

# LAMRIM TEACHINGS

VOLUME IV

ADVANCED SCOPE



Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Chodron

**LAMRIM TEACHINGS**  
**Volume 4**

**Advanced Scope**

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The merit created by preparing this ebook is dedicated to the good health and long lives of our precious teachers and the flourishing of the Buddhadharma. May the light of the Dharma illuminate the minds of all sentient beings, and awaken the seed of compassion and wisdom that lies within each of us.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Training the Mind in the Stages of the Path for an Advanced Level Practitioner**

We're going to begin the practice of a higher level being—the bodhisattva practice, or at least learning about it, let's put it that way. If you look at the outline, it's point 'C': Training the mind on the stages of path when you are a person of higher level.

#### **The first two levels and the reason for the words “in common”**

Point 'A' was training the mind on the stages of the path in common with an initial level practitioner. In that one, we were trying to develop some care and concern for how we are going to die and what we are going to be when reborn. We realized that unfortunate rebirths are a possibility, and that they're due to negative karma. As an antidote to that, we want to clean up our karmic act. In other words, we want to do some purification, to avoid doing the ten non-virtues and to try and do the ten virtuous actions as much as possible. This is the training of mind on the stages of the path in common with the initial level practitioner.

The reason it's called 'in common' is because the Lamrim, the gradual path to Enlightenment, is designed for somebody who already knows they want to practice the highest level. What you're doing at this first level is in common with the person of the initial

level because you are doing it in common with them, but you have in mind that you are going for the highest level. That's why at the beginning of all of our sessions, we spend time generating the altruistic intention of bodhicitta, which is the motivation of the highest level practitioner, even though we might then go back and meditate or study one of the meditations which are in common with the initial level practitioner.

Point 'B' was training the mind in the stages of the path in common with an intermediate level practitioner. An intermediate level practitioner is somebody who not just aspires for a good rebirth, but also wants to totally get out of samsara, and who recognizes the causes of being caught in cyclic existence are ignorance, anger and attachment. At this intermediate level, one practices the three higher trainings of ethics, concentration and wisdom in order to free oneself from cyclic existence. We practice the path that is in common with the intermediate level practitioner because we are still aiming for the highest practice, the highest path.

Now, we have finally come to the training of the mind in the path where you are a person of higher level. Even though we ourselves may not be a person of higher level right now, still it's beneficial to hear the teachings on this, contemplate them and meditate on them because it puts some imprint on our mind that begins the learning process. It plants the seeds and these seeds can gradually get nurtured as we listen and contemplate and meditate more and more. It's not that you have to do the initial level practice without knowing the rest and master that level before you

learn the next level, but rather, you try and learn the whole path so you have a broad overview of it, and then you concentrate on the level that is really where you are at. You do practice as much as you can on the whole path, even though your emphasis is at the level where you are really at.

This is why we may have taken tantric empowerments. “I didn’t understand everything, what do I do? How am I qualified to do this, I can’t even spell Chenrezig!” [Laughter.] If you have some knowledge of the whole path and some awareness of the determination to be free, the bodhicitta, and the wisdom realizing emptiness, then you start on the Chenrezig practice which belongs to the lowest class of tantra. It’s not the highest class of tantra, so it’s much easier and much simpler. Even though you don’t understand everything completely, it’s putting imprints in your mind. You practice it the best that you can. As you practice it, what you do will relate to the earlier levels of the path, and the earlier levels of the path will start relating to the practice, and you will begin to see how it all fits together. So there’s no need for despair. [Laughter.]

In this section of training in the path of the person of the highest motivation, there are three main sections:

1. Discussing the advantages of the altruistic intention or bodhicitta
2. The way to develop it
3. Having generated it, how to engage in the bodhisattva deeds, bodhisattva practices

## The Advantages of the Altruistic Intention

This is the hard sell. Whenever they talk about the advantages of something, it's really to sell you on it. Not just to sell you on it, but to get you to value what this thing is and have a mind that is full of appreciation and optimism so that you will want to engage in that practice. If you don't see the benefits of it, then what's the use of putting all the energy into it? Just as we now see the benefits of making a lot of money, we have much energy to go to work. You want to make money, so you get out of bed in the morning; your wish to make money gets you out of bed in the morning. It gets you in your car and going to work even if you are exhausted. Even if you are sick you still go to work. You spend extra hours working because you see the value of money. You are not lazy in it.

When we see the advantages of something, then the joyous effort comes very spontaneously. One reason why we don't have much joyous effort in our meditation practice, is that we may not yet know the advantages of it. Understanding the advantages of something helps. If we know the advantages then we'll get out of bed in the morning to meditate on bodhicitta, and we will work on bodhicitta all day long without fatigue, even overtime. [Laughter.] It won't seem such a big strain because we will see the advantages of it.

People may be quite surprised, I don't know if everybody knows that Lama Zopa doesn't sleep. Nobody's ever seen him lie down. Nobody, not even his attendants, have seen him lie down. So for about



forty-five minutes between like 3:30 and a quarter past four, he'll go into a very deep meditation and his head will go like this, and then forty-five minutes later he'll lift his head up and continue doing his prayers. He just doesn't sleep. You know how it is that this happens? It's by the power of the bodhicitta—his bodhicitta doesn't get him out of bed in the morning, it gets him not to go to bed at night! [Laughter.] This is the reason why he stays up into all hours of the day and night teaching. We're all sitting there falling asleep but he's completely 'on', one hundred percent. He comes back here and talks to people until all hours, again teaching them, and then he starts his prayers very early in the morning and has this whirlwind schedule.

Also, you look at His Holiness and how he lives—whirlwind schedule, very little privacy. This is made possible by the force of the altruistic intention. These things don't become hardships, but rather become joys. If we contemplate the advantages of the bodhicitta, then engaging in the practice becomes a joy rather than a hardship.

