

Enlightenment

Maitreya Institute, San Francisco, November 1989

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. Our subject tonight is enlightenment. Believe it or not, we're talking about enlightenment! Enlightenment is the most important subject for Buddhism, because the purpose and intention of every action is enlightenment. In fact, for Buddhists, attaining enlightenment is the purpose of life itself.

Although we can describe enlightenment in very simple terms, this won't give us a complete understanding. It does allow us to draw a number of quick conclusions, however, and most of us like quick conclusions because they usually take less time and effort. The simplest way of defining enlightenment is that we become what we ultimately are. We achieve the ultimate goal that is there to be achieved. Or, we are liberated ultimately. But to do justice to this subject, we need more than just a quick definition.

Tonight I would like to give some background on this subject and look into it in more detail. It will be a little like putting together the pieces of a puzzle to arrive at the whole image—which, in this case, is a wholesome understanding of enlightenment.

Distinguishing Between a Perfect Human Being and an Enlightened Being

Enlightenment and realization are the two English words most often used to denote ultimate liberation. Sometimes the word buddhahood is used. When we contemplate or meditate on enlightenment, there is, in addition, the presumption that an enlightened human being is a perfect human being. While that depends on what we mean by a perfect human being, to my understanding there is a difference between a perfect human being and an enlightened person. When I say enlightened human being, I'm talking about a being who has become a Buddha. When I say perfect human being, I'm talking about one who is accomplished in the practice of shamata and vipassana meditation. As you know, shamata and vipassana meditation develop calmness, stability and peacefulness, and from that calmness, stability and peacefulness, clarity will emerge.

Two Tibetan terms describe this process: *dod-sems-tse-chig-pa* and *lus-sems-shin-tu-jem-wa*. *Dod-sems-tse-chig-pa* is rich in meaning. *Dod-pa* means desire. *Sems* means mind. *Tse-chig-pa* means one-pointed. This is directly related to human beings of the human realm. When Buddha taught about sentient beings, he described six major realms—human beings, animals, hell beings, ghosts, gods and semi-gods. The gods are the highest. Semi-gods are below them. Human is below them, then animal, then hungry ghost, then hell beings.

Within those six realms, we are human beings of the planet earth. The human realm is considered to be the desire realm, because human beings are primarily occupied

with fulfilling their desires, ambitions, attachments, and passions. That is the primary physical and mental structure of the human being.

Dod-sems, the mind of the desire realm, is the human mind. As soon as the mind of a sentient being enters the body of a human being, no matter where that mind comes from—whether it comes from the god realm, the hell realm, the animal realm, or any other—that mind becomes the mind of a human being. Mind is always the same, but because of the human body and human environment, the human mind becomes a unique mind, strongly preoccupied with attachment and all aspects of desire. That is *dod-sems*, the human mind, which, again, means one-pointed.

Within the dimension or realm of human beings, how one-pointed, stable, consistent and sane we can achieve is *dod-sems-tse-chig-pa*. We still have attachment, desire, everything, but we're a perfect human being. That is *dod-sems-tse-chig-pa*. But this not ultimate enlightenment, buddhahood.

Lus-sem . . . shin-to-jen-wa makes the *dod-sems-tse-chig-pa* more clear, complete and wholesome. *Lus* means body, *sems* means mind. *Shin-to-jen-wa* means totally developed, totally purified, totally mature. A mature mind and a mature body. So, it is the highest of one-pointedness of the mind of the human realm, the desire mind. It is mind and body that are fully developed and pure.

One way to describe this is by looking into the opposite—the body and mind which is not purified, the mind which is not one-pointed. What kind of mind would that be? Mind that is not one-pointed is confused mind. It is influenced mind. It is mind that is unstable, mind that can be easily changed by outer circumstances. Neurosis is determined by how easily the mind changes and how much influence occurs.

