

**T**HE BUDDHA ATTAINED enlightenment under the Bodhi tree in India. Then he got up and started teaching other people. He taught the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, and the Twelve Links in the Chain of Dependent Origination. He taught that life is suffering, and suffering is life, and how to get out of this. One name given to the Buddha's original teaching is Hinayana Buddhism.

"Insight into impermanence" is the Buddha's most basic teaching. He taught this first because impermanence is the basis of every kind of suffering that we experience. Look at this world: everything is always changing, changing, changing, changing. This is the basic nature of the whole universe. You go to a big river, and cross the bridge. It is eight o'clock. When you come back an hour later and cross the bridge again, you are not crossing the same river. The water is completely different. It is not the same river! The water you saw at eight o'clock is all gone, and the water which you see at nine o'clock is not the same water. The water is constantly flowing, on and on and on. You say to your friend, "Oh, there's the Hudson River." Then when you come back an hour later, you still call that the Hudson River. That is actually not correct. The Hudson River at eight o'clock is not the same river anymore. Yah, the outside form is the same; but inside, the water has already gone to the ocean. So this river is always changing, from moment to moment.

When you wake up in the morning, your body is somewhat different from the body you had the night before. In many respects you now have a new body. Extremely subtle changes have occurred in your health and appearance as you slept. The outside form of your body may look the same, but inside, the food you ate the day before has been digested, and gone to your face and teeth and skin. Then the waste all comes down, as the food turns to urine and excrement. Right now, in the morning, your face is already older than yesterday, even though you may not notice any visible difference. And every seven years you have an entirely new body, because every single one of your cells has been replaced. But nobody understands that. Nobody realizes that

their body is constantly changing, from hour to hour. Someone may say, "Ten years ago I went to Paris." That is crazy speech! Ten years ago, some other body went to Paris, but it is not the same as the body which makes that statement right now. The name for that is impermanence.

And this does not only happen to human beings. A long, long time ago, this earth came from the sun, and the moon came from this earth. So the moon revolves around the earth, and the earth and moon revolve around the sun. Someday, many, many kalpas in the future, the sun's energy will run out and the sun will gradually become colder and colder. When the sun's energy stops coming in, the earth will also become colder and colder. Then all the animals will die. All the plants will die. Human beings will die too. Everything that we think is permanent now will completely disappear into empty space over time.

So in this world, everything is always changing, changing, changing, changing, because everyone is deluded by the name and form of things. We believe that name and form are permanent, so we suffer. Therefore the reason for suffering lies in our minds, where habitual attachment to name and form cover the real nature of this world. If you can perceive the actual nature of the phenomenal world, and you see that everything is constantly changing, then your desire-mind and the suffering that it causes also disappear. You can instantly perceive that anything that you acquire will soon pass. Everything you desire and get eventually disappears, because everything is always changing, changing, changing, nonstop. With this perception, your desire-mind and the suffering that comes from it will not control you so much. You will understand that suffering comes simply from attachment to impermanent things. Some people think: "Ahh, my life is no problem. I have everything. Perhaps I will live to be one hundred." Yes, perhaps this kind of person has no great difficulties now. But even if you manage to live past one hundred years, then what? You must still die. Everybody eventually dies. Then how will you feel? What will you do?

But most people don't understand this point. They don't understand this world's impermanence, so they hold on to many desires and anger. "I like this." "I don't like that!" People live their whole lives like this with a great deal of desire for impermanent things, always checking their minds and other people and this world. They hold their petty opinions about what they like and dislike, holding this up as the truth. We call this *attachment*. But if you correctly perceive this world's impermanence, you don't become so attached to things, so you don't suffer as much when things eventually change. Every-

thing disappears so soon, so why be attached to anything? Even if you get some kind of happiness, how long can you keep it? Two people get married. In the beginning, they think, "Oh, now I will be happy. I have finally found the one I've been waiting for. This is wonderful!" And it is a very beautiful experience. But how long does this happiness mind really last? How long? One year? Two years? Three years? These days if you can keep it for more than three years, that is considered very unusual! [*Laughter from the assembly*] Many people can be like this for maybe three years. Then they start to think, "I don't like you!" "Oh, I don't like you!" They get separated and suffering appears in their lives. That is because human beings cannot get anything and cannot keep anything, since everything in this universe is constantly changing. So you must first understand this world's impermanence, and then you can put it down. In some Hinayana and Tibetan traditions the monks do meditation in cemeteries to help them have a deep experience of this body's impermanence. Then they can put down any kind of desire arising from this temporary body. This is insight into impermanence.