## **1. IT IS THE ONLY GATEWAY FOR ENTERING THE MAHAYANA PATH**

When we talk about the advantages of the bodhicitta, they really emphasize that it is the gateway for entering into the Mahayana. And we get all high and mighty because we are Mahayana practitioners, not those Hinayana lower vehicle people who don't have compassion. [Laughter.] “We *are* Mahayana practitioners!” What this point is emphasizing is that

you are not really a Mahayana practitioner if you don't have the bodhicitta. That just talking about bodhicitta and calling yourself a Mahayanist doesn't really do anything. The whole thing depends upon your state of mind and your level of realization. If you don't have the bodhicitta, even if you practice the highest tantra, it doesn't lead you to realization of the Mahayana path!

In fact, there is even a story of one person who meditated on one deity and because they didn't have the proper bodhicitta motivation, not even the artificial bodhicitta (what we try and create), he was reborn as a spirit in the shape of that deity. It is really emphasizing that, for tantra to be effective, we need to do the bodhicitta practice. Meditating on bodhicitta is the best preparation to make your Chenrezig practice go well. That's why Rinpoche talked about bodhicitta the whole first night. Also, the more you do Chenrezig practice—because Chenrezig is the embodiment of compassion—the more that is going to help your bodhicitta practice as well. Lama Yeshe said if you recite 'Om Mani Padme Hum,' even if you don't want to develop compassion, you will. [Laughter.] Doing the Lamrim meditations on altruism plus doing the Chenrezig—or if you didn't take the Chenrezig initiation, then reciting 'Om Mani Padme Hum,'—they complement each other, they help each other a lot.

I emphasize this because many people in the West are just so enthralled with, "We want the highest class tantric practice!" We go to this high lama and that high lama, collecting initiations like people collect stamps. You ask them what is bodhicitta and they say,

“Bodhicitta?” You can see that if a person doesn’t start with the basic fundamentals, the aspiration for the highest goal will not bear fruit. It is really important to cultivate the fundamental practice.

## **The real miracle**

In the same way, many people get all excited about developing clairvoyant powers or healing powers or some special powers. But again, even if you develop these powers, if you don’t have the altruistic intention, what good do these powers do you? You might have these powers, but then if you don’t have the proper motivation, they go for increasing one’s own pride and ego. After death what happens is that instead of having a good rebirth, somebody has a lower rebirth, even though in this life they have clairvoyance or some other kind of fantastic power.

It reminds me of a story. When I was in Hong Kong, I used to teach at the schools (some of the teachers would ask me to come in), and at one school one student asked me if I could do magic powers, if I had miraculous powers. I guess he had just read a book on Uri Geller, because he asked me if I could bend spoons. [Laughter.] He asked if I could read people’s minds and things like that. People are just so excited by miraculous powers. I told this student that I wasn’t impressed with those kinds of things. To me the real miraculous power was being able to have a kind heart towards all the different people that you meet. I think that’s much more miraculous than being able to bend spoons. I mean, bending spoons doesn’t help anyone, it might even make somebody angry if

it's their spoon you're bending! [Laughter.] Likewise, reading somebody's mind might make them angry, might harm them too, and it might harm yourself! But if you can have a kind heart towards somebody, and a feeling of altruism, then that's something that is universally beneficial. I think that's the real miracle. That's what we want to emphasize in our practice.

### **Beware of being sectarian**

When the Tibetans start talking about the bodhicitta and the advantages of bodhicitta, they go on a big thing about how superior a bodhisattva is to an arhat. An arhat is somebody who has attained liberation, they've removed the afflictions (of attachment, aversion and ignorance) and karma. They've freed themselves from the twelve links of dependent arising. They've attained liberation, but they haven't yet developed the altruistic intention so they haven't removed the cognitive obscurations in their mind. And so you'll find, in the Mahayana sutras and in the Indian ...

*[Teachings lost due to change of tape]*

... is that it's a way of encouraging us to enter into the Mahayana path from the very beginning. There are two ways to reach Enlightenment.

One way is to enter the Mahayana path, developing the determination to be free, developing the altruism, doing the bodhisattva practices and becoming a Buddha. You go straight that way, that's one way to do it.

The second way is that you enter what the Tibetans call the Hinayana path, we might call it the Theravada path, and you become an arhat and you are free from cyclic existence, but you haven't developed the bodhicitta. You stay in your blissful samadhi on emptiness for eons and eons and eons, because you are liberated and it's wonderful. But you don't have the bodhicitta. You're in what they call the extreme of nirvana in your meditation on emptiness, and at some point, the Buddha wakes you up, and you have to develop bodhicitta and then start at the beginning of the Mahayana path and do all the bodhisattva practices. It's kind of like taking a detour of becoming an arhat first, then you have to switch back to the bodhisattva practice.

They say that for some people, that's the best way to do it. But if you could enter the Mahayana practice directly, it saves time. And we all want to save time. [Laughter.] They say, even if you have to spend a little time in hell on the way to Buddhahood, it's worthwhile rather than detouring into the blissful state of nirvana and then coming back to the bodhisattva practice. I'm telling you this because you will hear it from Tibetan lamas as you go on. I am telling you this to help interpret it a bit.

They always tell a story. There were sixty practitioners who were just about ready to, I think, realize emptiness. They were going to attain nirvana or liberation very, very soon. And Manjushri came and taught them about bodhicitta, but because it was too much for their minds, they generated wrong views and because of their wrong views, they were reborn in the lower realms for I don't know how long, but some

time. [Laughter.] When they got out of the lower realms, they entered the Mahayana practice and went straight to Enlightenment. People were curious about why Manjushri did this, why he taught them this teaching knowing that they would generate wrong views and be reborn in the lower realms. Buddha explained that this was actually a skillful method to put the seeds of the Mahayana practice in somebody's mindstream in order that they could then progress along the path.