When we say “I feel neurotic,” what does it mean? When I say it, I personally mean that I am totally overwhelmed by the situation. I lose my perspective. I can't think anymore. I can't expect myself to get the truth straight. My mind will be totally influenced by everything. This is the confused mind. It is the total opposite of *dod-sems-tse-chig-pa*.

Then, the opposite of *lus-sems-shin-to-jen-wa* is that it's very easy to do harmful things, easy to fall into negative actions and thoughts. For example, most of us have to exert effort to do something good, but we find that it's quite easy to do something not so good, to do things we're not supposed to do. That's what I mean by the opposite of *lus-sems-shin-to-jen-wa*. So therefore, the *dod-sems-tse-chig-pa* is the opposite of that confused mind, and *lus-sem-shin-to-jen-wa* is the opposite of having a difficult time doing the right thing and finding it much easier to do the wrong thing. In other words, *lus-sems-shin-to-jen-wa* is when doing the right thing is automatic and doing the wrong thing is almost impossible.

So, my definition of a perfect human being is a human being who achieves *dod-sems-tse-chig-pa* and *lus-sem-shin-to-jen-wa*. And if you ask me personally, I'm very far away from it. But that is what I mean by perfect human being. When we talk about enlightenment, it is more than just a perfect human being. Enlightenment is much more than that. It is much deeper, and limitless. The perfect human being, as we just described him here, is limited.

With these two definitions, we will hopefully have a more accurate perspective about enlightenment. This doesn't mean a perfect human being is not worth aspiring to. We have to become a perfect human being before we can achieve enlightenment. We

have to become what a human being should be—a human being who has feeling, who has desire, who wants to get the best out of the best as well as out of the worst, a human being who can go through all the realities without having to make excuses or ignore things, without having to make up things, who is able to handle whatever is going on without becoming affected by it. We don't have to brainwash ourselves. We face the reality, we handle it and we don't get affected by it. That's what a perfect human being is according to this definition.

Enlightenment is a continuation of this. The perfect human being is like the foundation of a building. Upon that foundation, enlightenment, or buddhahood, or realization, is based. As I said earlier, realization, enlightenment and buddhahood mean beyond any limitation or boundary. That includes any limitation we can think of. It means free of every aspect of limitation.

The Three Kayas

There are several ways to describe enlightenment, but the simplest way is through the principle of the three kayas. In Sanskrit, this is dharmakaya, sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya. I'll go through each of these definitions briefly.

- *Dharmakaya*: Dharma means everything—all phenomena, everything. Kaya means body. Dharmakaya means the body which is the embodiment of everything.
- *Sambhogakaya*: Sambhoga means complete, nothing is left out, nothing is excluded. It is like a person who is fully dressed, from head to toe. So sambhoga means the total. Kaya means the body. So, sambhogakaya is the body which is the total development, the total everything.
- *Nirmanakaya*: Nirmana means emanation, manifestation. One emanates two, three, to numberless manifestations. Kaya means the body, or embodiment, which is the manifestation.

When a person like ourselves becomes enlightened, when we become Buddha, our mind is dharmakaya, our body is nirmanakaya, and our energy, speech, and expression is sambhogakaya.

Now let's look more deeply into each of these.

Dharmakaya

The mind, in its current condition, learns, thinks, understands, gets confused. This is the nature of our mind. If we ask, which is more limited, our mind or our body? Definitely our body is more limited. Right now we can expand our mind. It is limitless. Our mind can think about the whole universe. Our mind can reach out to the limitless space. The limitless potential is there. But practically, our mind is limited because of one thing—the "I." We constantly limit the limitless potential of our mind by putting it into a small box called "I." It is not negative, but that's the way it is right now. And that's how mind, which is limitless, becomes limited.

