like this, about the fatalism.

A: Yes, it's not fatalism, that's the main thing.

Q: It's good to do something, to try at least.

A: We have to try to change a little bit, whatever we can. And try to help: there's nothing wrong with it when we have to do it, as sometimes it can be changed, that's the whole idea.

Q: My question is that if a negative emotion arises – like greed, jealousy, hatred or anger, what is the best way to deal with it? Is it best to ignore it or perhaps let it go? Or is it best to analyse it and acknowledge it within yourself?

A: The best way is to let it go. Letting it go means you don't have it any more: it's not about trying to push it away; actually there are many different ways of dealing with it. The whole Buddhist practice is mainly dealing with negative emotions, not just mainly, but *all* of it is working with these negative emotions.

So there are basically three ways: what we call abandoning, transforming and understanding. So we can use all three, whichever works. The first is to try to generate the opposite: like if you feel hatred, try to bring up compassion and loving kindness more, and things like that. Another is transforming, and there are many ways of transforming. Then there is understanding, looking at the nature of this.

One thing that is very important, I think, is this letting go and the way you let go. For instance, if you have a certain emotion coming, and you are aware that this emotion is coming because it's disturbing you, and it's making you say 'oh, this is very bad, I should

not have it', it does not necessarily make it go away. It is like aversion: the more you don't want it, the more it comes. So what we have to do is try to practice, because these thoughts and emotions are coming and going and they are manifesting in our minds, coming in. They are very temporary, very momentary.

So, what we have to do is let something else come into our mind, like when I'm feeling anger, jealousy or whatever, I just relax in that. I don't kind of follow it up because any kind of negative emotion where I am doing this: 'grrrr...', whether it's anger, whether it's jealousy, whether it's greed; it is not opening, it's closing. Closing and tensing then becomes a negative emotion. Opening and relaxing becomes positive, and that's why the compassion is opening, and kindness, peace, generosity, joy, rejoicing, all are open and relaxing.

Therefore, when any negative [emotion arises] you try to relax within that, it doesn't matter and you don't have to do anything on that. Not trying to push it off, nor trying to get rid of it. Just relax in it and usually it disappears and something else comes, because when you are relaxed and when you are open these negative emotions cannot take over. Negative emotions are closed like the ego, you know, a little bit of self centredness, and tense. When only that happens it is negative, but if you are open and relaxed it cannot be.

Q: I have one question about the word 'ma'. Because you said what 'dhar' means in 'Dharma', what does 'ma' mean? You explained 'dhar' was letting go, and 'ma'. Is there a meaning?

A: No, Dharma comes from ‘dharun’ which is the root word meaning ‘hold’. Dharma is ‘One that holds’.

Q: The other question goes back to the hierarchal system, because I was told a story about a person who wanted to join the ordained Sangha during the time of the Buddha, and the people said that he couldn’t become a monk. The man kept pleading and his case was brought before the Buddha, who then looked back into the man’s past lifetimes and saw that this man had once been a little ant which had been washed around a stupa. Because of that good karma the Buddha allowed the man to become a monk. I have a big question about that because that wasn’t due to the good actions of the little ant, it was due to the water washing the ant around the stupa. So I still have this question about the hierarchical system and karma: did the ant have the karma to be washed around the stupa, or did the ant do some good action before to make the water wash him around like that?

A: It’s not like that; the story is not like that (laughs). It’s not about a person wanting to become a monk and that he’s not allowed to become a monk, it’s not like that. During Buddha’s time there was no question of allowing or not allowing anyone to become a monk, as anybody could become one. The Buddha said ‘Oh come here, come here’ and he was a monk. It was not like the present day ordination system which was not there during Buddha’s time. It’s not about that, the Buddha didn’t look into his past and say ‘he wants this therefore he’s allowed to become a monk,’ it’s not like that.

It's a totally different story: the person became an arhat, a very highly realized being, like becoming enlightened you can say, becoming an arhat. The Buddha said the person became an arhat, and the first time he made any kind of contact or connection with the Dharma was when he was taken around a stupa on a piece of leaf. That was what made the first connection. That was his first connection with anything to do with the Buddha, and that's why he eventually became an arhat; in talking about the connections. This is why it is said, from the Buddhist point of view, that you can help, you can help each other. You can also help with little connections even if the connection is totally far away like this ant on a kind of leaf, which was taken out by the water or river flowing around a stupa that had the relics of the Buddha. And it's totally unintentional, with no intention, nothing, but there can *still* be a connection, and therefore that connection can be of help.

So this is not talking about any hierarchical thing, it's talking about the connection and is also talking about how important it is to make connections with positive things. So even if you make a little connection with the positive things it can be helpful, and so there is more possibility to help in the long run. And not only that, even you make a wrong connection, like a negative connection, eventually it can be helped. There is a story about that in the Jataka Stories.

You know the Jataka Stories that were told by the Buddha about lives and things like that, but also to teach people, give a teaching, and give an example about these things. The wrong connection is about this person who killed the Buddha. Do you know the story? Do you want to know the story? It's not a very nice story actually.

You know when the Buddha gave his first teachings in Sarnath, one of his five disciples became an arhat, an enlightened being. Later on people asked Buddha ‘Why, of all the people, did you give this first teaching to these five people? And why, of all the people, did this particular monk become enlightened first?’ The Buddha said it’s because of a connection. A long time before it was because of a connection, but it was not a very good connection.

