

~ *Getting to Know Suffering* ~

By Mingyur Rinpoche

Suffering is the translation of what is, in Sanskrit, called “*duhkha*.” In Pali, it is *dukkha*. The meaning of *duhkha* is non-satisfaction. You cannot be satisfied. You cannot appreciate what you have. You always need more, more, more. The feeling of not being complete. The feeling that something is missing. This has many different levels. When we translate in the West, many texts say “suffering,” but I think when you hear the word suffering, you feel it is like pain. You only think about pain, obstacles, problems, having a hard time. Like a lot of very unhappy feelings. But whether we translate it as suffering or non-satisfaction, the meaning is *duhkha*. *Duhkha* means more like problems, more like not satisfied, always a feeling of not being perfect.

This is what we call – I will use now the term “suffering,” because normally I use this word, so today I am going to use it. But suffering is not only pain. Even pleasure, even the feeling of pleasure – with grasping – can be suffering. I will tell you more about this later. Suffering is a very important practice, also. For example, it was the first teaching of the Buddha. The Buddha had already achieved enlightenment in India, under the Bodhi tree, in the central part of India, Bodh Gaya. Then, after that, the Buddha went to Varanasi and gave the first dharma talk – the first turning of the wheel of dharma. There were five main students of the Buddha. At the first teaching, he taught to the five main disciples.

The first part of the teaching is, “Bhikkhus [monks], life is suffering.” So the beginning teaching is suffering. It looks very depressing. “We came here to learn the teaching which is for liberation and freedom, but the teaching begins with ‘life is suffering!’ Oh...” It sounds depressing. Actually, the Buddha said the practice of the first noble truth – which is suffering, “Life is suffering,” and this is very important – the practice of the first noble truth is knowing suffering *as* suffering

and knowing the nature of suffering. If you know the nature of suffering, then you can be free from suffering.

One of the best ways to eliminate, to be free from suffering, is to recognize suffering. For example, the Buddha said, “suffering is like a disease.” If you have a disease, you have to check with the doctor. You have to do a lot of tests. You have to test the blood, do an x ray, do other tests like checking your blood pressure, and you have to spend a lot of money checking what disease you are suffering from, what kind of disease you have got. First you have to spend a lot of time to see, to check, and to examine. Then you know how to eliminate the disease.

It is similar here. The first important thing is to recognize suffering *as* suffering. If you do not recognize suffering as suffering, then you are one with the suffering – it is almost like you fall into the river, and you are carried by the river. But if you look at the river, if you are aware of the river, then you are already out of the river! Then you can see it. If you are in the river, falling into the river, then you cannot see your suffering, you cannot see the river.

That is why developing awareness of suffering is very important.