One of the sacred Mahamudra prayers mentions very clearly that we constantly encounter the limitless essence of ourselves but we constantly misunderstand it as I. Dharmakaya means that the ultimate limitless quality, the potential of the mind, is totally liberated. Therefore there's no relative limitation as far as we're concerned. We become the embodiment of everything. Because of that, if a sentient being ten billion galaxies to the east prays to a buddha who is here on this planet, Buddha's compassion, Buddha's blessing will reach that person even while he is still praying. That's how prayer works. In our prayers it is written very clearly "the buddhas of the ten directions." This is just a way to describe it. Instead of saying four directions or eight directions, it becomes ten. It simply means the buddhas of all directions.

So we pray, "I request the buddhas of the ten directions who have attained enlightenment to teach the profound teachings for the benefit of all sentient beings." That is one of our many prayers. And it is guaranteed, according to the teaching of Buddha that, in every second of every day, numberless sentient beings attain enlightenment in all directions. It is not that our traditional Buddhism or Tibetan Buddhism is the only way to attain enlightenment. The right method, the right path, can be anywhere. And when that is pursued, beings attain enlightenment. That is one way to look at the limitless quality of dharmakaya. And that is what our mind becomes when we obtain enlightenment.

Sambhogakaya

When we say things, when we express things, there also needs to be a partially intelligent person to understand us. Those beings who are quite highly enlightened, and whose wisdom and clarity is highly perfected, will manifest as sambhogakaya. Dharmakaya is only experienced when we attain enlightenment or when we achieve buddhahood, but sambhogakaya is how others will experience us when we become Buddha. Sambhogakaya is how we'll appear and manifest to the others who are highly developed.

There are many principles that describe dharmakaya, sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya, which can make any explanation quite complicated, so I'm not going to go through those details. But I thought the five principles that describe sambhogakaya might not be too complicated, and if I manage to explain them correctly, it can be quite helpful for our understanding.

First, how does the sambhogakaya manifestation manifest to those who are highly developed? Nothing will have the cause and condition of wrongdoing. Nothing will have the cause and condition of negativity. Nothing will make us do wrong. Nothing will increase our anger, attachment, jealousy, ego. That means the environment becomes perfect, similar to our description of a perfect human being. With the sambhogakaya manifestation, the external environment becomes the perfect environment. It does nothing but good.

It is the same with time. It says, "The time of the sambhogakaya is beyond any limitation." Right now, as it is, we forget the past, the future is unknown, and, most of the time, we even miss the present. But at this point, time will manifest as limitless. We become omniscient—knowing the future, knowing the past. That's how the sambhogakaya time manifests.

Third, besides time and the environment, how do we, who are Buddha, manifest to those who are highly developed? We manifest as having everything—all the wisdom, all the inspiration, all the quality, the embodiment of everything. Nothing is missing.

We become the source of blessing, we become the source of wisdom, we become the source of everything that is limitless and ultimate. That is how we manifest to that being.

The fourth is, who will experience that? That level of enlightenment, or that level of Buddha, is only experienced by those who have a higher level of realization, a higher level of development.

The last one is how you will express yourself, how you will have an influence. Up to now, it sounds like a perfect surrounding, perfect time, perfect person, and perfect beings to experience it. The activity that generates from this perfection is *de pu chos*, which means the teaching of the fruition, the teaching of the result. It becomes the ultimate teaching, the ultimate manifestation, that will upgrade other beings from their level, which is already quite highly developed, to becoming Buddha. It will lead us to the Buddha. Everything that manifests from this will make those who experience it become what it is, to become Buddha. So *de pu chos*, the final teaching, the fruition teaching.

Those are the five characteristics that describe sambhogakaya.

Nirmanakaya

When we become Buddha, our mind is dharmakaya, our subtle aspect is sambhogakaya, and the physical body aspect is nirmanakaya. The nirmanakaya is experienced by all sentient beings. The way human beings who are not highly developed—like ordinary human beings, animals, spirits, every single category of sentient being—will see and hear us, and what we mean to them, is nirmanakaya, the emanation body, the manifestation body.