I think there is some difficulty in this. Sometimes the way this is taught may sound very sectarian to us. It may sound to us like we are putting people down: "They just watch their breath and practice Vipassana, and try and become arhats, while we're the great Mahayana practitioners." People who hear this may feel that it sounds quite sectarian. I am bringing this all up because we talk about sectarianism at the conference. I am a fundamentalist regarding being anti-sectarian. [Laughter.]

I think we have to really know how to interpret these passages very well. They are offered in the context of encouraging somebody to develop love, compassion and altruism, because that person already has that kind of interest and inclination. It's not said as a put down for the Theravada practice, okay? It may sound that way sometimes, and some people who don't know how to understand it, might become very sectarian. The reason it is spoken of this way, is as a way of encouraging us in the Mahayana practice, not as a way of putting down and creating differences with other traditions. They are also, at other points in the teachings, very quick to remind us that we should

never disparage arhats. The arhats have much more love and compassion than we do! [Laughter.]

It's not that arhats lack love and compassion, it's not that you don't have love and compassion in the Theravada tradition—there is obviously the metta meditation; this is something that is taught. It's probably taught more and emphasized more in the Mahayana tradition, but the teachings on love and compassion, bodhicitta and bodhisattvas are also found in the Theravada teaching.

I am telling you all this just to show you how centuries of Asian misconceptions get passed down. I heard one Westerner tell a story about a Vipassana meditator in Thailand or Sri Lanka in the Theravada tradition, who got very, very far on his meditation and then got stuck and he couldn't deepen his concentration. One of the teachers there saw that that was because he took the bodhisattva vows in a previous life. The moral of the story is be careful and maybe don't take the bodhisattva vows since they may interfere with your practice. Could you have attained nirvana quicker if you didn't take the bodhisattva vows? This is the kind of implication of this story. I heard one Westerner say it, and I'm sure he learned it from an Asian teacher.

It's the centuries of misconception that you have passed down, that the Theravada people might say, "Be careful of bodhicitta because you won't become an arhat," or "It distracts you from the path." Mahayana people say, "Well, those Theravada people, they are from a lower vehicle and they don't have love and compassion." I think both those attitudes are incorrect. I think that as Westerners, we don't need to

import these kinds of attitudes from Asia. If we have a tendency and we are interested in a tradition of love and compassion, to recognize that this is found in the Theravada teachings. Learning the metta meditation done in the Vipassana communities is very helpful for us to do. In our own teachings, it emphasizes this practice a lot more, and that may fit more with our personality and our disposition, so go for it, but don't criticize other people who don't emphasize it.

I think sectarianism happens among the people who don't have realizations. The people who really understand the Dharma, they have no need to be sectarian and put one tradition up or another tradition down. That's why I said I think those people who wrote these passages in the Indian scriptures aren't being sectarian. They are trying to do it as a way of encouraging people with the disposition. But other people might misinterpret it as being sectarian.

One example of this, and why it's good not to be proud, is one time, I was invited by a Mahayana center to teach, but when I reminded them about helping with my airfare, they hummed and hawed and said: "Well, we didn't expect it. We don't know about this and there are all these other expenses." They had just had a big fund raiser and raised a whole lot of money. They were really humming and hawing about helping with the airfare.

When I got there, I gave a talk at another place where the chief was a Sri Lankan monk from the Theravada tradition. Most of the people there practiced in the Theravada tradition, although they have people from all traditions practicing there. At the end of the talk, this chief monk, whom I really respect



very much, asked me to come and see him. I came in and some people from his committee were there, and he made an offering and said, “This is for your airfare.” Somehow he heard about it through the grapevine, and he hadn’t even been asked! Here are the Theravada people who are helping and the Mahayana people who are saying “Well ...” [Laughter.] That’s why it really comes down to what’s in your heart and how you live your life, not spouting a bunch of philosophy about how great your tradition is.

## **What bodhicitta is**

Anyway, if we see some advantage to having a Mahayana mind (not just a Mahayana label), and the results that it can bring and how beneficial our lives can become for others, then it is important to know that generating the bodhicitta is the gateway to entering that path.

We have to know specifically what bodhicitta is, because we are talking about it here. I’m translating bodhicitta as the altruistic intention. Other people translate it as the mind of Enlightenment and the awakening mind. There’re lots of different translations. Bodhicitta is a primary mind that is accompanied by two aspirations. One aspiration is to become a Buddha and the second aspiration is to be able to benefit sentient beings. You want to become a Buddha in order to benefit sentient beings. The mind that has these two aspirations, that’s the bodhicitta. Bodhicitta isn’t just wanting to help others, because you can want to help others without wanting to

become a Buddha. Wanting to become a Buddha isn't bodhicitta either, because you can want to become a Buddha and not want to help others.

### **The right way to approach bodhicitta**

Bodhicitta isn't just having a kind heart, it isn't just love and compassion, but an actual wish to become a Buddha so that one can help others more effectively. The emphasis here in the bodhicitta, is being of benefit to others, working for the welfare of others. The emphasis is not on becoming a Buddha. Actually, they are both equally important, but I think it is more important for us to work for the welfare of others. Otherwise, we get into this thing of, "I want to become a Buddha. I want to become a Buddha because Buddhahood is the best! I want to be the best! I want to be the highest! I want to be the most glorious! I want to be a Buddha!" Helping others becomes a 'tax' that you have to pay in order to become a Buddha, you know? [Laughter.] It's like, "I want to become a Buddha, so okay if I had to help others, I'll do it." [Laughter.] That's not the attitude that we want to have, but rather what we want to try and cultivate, is this real strong wish to serve others. We realize that at the present, our ability to help others is limited. We want to become a Buddha in order to overcome our own limitations and purify our mind so that we can help others most effectively. Becoming a Buddha becomes the method for carrying out this strong aspiration to serve others. That's how we want to approach bodhicitta.