The Buddha said that once, a long, long time before, when the Buddha was a hermit he was meditating in the feet of the Himalayas on the practice of patience. And then the story says, at that time there was a king in the area who went hunting with all his retinue. He camped not very far from the place where this hermit was. And then the king went with his men to hunt while the queen and all the others stayed at the camp. So while the king was away, the queen went into the forest to pluck fruits, flowers, and things like that. She met the hermit, and he was a very great hermit when they met him. They talked to him, and asked for teachings from him while they were sitting there.

Meanwhile the king came back and was a little bit angry as he didn’t get any game, so he had no food and was a little bit hungry. Then he didn’t see his queen so he was still angry and asked: ‘Where is my Queen?’ The others replied that they went to see the hermit. So the king went to the hermitage and asked: ‘What are you doing with my Queen?’ The hermit replied ‘I am just practicing patience and meditating’. So the king became very angry because the hermit was a very good looking man. The king took out his sword and

started to cut the hermit's limbs and said 'If you are so patient let me see how patient you are!' And then the hermit died, but before he died he said 'You did this to me, but I still don't have any hatred towards you. I make this dedication, this prayer, that when I become the Buddha you will be the first person I will liberate. And at that time, because the way you cut my limbs, in the same way I will cut all of your negative things and make you enlightened.' And the then hermit died, and because of that the king had to go through all sorts of negative karma because he did this very bad thing. But in the end, when Buddha became the Buddha, the king [when reborn as one of the Buddha's first five disciples] was the first one to get enlightened. So this is the truth, to make a connection to a great being. Even to make a little connection to a positive thing is very good, but even negative connections can sometimes be helpful. That's the idea.

Q: I'd like to ask a question about meditation, and why it is so difficult to do. I try to sit still and then it's very quiet. I try to be in a nice environment and have candles, then I sit there and all these thoughts come and I cannot stop them. They just keep coming and coming and coming, and I ask when will they go? And you said you have to leave it and that it has to go. But I just think about tomorrow, or that I have to do my washing and then I have to go to work, and it's just not stopping. I have no idea how to do it. I don't get a click, then I fall asleep and next morning I wake up and I don't think I did meditate.

A: Okay... you sound like me (laughs). It's like this, when you meditate it doesn't mean you have to stop thinking. You cannot stop thinking. You have to let your senses be open- you have your eyes, your mind, your body, your nose, and ears open. Don't try to

stop thinking, it's not about *stopping* thinking. You cannot stop thinking because thoughts arise in your mind and it's the nature of things, the thoughts and emotions are a natural phenomenon, not that you can stop them.

What you have to do in meditation is to relax. Relax so that a thought comes, and let it come, it doesn't matter, but don't follow that. Thoughts come, let them come and let them go; emotions come, let them come and let them go, and not to stop them with 'Oh I have to go for washing, okay, oh the car is coming, okay'. Whatever you hear and whatever you see, whatever is coming, that's okay; you can't stop that, you don't try to stop that. What you try to do is to not let these things carry you over. So you try to be relaxed in the present moment. The present moment means *now*, aware of *now*. Okay, I am here now, I'm in a body, I'm just here and relaxing. And one thought comes, okay, but I am still aware of now. So I try to be aware of being just at this very moment: this very moment means this thought, this seeing, this hearing, this whatever, just that and relax in that.

Whatever comes, thoughts come and it doesn't matter because when you just let them come and go, they come but you remain, and it is not static. You try to be in the present moment and the present moment is not static, it's moving. Now is (flicking fingers), so you just be aware of now, now, now, now, now, now, now. So we just *be*, relaxed and then that's all. Don't *do* anything.

Q: Is it maybe like you have to see the thought from far away?

A: No, you just let it go. You don't follow the thoughts, you don't have to follow the thoughts at all. Therefore we need a little bit of an object of meditation, so whether it is the breathing, you know breathing out and breathing in, or whether it is something, such as an object like a flower in front of you. It is just there, you are kind of *light* and not tense. You cannot concentrate too much, you should be lightly aware of the moment.

Q: It's like being hypnotised by looking at the flower or...?

A: It's not like a pendulum (laughs), you don't need to be hypnotised. You just have to be in the present moment. And you just relax there and are a little bit aware of now, aware of the flower or whatever, just aware of this lightly, not concentrated, but lightly. So therefore if we will (flicking fingers) definitely get distracted it is because that's what we are doing all the time. When we are distracted, just remember the flower again. Remember this again, even a little bit you can remember again. Of course when you are sleeping you remember to wake up (laughs).

Q: How is it when you have to visualise something then?

A: It's not necessary to visualise, though you can if you like but it's not necessary. I think it is better to visualise something more solid, something on the wall like a kind of patch or something. It doesn't matter, whatever; and do not make it too small nor too big. Big is okay, but not too small because then you cannot look at it. Use something, then you can look and just be. Relax, so that you don't forget, because distraction is such that you become forgetful. You don't know what happened and then you think 'Oh, I was

washing (laughs) my laundry or doing something else.’ And even if you find that is happening it doesn’t matter, you just remember the meditation.

You don’t have to say ‘Oh I was very bad, I didn’t meditate’ since that’s the way with meditation and it’s not easy; so you can just do that, to not let it matter too much. And then even if I can remain here for a short time it’s okay. Relax, and then you can have a break. After short time you can have a break and when you have a break you don’t do anything, you just relax. It doesn’t matter even if your mind is distracted, that’s okay, and then you can start again in short sessions.

Transcribed by Sue Forsyth and edited by Tim Barrow