There are several ways Buddha will manifest to ordinary sentient beings. Buddha will manifest as a friend, as an inspiration, as a teacher, as a cause and condition for making that person develop, making that person become a better person. And Buddha's teaching will become the right word. This means that whatever I'm saying here is repeating the words that were taught by Buddha, so this is part of the Buddha's nirmanakaya, which still continues after 2,500 years. So this is part of the Buddha nirmanakaya as well.

When we look into these three, we clearly see the differences between a perfect human being and an enlightened one, or Buddha. There are tremendous differences between these two.

Conclusion

In every aspect of Vajrayana teaching, and in many of the sutra teachings, Lord Buddha very clearly said that right now our body is the seed of nirmanakaya, our speech is the seed of sambhogakaya, and our mind is the seed of dharmakaya. Therefore, if we perfect this body, speech and mind through perfect action and perfect intention, and with appropriate methods such as meditation, that essence, that seed, becomes fully liberated. That is why every sentient being has that potential of dharmakaya, sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya. Not only every human being, but every sentient being, has that potential, although in many sutras the human body is described as the best vehicle for enlightenment. I don't want to entertain any doubt about it, because I'm a human being and I would like to have that great privilege. But

every sentient being can attain enlightenment, every sentient being can become Buddha.

One last thing. The word enlightenment did not mean very much to me, especially in the beginning, but after using it for the past ten years, I have acquired some feelings about it. But in the beginning, the word could have been dog, chair or any other word. It was just vocabulary. In Tibetan it is a little different. In Tibetan, the word for Buddha is *sangye*. And this word says everything that is there to say about the final realization or enlightenment of buddhahood.

Sang means awake. If somebody spills a bucket of ice cold water on our head at 7 a.m., when we're feeling like we don't want to get out of bed, how do we feel? Wide awake! Totally awake! Another meaning of this word is, if we have a stuffed nose, we feel terrible. Then we put some of those chemical drops in our nose and we feel good, totally clear. It's like that. Another example is that when I take off my glasses I can hardly tell if you're a real person or one of those store mannequins used in displays. When I put my glasses back on, I can see your eyes, your faces, your hair. I start to see that quite clearly. That is *sang*, awakened.

Gye means fully developed. A seed is just a small, dry insignificant thing, but when we put it in good soil and take good care of it, it will grow into a beautiful bush that grows quite big. On top of that, out of this seed, a beautiful flower blooms. That is *gye*. One seed can *gye* into a fully flowering bush, so it's totally developed.

Sangye is the essence of every sentient being. It is like a seed that is fully *sang* and fully *gye*. This is a simple but direct way to remind me, as a Tibetan, of what Buddha means each time I say it. When I say "I take refuge in the Buddha," I say "*Sangye la chap su chio*." When I say *sangye*, and then I take refuge, it makes perfect sense. But if I have to say "I take refuge to enlightenment," it doesn't make much sense, because I don't have the same feelings about this word.

I've done my best to explain enlightenment within my limited ability. I hope it will contribute something to your understanding of Buddhism, because Buddhism is all about enlightenment. That is the aim for every Buddhist, because if we become Buddha, our nirmanakaya is limitless. Buddha's nirmanakaya will be there forever. There is no limitation from the Buddha's side. If every one of the five billion human beings on this planet prayed sincerely to Buddha at the same time, Buddha's blessing would reach all five billion people equally. And if the limitless sentient beings of the endless space all pray at the same time to Buddha, with the most sincere devotion and compassion, the blessing will be received equally. No limitation. That is how the nirmanakaya works. That is why every Buddhist wants to become buddha, in order to help all sentient beings. This is absolutely essential as a Buddhist.

I hope this made a few things clearer for you so that your practice, your study, will become slightly easier or more accurate. I'm being very presumptuous, but I sincerely hope for it.

We have some time for questions.

I'm confused when I hear people talk about the different levels of enlightenment, that there are bhumis, that the word lama means a realized being. Could you please talk about that?