### **3. ONE RECEIVES THE NAME “CHILD OF THE BUDDHA”**

The second advantage of bodhicitta is that you will receive the name, “child of the Buddha”. I will explain it, then I’ll give my commentary. [Laughter.] If you generate the bodhicitta—which is the wish to become a Buddha for the benefit of others, even though you haven’t yet become a Buddha and may not yet even realize emptiness, you are still called a “child of the Buddha” in the sense that you enter into the Buddha’s lineage, you become an heir to the position. Think of the Buddha as the parent. When the parents have heirs to their kingdom or queendom or whatever it is, then the heirs are very special. The heirs are their special children. The bodhisattvas, those who have generated bodhicitta, become the spiritual heirs, so to speak, of the Buddha, so they are called the children of the Buddha. That’s considered a great honor.

Now to us, Westerners, I don’t know about you, but I listened to this and I feel, “Well, I don’t really care if I get called the child of the Buddha. Why do I need another label?” I don’t know if any of you felt that way. For those of you who may have this skeptical mind like I do, when I heard this teaching, I thought: “Why is that an advantage for generating bodhicitta? I get the title of the spiritual child of the Buddha—big deal! Who cares about another title!” For somebody like me, that may not appear as an advantage, but if you look at it, for other people, it might be very encouraging. “Wow, that means I’m really entering into the Buddha’s family. I become the

spiritual child of the Buddha, and just as a child grows up and takes over the Buddha, the parents' place, the bodhisattvas grow up and they also assume the work of the Buddhas. Gee, that's what I want to do!"

### **3. ONE WILL SURPASS IN BRILLIANCE THE SRAVAKAS AND SOLITARY REALIZERS**

The third advantage of bodhicitta is that you surpass in brilliance the sravakas and the solitary realizers. The English translation for "sravakas" is the "hearers," because they hear the Dharma, they practice it, they attain nirvana. The solitary realizers also hear the Dharma, they also eliminate the afflicted obscurations and attain nirvana, but they do so in their last rebirth, at a time when there is no Buddha on Earth. That's why they are called "solitary realizers." In their last rebirth, they practice in a solitary way. Both the hearers or sravakas, and the solitary realizers, are people who practice to attain nirvana. Like I was saying at the beginning, they stay in nirvana for a long time, then later the Buddha has to wake them up and say, "Hey, you aren't done yet. You have to generate the bodhicitta and become enlightened for the benefit of others."

It is said here that if you generate the bodhicitta at the beginning, you surpass in brilliance these sravakas and solitary realizers. Even though they may be out of samsara and you may not be, and they have realized emptiness and you may not have yet, still, they say that you surpass them because of the potential and the force of the bodhicitta. Because the bodhicitta is so powerful it's like a turbo jet? [Laughter.] I don't know

the latest thing—laser beam? Okay, it's the laser beam of the practice. Even though you may not have the realizations of emptiness that a sravaka or an arhat or a solitary realizer has, because of the power of bodhicitta, you have set yourself on a path where you are going to gain all of those qualities and more.

#### **4. ONE WILL BECOME AN OBJECT OF HIGHEST RESPECT AND OFFERING**

The fourth advantage of bodhicitta is that you become an object of highest respect and offering. Somebody who has generated the altruistic intention and working for the benefit of others, because this intention is so profound and so pervasive in the service that it offers to humanity and to all sentient life, then, that person becomes an object of respect and offering.

We shouldn't look at it like, "Become an object of highest respect and offering? I thought I was supposed to give that up? Isn't seeking offering and respect something to give up? Why is this an advantage here of bodhicitta?" Don't think of it that way. It's not like, "Oh, I want respect and offering. Therefore, I am going to generate bodhicitta!" You don't approach it that way. Rather, it's emphasizing again how noble the bodhicitta attitude is. If you have milk and you churn the milk, the rich stuff is the cream that comes to the top. Similarly, if you take all the Buddha's teachings and churn them, the richness that comes to the top is the kind heart. It is bodhicitta. It's a way of pointing out to us that this is really the core of the practice. It is helpful for us to know, so that we make the core of our daily life, developing a kind heart.

I'll continue with the advantages of bodhicitta next time. I want to leave some time for questions and answers now.

## **Questions and answers**

*[Audience:] What's the difference between bodhicitta and compassion?*

Compassion is the wish for others to be free of suffering and its causes. Compassion is a cause for bodhicitta. First you develop compassion. But you can have compassion and still not want to become a Buddha. You can have compassion, but still not want to really engage in the process of helping others. Compassion is a step you develop first, and then you go further and develop the bodhicitta and the wish to become a Buddha.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Well, they are both aspirations, they are both mental states. With compassion you want others to be free of suffering and its cause, but you are not yet necessarily aspiring to do anything about it yourself. Nor are you aspiring yet to become a Buddha to do something about it. That's why they say compassion is the cause for bodhicitta. It is a very important cause, so it is very highly praised. You can't have bodhicitta without compassion, but you can have compassion without having bodhicitta.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Philosophically speaking, in the doctrine, they do make a difference—even in the Theravada scriptures—between an arhat’s realization and the Buddha’s realization.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

What happens when the alarm clock goes off? [Laughter.] I’m not quite sure. They may just do all this work of developing bodhicitta in the Pure Land, that’s my guess. And then maybe, after having developed the bodhicitta, they may voluntarily, out of compassion (not out of the twelve links, because they are free from these), take rebirth in the other realms of existence in order to carry out the bodhisattva activity.

If I can just kind of elaborate, you didn’t ask this question but this might be useful information. In the Theravada tradition, they say that not everybody can become a Buddha. Everybody can become an arhat, but there are only a thousand Buddhas in this particular eon (Shakyamuni is the fourth) who would become fully enlightened Buddhas through doing the bodhisattva practice. Everybody else can become arhats. Becoming an arhat is wonderful. In the Mahayana tradition, they say actually everybody can become a Buddha, because everybody has the Buddha potential, and there’re more Buddhas than just a thousand in this particular eon.