This is a very big subject and I don't want to be wordy, but I'm afraid I have to be slightly wordy, so forgive me. First I'll talk about *lama*. *La* means above, *ma* means mother. So, *lama* simply means somebody who has more knowledge, more wisdom, more insight than ordinary people and whose job it is to use that insight to assist others, just as a mother would assist her child. Traditionally, among Tibetans the word *lama* is used when a monk completes a three-year retreat. It becomes something like a title. His given name would come after the word *lama*. So if a person named Bill does a three-year retreat, when he comes out he becomes Lama Bill.

And about the different levels of realization, I don't think it is that difficult to understand. I'll give you a very simple example, so please don't take offense. To learn how to read, first we have to learn the alphabet, the shape of every letter. For children, this a complicated process. It takes time for them to learn to distinguish the difference between "a" and "b," for example, even though the shape of the letters is totally different. Then, once we learn the individual letters of the alphabet, we have to know how to put them together to make a word. Then we have to learn grammar. That's how we learn how to read. But all of this is a gradual learning process. It is the same with enlightenment. It is a gradual process. It's not like one day we're not enlightened and all of a sudden we become enlightened. But even if that were to happen, it would still take a few seconds.

So, in this process, first we learn something, then we study more about it, then we become quite knowledgeable about it, and then we become fully enlightened. It's gradual. But in the teaching, just for the sake of practical explanation, it is divided into specific levels. It's just like school. We go to kindergarten, then Grade 1, Grade 2, Grade 3, and so on. The school may be divided into six consecutive grades, but that's not because there are six actual stages of learning. It's just the practical way we set up the school. But in actuality, we start learning from kindergarten and we keep learning until we get to the top. In the same way, the bodhisattva levels, or bhumis, are categorized as ten, but this is just for practical reasons, so that we can describe the process.

Rinpoche, does buddha nature apply only to sentient beings?

Everything that has mind—I don't know how to define that scientifically, but everything that has mind has buddha nature. It doesn't have to be everything that has blood, or everything that breathes. It does not stop there. Everything that has mind. The essence of mind is buddha nature.

When a being becomes enlightened, is the change only in the mind? Or is there also a change in the physical body?

Definitely there is a change in the physical body as well. Maybe I left out something. Nirmanakaya is the physical manifestation of the Buddha. How many physical bodies can Buddha manifest? If there is a condition for every human being on this planet to experience the physical manifestation of Buddha at the same time, then that is what will happen. Buddha is not limited to just one physical manifestation. When we become Buddha, our physical manifestation is not limited to even a hundred or thousand or million or billion. There is no physical limitation. Does that make sense?

It makes sense—and I was also wondering . . .

That's great, it means sense and—I like that!

I was wondering if there are physical manifestations that we could look for in ourselves or others?

When we are able to see or relate to anything in a pure and beneficial way, that should be considered a manifestation of the body of the Buddha. Any time we're able to do something positive and beneficial for others, that is a manifestation of the body of the Buddha. But not only the Buddha who is already enlightened, but also each one of us, since our ultimate essence is always perfect, always Buddha. We call it buddha nature. I heard on the news that many people turned out to help those who were injured or lost their homes in the earthquake. I think we should consider that as the manifestation of the Buddha.

When the Dalai Lama was here I often heard the sentence repeated "the qualities of the body are precious." Does that refer to the knowing, to the mind of sentient beings?

Generally speaking, I think so. What we host in our body right now is our mind, the essence of which is precious, the buddha nature. That would be the usual connotation. But let me say a little more, so that you get some perspective on the other side. In tantra, beside the buddha nature, the body itself is considered sacred. Then, each joint of the body, each nerve, each flow of the energy, including not only the physical anatomy but also the subtle aspect of energy, is sacred. Each aspect has its own sacred quality. The body is usually described as the temple of one hundred deities. That particular teaching is part of a tantra which is called *shitrol*, which means peaceful and wrathful. *Shi-wa* means peaceful, and *trol* means wrathful. It might have some relation to that.