*[Audience:] On what basis is the discrimination made that some people can attain Buddhahood and others cannot according to the Theravada tradition?*

This is a question I've always had too. It seems to me, so obvious to my ignorant mind, that a mindstream is a mindstream. How can you say some people have Buddha nature and other people don't? I don't really understand where this comes from philosophically.

His Holiness was saying at a conference that, if you see the Buddha nature in everybody, you want to go like this (hands folded in respect). In the "Eight Verses of Thought Transformation", it talks about making yourself the lowest of all beings. Everybody has the Buddha potential, everybody has some qualities we can learn from, everybody has something to respect. We should go like this (hands folded) to everybody. At the conference, His Holiness was telling the story that when he was in Thailand, the custom in Thailand is that the lay people do this to the Sangha, but the Sangha aren't allowed to do it to the lay people, because the respect goes one way. His Holiness said the first time he was there, he tried very hard, all these people were going like this and he just had to keep his arms down. He said, "This last time I went, I went like this to everybody! I think maybe they didn't like it. They didn't think I was a proper monk!" [Laughter.] "But," he said, "I couldn't help it!" It is having an attitude of respect that comes quite naturally from seeing that everybody has the Buddha potential.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

They say yes, even in this degenerate age, you can become a Buddha. That's why tantra is so effective in the degenerate age.



*[Audience: inaudible]*

Yes, I think as the age gets more and more degenerate, the ability to practice does become more and more difficult. It is harder to generate wisdom, it's harder to generate concentration, it's harder to keep ethics. There are many more obstacles. At a certain point, they say, "Okay, during this period, people can't get higher realizations than a certain level." But in the Tibetan tradition, they say first of all, if we start out with the Mahayana practice, all these degenerate things can become fuel for your practice, through thought transformation. That's why thought transformation is so important—because the times are so degenerate. Based on the thought transformation, if you then do tantra, this helps transform the difficulties of the degenerate age into the path.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

They aren't very good at statistics in the scriptures. [Laughter.] What percentage of bodhisattvas seek out a hell rebirth?

*[Audience: inaudible]*

From the side of the bodhisattvas, they would be totally delighted to be reborn in the hell realm. Whether they actually do or not, I'm not sure. It probably depends on the karma of those particular hell realm beings. But from the side of the bodhisattva, he or she is completely happy to do that.

*[Audience:] Why do the bodhisattvas want to be reborn in the lower realms?*

To help others.

*[Audience:] Why do they have to do that?*

Because you have to appear in a way, and in an environment that enables you to communicate with others very directly. That's why they say that there can be many Buddhas amongst us right now. But they look like Joe Blow whom we criticize. The reason that the Buddhas and bodhisattvas may appear as Joe Blow, is so we can relate to them. If Buddha had walked in here with a golden body and thirty-two signs and eighty marks, we wouldn't have been able to relate at all, "He is so far above us, how can we possibly become like that?" But if a bodhisattva manifests amongst us as somebody who is just ordinary, that gives you the idea, "Wow! Look, that person is a human being but look what they are like. I can do that. I can become like them!" That's a real skillful way to help us.

In the human realm, a bodhisattva may manifests that way, or they may manifest in a way that directly helps people by giving them food, clothing and other things. Or a bodhisattva may manifest as an animal, and somehow teach the animals the Dharma. Similarly, in the hell realm, if those beings have the karma, if they have some openness and receptivity, then a bodhisattva can manifest and help in whichever way is possible. They may not be able to teach the Dharma, it may only be possible to put out a little bit

of the fire or something like that. However, because it's beneficial, they do that.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Yes, it does help those beings in the hell realms. It's interesting that in the Chinese temples (they don't do this in the Tibetan temples), when you wake up in the morning, they ring this enormous gong. They ring this huge gong a hundred and eight times to get you up in the morning. [Laughter.] They say that when the hell realm beings hear the Dharma gong, it alleviates a little bit of their suffering. When you wake up in the morning, when you are getting out of your own fog of the night, if you think about this, it makes the mind happy to hear the bell.

Let's just sit quietly for a few minutes.

## **OTHER ADVANTAGES OF THE ALTRUISTIC INTENTION**

We were talking about the advantages of the altruistic intention. The Sanskrit term for the altruistic intention is bodhicitta. I went through the ten advantages that are commonly listed, such as being able to purify negative karma very rapidly, creating vast amounts of positive potential, and gaining realizations of the Path. There are some other advantages that I thought I would go into.

### **We please the Buddhas**

One is that we please the Buddhas. By the force of

having an altruistic intention and love and compassion, we take some effort to act constructively and so all of our constructive actions are pleasing to the Buddha. We please the Buddhas especially when we work for the benefit of others with a sense of altruism and compassion. The whole reason why anybody who is a Buddha became a Buddha is because they cherish others. Therefore anytime we cherish others and do something to benefit others, that's something that is automatically very pleasing to the Buddha. When we have the altruism, the Buddha becomes very, very happy.

### **Bodhicitta is our real friend who never deserts us**

Another advantage is that the bodhicitta is our real friend and it's something that never deserts us. Ordinary friends—they come and they go and we can't always be with them. Whereas when we have the bodhicitta in our heart, it will always be there. No matter what is happening around us, whether awful or good, it doesn't really matter. The bodhicitta is still in our heart and it's our best friend that keeps us company always.

### **Our lives become very purposeful**

Also our lives become very purposeful. We begin to have a sense of meaning in our lives. Last week I was telling you about the class of new people, that many of them said they came for some sense of meaning in their life, some sense of purpose besides having a house and a spouse, besides accumulating a lot of

things.

You can see that when there's a sense of altruism and when there's a sense of compassion for others, life becomes very purposeful. There's something that's really driving you, pushing your energy. You have some reason to live, some feeling that you can do something for others, that you can do something for the state of the world. The situation in the world doesn't overwhelm you anymore. Not only do you have the ability to cope with it, but you also feel that your life is very purposeful. And I think that's something really important because as the world gets crazier and crazier, the opportunity and the necessity for bodhicitta or altruism, love and compassion becomes much stronger, doesn't it? In some way, the crazier the world, the more important compassion is. Actually in some ways, it should be easier to develop compassion when things are really crazy. We see how out of control things are, and when we see suffering in a very deep way, then compassion automatically arises. So in some ways the fact that we are living in a degenerate time can make our practice stronger, can't it?

### **It is the best way to serve others**

Also, if you have some kind of wish to help your family, the best way to help is through altruism and love and compassion, through the aspiration to become a Buddha for the benefit of others. If you're feeling exceptionally patriotic, and want to help your country, the best way is also through the altruistic intention. When somebody in the society or in a

family has a sense of altruism, that person's actions automatically contribute to the benefit of the family or the society or the world. So the best way really to serve those people is if we change our mind to one of altruism.

### **We will be balanced and we will relate to people in a very direct and straightforward way**

Also, when we have a sense of altruism, we're going to be really balanced and the way we relate to people is going to be very direct and straightforward. If we don't have altruism and we try to be people pleasers and win other people's approval, our actions aren't going to be very straightforward because we will be wanting something in return or we will be looking for something in return. So even though we may try and help, it's not going to work real well because there's going to be a lot of trips involved. But when we have an altruistic intention, which means wanting others to be happy and to be free of suffering simply because they exist and are just like us, then there're no trips involved. Then what we do can be very direct. Things don't get mushy.

### **We will not feel alienated or discouraged**

Also, when we have altruism, we won't feel alienated or discouraged anymore. They say that bodhicitta is a very good anti-depressant—better than Prozac, and cheaper too [laughter]. You might think now, “Wait, wait, how is love and compassion a good anti-depressant? Compassion means I have to think about

other people's suffering. That's going to make me depressed. So how is this going to work? How am I going to be not depressed thinking about this?"

The thing is that we get depressed because we feel overwhelmed by situations. We feel like there're no resources, no tools. We can't do anything. When we have a sense of altruism, we realize that there's a lot that we can do, and we feel very encouraged. We feel very uplifted because we see we can do something. We see some path out of the misery, some path out of the confusion. And so we see that there is no reason to be depressed. We have some self-confidence to be able to do something. We have the inner strength to endure situations by the force of love and compassion. The mind doesn't get discouraged and depressed.

### **Bodhicitta eliminates fear**

Similarly, bodhicitta is very good for eliminating fear. This is interesting, when you think of how many things in our lives terrify us, how much fear overwhelms us. Very often in retreats, people ask questions about that.

How does that work? Well, fear comes when there is a lack of clarity. Fear comes when we have a lot of attachment to things, and we're afraid of losing them. Fear comes when we can't find our own internal resources to deal with a situation. When we have love and compassion for others, we have a sense of our own confidence and power in the situation, a sense of our ability to contribute. We're in touch with our own internal resources. We know that we have available

tools that we can share with others. And because we aren't attached either to our own ego or to our own body, possessions or reputation, we have nothing to fear about losing those things. So for all those reasons then, bodhicitta just makes the mind very courageous, very, very strong and no longer submerged by fear. When we get fearful, what happens to the mind? It curls up into little balls like the stinkbugs. Well, that's how we get when we are afraid. Altruism, on the other hand, makes the mind very strong and courageous. It's free of attachment and it has access to inner tools.

### **Bodhicitta frees us from our pride**

Bodhicitta also frees us from our pride, conceit and arrogance. Why? Because bodhicitta is really based on looking at others as equal to ourselves, in that others want happiness and want to be free of suffering just as we do. Because we see ourselves and others as equal, there's no reason for pride to arise. And because we are not seeking a good reputation and praise and we believe we're okay, we don't need to put on a false air of arrogance. We really don't care if we have a fantastic reputation or not because we see that as rather meaningless.

### **“Old age” insurance**

Also, bodhicitta is a very good old age insurance [laughter]. They say that if you have an attitude of love and compassion, you don't need to worry about who's going to take care of you when you're old



because if you spend your life living from a space of kindness for others, then others naturally are attracted to you. They naturally want to reciprocate. So we're going to try this one out and see if it beats Medicare or not. [Laughter.]

## **Very good antidote for loneliness**

Also, bodhicitta is a very good antidote to loneliness. When we feel lonely, we feel disconnected from others. We feel unrelated to others. We don't feel the kindness of others in any way. Whereas when we have bodhicitta, there is a definite feeling of connection with other people because we realize we're all the same in wanting happiness and not wanting pain. We're all exactly the same, so there's that feeling of connectedness and the heart opens towards others.

Also with bodhicitta, we're quite aware and conscious of the kindness we receive from others. Rather than shriveling up into our own self-pity, "Others have been so mean to me", "I've been abused", "Others are cruel" and "Others judge me"—you know, our usual trip—bodhicitta gives us strength to be able to overcome that. We remember the kindness that we've received. We realize that we have been the recipient of a lot of kindness in the universe, instead of thinking we are the recipient of a lot of cruelty. So it just depends on where we put our concentration on—what we emphasize will be what we perceive, what we experience.

Bodhicitta continuously brings us back to remembering everything we have received and how

much of it is from others, so that takes away the feeling of alienation, the feeling of loneliness. It's a very powerful, very good medicine. You never hear of the Buddha being lonely, do you? Never heard of Buddha having to call somebody up on the telephone because he's lonely. [Laughter.]