In Hindu cosmology it is said that every being is going to become enlightened and that there is a universal process going on. Is that the same as in Buddhism?

I must say that I don't know what that particular explanation means in Hinduism. I don't have enough knowledge about Hinduism to even speculate about it. But as far as the principle is concerned, every Buddhist's prayer is "May all sentient beings attain enlightenment." It is not an impractical prayer. It might take a long time, but every sentient being has buddha nature, every sentient being has buddha essence, therefore every sentient being can be enlightened. That is what we hope for, and that is what we believe.

When I hear expressions like "the buddhas of the ten directions," it sounds theistic to me. Does it sound that way to you?

No. It doesn't sound theistic to me.

But it sounds like Buddha is a God, like a great being.

Well, Buddha is a great being, of course!

But Buddhism is non-theistic, right?

As a general rule, I personally don't feel it is at all helpful to the layman to complicate the pure, devotional faith and precious insight. Some sensation is there, of course, some emotion is there, of course, and some imperfection is there. But there is tremendous virtue in it. Relating to Buddha as someone who is enlightened, and as

an inspiration, as a teacher, as a source of power to help us manage what we want to manage, and to reinforce our strength, is absolutely helpful. And that is the way it works. I don't think it will become theistic. I use the word eternalism, which is a little more permanent, solid, out there. I use the words eternalism and nihilism. Eternalism means something is there, and nihilism means nothing is there. With your permission, I would like to use the word eternalism instead of theism. It will not become eternalism because Buddha is limitless. Buddha is not limited to anything, so it will not become eternalistic. But the ideology is not relevant when we're trying to grow and develop and work. If we worry about eternalism and nihilism too much, it can become an obstacle. That's why great masters like Milarepa discouraged or ridiculed people whose heads were too filled with philosophy. He said they just spend all their time arguing with each other and, when they die, nothing changes. So we can be a little bit eternalistic or nihilistic about certain things, but what benefit comes from it as far as our development is concerned?

We have a story. There was a fool of very strong faith who lived somewhere in Central Tibet. On one occasion, he went to our most important holy place, which all Tibetans visit at least once in their life. They make a great sacrifice to go there and pay homage and touch it. The fool was quite poor and uneducated and he didn't know what was appropriate and what was not appropriate. When we go into the temple, we're not allowed to wear shoes, so the fool, who had his Tibetan boots with him, put them on the lap of the statue, and said, "I would like to circumambulate your temple to pay my respects. Please look after my shoes."

Now, each shrine has at least one caretaker. Every day thousands and thousands of people come, so the caretakers are always exhausted. They become very nasty. When the caretaker of this shrine saw the boots on the lap of the statue, he grabbed them and started to throw them away. But the statue stretched its hand to the caretaker's hand and said, "No, don't throw them away. I have to watch them."

After the man circumambulated the temple several times, he went back for his boots. As you know, in a Tibetan-style shrine room we have butter lamps, which use pure butter, and *torma*, which is like a cake and is made with butter and *tsampa*. It is very edible. Realizing he was hungry, the fool asked the chowa, "May I eat some?" The statue didn't object, so he took some of the *tsampa* and put it in the butter and ate it.

Then he looked at the statue and said, "I ate your food and you're still smiling." Then he told the statue: "I have to go home. Next year on such and such day, please come to my house. I will make some wine and prepare some good food for you." Then the fool gave the statue directions to his house.

On that date, one year later, the fool's wife went to fetch water from the well. As she knelt down, she saw an amazing figure reflected back to her in the water. She was frightened, so she ran to her husband. The husband ran to the well. He was so happy because the reflection of the statue was in the water. He took his food to the well and sat there. The *chowa* came out of the water and joined him, sharing his food and wine. That well became a holy place. Even now people go there. They call it *gompo chu*, water cho in the Gompo area. So, sometimes it works.

Yesterday we were talking about the transformation of feelings, and I was hoping you would say more about that.

Actually, this is another vast subject. The five major defilements are ignorance, desire, anger, jealousy and ego, or pride. According to the common tantric teaching,

attachment is actually a sense of dissatisfaction. We're not satisfied, so we look for more to fulfill our satisfaction. Attachment continues until we're fully satisfied. When will that happen? Only when we attain enlightenment is our attachment fulfilled. Until then, we will be assailed by desire and attachment.

When we say sentient beings are suffering in samsara, we mean that our attachment is quite confused. We don't know exactly what we want, or what is good for us, and we get attached to things that are harmful to us. We go through it, and we come up with lots of excuses and try to brainwash ourselves constantly, but in the end, we realize the truth. Consequently we become totally disappointed and disillusioned and lots of suffering develops, such as anger, jealousy, and greed.

It is the same with anger. Until we attain a great level of realization, we will have anger. Anger arises when we lose what we have, or someone is interrupting our attainment, our desire, something that we hold precious. Jealousy is also similar. Someone has what we wish to have, so we get jealous. All of this is just a reflection that we are not able to experience what we are, and we're not able to become what we are. With the background of our previous explanation of enlightenment, I think we can relate to this much better.

Now, concerning transformation, in the tantric practice there are five buddha families. This isn't like an ordinary family, with a Buddha father, Buddha mother, Buddha son and Buddha daughter. The five buddha families means five aspects of the manifestation of the Buddha. Usually it is sambhogakaya manifestation. The teaching, the practice, the mantra, the entire subject that is involved with each one of these five families represents a particular defilement, such as attachment, desire, anger and ignorance. The practice of that particular method is to transform these negativities into something positive, transform the defilements into wisdom. So it is quite a big subject. If you want details, the most effective way might be read some books about it. I've seen a number of good ones describing the five Buddha families in English.

In trying to generate compassion, the exercise given is to imagine all beings as our mother. How we can imagine each being as the mother is that our mind has no beginning and no end and it is a continuum, so we are always being reborn and dying and reborn and dying. And if that happens over and over again, each person will have been our mother. But if that is the case, it means there are finite number of minds? Isn't that so?

First of all, whether there are an infinite number of minds or not, we have all been shuffling around, for sure. I think the most helpful information from the dharma might be that, as a relative truth, we have been reborn again and again as a human, as an animal, as everything, since ever. We'll be doing that until we attain enlightenment. That is relative truth, which is relevant to us until we attain enlightenment. But at the moment of our enlightenment, that relative truth is irrelevant, because enlightenment is ultimate truth.

Both ultimate truth and relative truth are truth, but as far as we are concerned, because we are not enlightened, ultimate truth is not relevant and relative truth is. That's how it works. But the essence of relative truth is ultimate truth, just as the essence of our mind is Buddha, even though right now it sometimes gets confused. I hope this is helpful.

You have spoken about enlightenment and realization. Would you say something about instant enlightenment, as in when Naropa, who was slapped by Tilopa, attained enlightenment in that second?

But that was the last moment. I wouldn't say that was the first moment and the last moment. I don't think I, personally, could stand all of those things that Tilopa did to Naropa. Tilopa gave him an ultimately difficult time. I don't think I could stand that. Everything that enabled Naropa to carry on until he got slapped with Tilopa's shoe on his cheek so hard that it knocked him out—that, itself, is progress, that, itself, is a realization. But don't misunderstand. Every enlightenment did not take place by someone hitting somebody else on the cheek with a shoe. It happened to Naropa, you're right. It worked for him.

As I mentioned yesterday, I think the people who are suffering as a result of the earthquake definitely need our prayers, so I urge you to remember them. I will not do a particular prayer today because we did it yesterday, but we should always include them in our prayers.

[Dedication]

[Transcribed and edited by Stephanie Harold]