## **Why be kind to others?**

Before we get into the different techniques for developing altruism, I just want to talk a little bit also about the question, "Why be kind to others?" because this whole section on altruism is based on the idea of kindness. In many ways, kindness and compassion are what we all want in our lives. Yet somehow, especially in recent years, it's almost as if kindness and compassion are being equated with co-dependency. I think that's really quite dangerous for people: the feeling that if you're kind to others, then you're opening yourself up and they're going to take advantage of you. Nobody wants to think that if you're kind to others, they're going to get dependent on you, and you're going to get dependent on them.

Also, thinking, "I've spent my whole life taking care of others, now I'm going to meet my own needs and take care of myself." And we get that really hard, tough attitude that completely blocks out kindness. People, in some ways, feel insecure about being kind nowadays. It's so strange because we can see so directly from our own experience, what happens to us when other people are kind to us. It's like the whole heart chakra opens up. It's like, "Oh wow, I can smile, I can laugh!". You can feel what it does to you

physically when you receive a little bit of kindness from somebody else.

And so if we can give that kind of kindness to other people, how can that be bad, how can that be co-dependent? How can others take advantage of us if from our heart, we're really giving kindness? If we're not really giving kindness from the heart, but we're looking for approval and other things, then of course, people can take advantage of us. But that's not because of their actions. That's because of our sticky motivation. If from our side, we're being real clean clear and just being kind for the sake of being kind, how can anybody possibly take advantage, because in our mind, there's no space to be taken advantage of?

His Holiness quite often, in response to this question of "Why be kind to others?", tells this very simple story. I don't know, somehow this is very powerful for me. He says, "You look at the ants. Sit sometime in your garden and look at the ants. You look at all the ants, they work together. Some of them are building the big anthill. Some are running out and telling the other ones, "Go this way, there's a real good fly over there." [Laughter.] "Go that way, a child has dropped a piece of cheese, go get it!" [Laughter.] And so they all communicate and they tell each other where to get food. They tell each other where to get blades of grass or things to build up the anthill. They're all very busy and they all work together in harmony. There're thousands of ants in one anthill. They don't fight each other. They all work together. As a result, they're able to build this huge anthill.

The reason they work together is because they see

that everybody needs to work together for any one of them to survive, that no ant can survive on its own. So very naturally, the ants work together. They don't need to come to Dharma class to learn about kindness. [Laughter.] They don't need to hear about the ten advantages of bodhicitta. They just help each other. So the question comes: "If little, tiny creatures like ants can be that way, then what about us?" It shouldn't be that difficult for us as human beings to work together for a common purpose, if the ants and the bees can do it. You watch what the bees do? They all work together harmoniously. It's really quite touching when you think about this.

His Holiness also says that kindness is not something unusual. Sometimes, we feel it's very unusual, but he says actually it's something that's quite normal in our society. He says the fact that it's so normal is shown by the fact that the newspapers very seldom reports acts of kindness, because kindness is expected. We take the fact that there is kindness for granted. But the things that are irregular, the things that stand out—certain cruelty or something like that—get reported because that's an aberration.

If you look at it, really, our whole society is created by kindness. It's not created by cruelty. Cruelty really is the aberration. If we look again at how interdependent we are as a society, and how everything we have really comes from others, it's very clear that we function by the force of the kindness of all beings, by the force of what everybody contributes to the general good. Even when people don't have the wish to contribute to the general good, just by the fact of

their doing their job in society, they contribute to the general good. That's an act of kindness.

So it's really something that is present in our lives, that is ingrained in us, if we open our eyes and look at it. If we look at everything we have in our life, the source of it is kindness. We have this house because of the kindness of the people who built it. You have your cars by the force of the kindness of the people who built them. That we can speak is due to the kindness of the people who taught us to speak when we were little. All the people who held us up when we were babies and talked baby talk with us so that we eventually learnt to talk regular talk. All the people who taught us when we were young. All the skills we have, the abilities we have, are again the result of the kindness of others. So kindness is something that's very present in our lives, very present in our society. Kindness shouldn't be something that's difficult. It's not a strange thing, it's not a weird thing.

Again, why be kind? Because we are so inter-dependent. Just like the ants, one human being can't live alone. I think especially now, more than at any other time in human history, we're more dependent on each other. In ancient times, people maybe could go and grow their own vegetables or they could shear a sheep and make some wool and do their own clothes and build their own houses. But nowadays, we can't do any of that. It's very hard to be self-sufficient because our society is arranged such that we're so inter-dependent. And if we're that dependent on one another, then the happiness of one part of the society depends on the happiness of the rest of the society. It's quite difficult for us as one person to be happy if

we don't take care of the other people who live around us. His Holiness, for that reason, always says, "If you want to be selfish, at least be wisely selfish and take care of others." If you want to be selfish and you want your own happiness, then do it by serving others.

And you can really see how that's true. If you're living together in a family and you take care of the people whom you live with, the whole ambience of the family is going to be nicer. Whereas if everybody in the family just gets really defensive and says, "I want my happiness. Why are all these other people bugging me?", then that sets up an atmosphere of tension that breeds and festers. Nobody in the situation will be happy even though everybody is going around saying, "I'm going to work for my own happiness. I'm tired of being kind and doing what these other people want." [Laughter.]

Because we're so inter-dependent, we've got to take care of each other, not just in our families but in society as a whole. I remember a few years ago, Seattle was voting on a new school bond, and I thought a lot about it (I used to be a teacher so these issues are very, very personal). Some people who didn't have children in school thought, "Why do I need to vote for a school bond? Teachers already get paid enough. Kids already have enough stuff. I don't want to pay more property taxes for these brats to go to school. I don't have any kids at home." People felt that, because they didn't have children who would directly benefit from their paying more taxes. I was thinking that that's really quite silly because if you cut the money available to the schools, what are the kids

going to do? They're not going to have as many activities or as much guidance. They're going to get into more mischief. Whose house are they going to vandalize? Whose neighborhood are they going to mess up because they don't have proper guidance and activities?

So it's not sufficient to say, "Well, my kids won't benefit from it so I don't want to help other people's kids". You can see we're so inter-related that if other people's kids are miserable, it very directly affects your own happiness. It's really the same with all aspects of our society and with what's happening in the whole globe. Now, that doesn't mean that we have to feel, "I can't be happy unless this world is Utopia". Not like that, because then we get overwhelmed again by the suffering. But rather, whenever we feel that we want to withdraw because the world is too much, to remember that it's difficult to be happy if you withdraw, because we are so inter-dependent.

Little acts of kindness can have very, very strong repercussions. Again you can see it from your own experience. Have you ever been down and somebody who is a stranger smiles at you, and you feel kind of "Wow!"? One person whom I stayed with one time, told me when she was a teenager, she was just so depressed, just overwhelmingly depressed. While she's walking down the street one day, one stranger just said, "Hey, are you okay?", or something like that, and all of a sudden, that one little taste of kindness she just had gave her the space to realize that there was kindness in the world. If we look in our own life, we could see how small things of kindness affect us. And they just stay in the mind and they can

be very powerful.

I went to the ex-Soviet Union when I was about nineteen years old. I think I was in Moscow that time, or maybe it was Leningrad. Anyway, I was in a subway station, an underground station. I didn't know any Russian. I was trying to get around somewhere and I was obviously a foreigner. [Laughter.] One young woman came up to me. She had a ring. I think it was amber or something. She just pulled it off and gave it to me. I mean, she didn't know me from a hole in the head (as my mother would say) . [Laughter.] So many years later, I still remember that simple act of kindness of a stranger. And I'm sure all of us have many stories like that to tell.

If we can see how we feel when we're the recipients of that, and know that we can give that to others too, we can see that there is a way to make a contribution for human happiness, for world happiness.

## **The value of keeping precepts**

This is also where the value of keeping precepts comes in. Because if we keep one precept, if we're able to restrain from one kind of negative action, this is a contribution towards world peace. It's something you don't think about very much but if one person, let's say, takes the precept not to kill, not to destroy life, then every other living being that that person comes in contact with, can feel safe. It means that five billion human beings, and I don't know how many billion animals, have some safety in their lives. They don't need to be afraid. If every person on this



planet took precepts, just even one precept not to kill, what would we put in the newspapers every day? [Laughter.] How dramatically different things would be! We can see what a contribution that is towards world peace.

Or if we take the precept not to take other people's belongings, or not to cheat other people, then again that means every other person in this universe can feel safe, that they don't have to worry about their possessions when they're around us. When people are around us, they can leave their wallet out, they can leave their door unlocked. Nobody needs to worry about anything. So again, that's a very great contribution to society, to world peace. That comes from an attitude of kindness towards others.

### **Developing Equanimity: A Preliminary Practice for Developing the Altruistic Intention**

When we talk about the altruistic intention of the bodhicitta, there're two main ways to develop it. One way is called the "Seven Points of Cause and Effect", and another method is called "Equalizing and Exchanging Self with Others". I'll go into both of these.

But first, I want to talk about a common preliminary practice for both of them, which is equanimity. Before we can develop love and compassion for others, we have to have some sense of equanimity, because love and compassion in the Buddhist sense refers to impartial love and compassion. We're not just being kind to some people

and ignoring others and hating the rest. We're trying to develop a heart of love and compassion that goes equally towards everybody.

In order to do that, we first have to have some feeling of equality about others, which means placating the attachment towards the people that we hold dear, the aversion towards the people we don't get along with and the apathy towards strangers, the people we don't know. So those three emotions of attachment, aversion and apathy are impediments to developing equanimity, and if we don't have equanimity, we can't develop love and compassion. We can't develop altruism.

So, first step is equanimity. We're going to do a little research in the laboratory of our mind. Some of you may have done this meditation with me before but I do it many, many times and learn something each time. So close your eyes. Put your notebooks down. And think of three people. Think of one person that you have a lot of attachment for, a very dear friend, or a relative you really like to be around. Somebody the mind clings to. [Pause]

And then think of somebody you don't get along with very well, who really irritates you. [Pause]

And then think of a stranger. [Pause]

Now go back to that friend. Imagine that friend in your mind's eye and ask yourself, "Why am I so attached to that friend?" "Why do I always want to be with that person?" "Why do I hold them so dear?" And then just listen to the reasons that your mind gives. Don't censure it. Just ask yourself that question and see what answers your mind gives. [Pause]

Now go back to that person whom you don't get

along with very well, and ask yourself, “Why do I have so much aversion for that person?” And again, listen to what your mind says. Just do research into your own way of thinking. [Pause]

And then go back to the stranger and ask yourself, “Why am I apathetic towards that person?” And again listen to what your mind responds. [Pause]

[End of meditation session.]

Why are you attached to your friends?

[Responses from audience:]

- They like the same things I like.
- They’ve been kind to us.
- They do things with us.
- They cheer us up when we feel down.
- They really accept us.
- When we do things for them they’re grateful, they’re appreciative. They recognize what we’ve done.
- They respect us. They don’t take us for granted. They agree with many of our views.

What about the people you don’t get along with very well? Why is there so much aversion towards them? Because they criticize me!

[Responses from audience:]

- They compete with us. Sometimes they win.  
[Laughter.]
- They don’t appreciate us or they just look at our mistakes.
- They sometimes show us aspects of ourselves

that we would rather not look at.

- They have a lot of negative feelings towards us and misunderstand us. We don't seem to be able to clear it up.
- When we want to do something, they get in our way. We have some project and they get in the way of our project, cause interference.

And why do you have apathy for the stranger?

[Responses from audience:]

- They don't affect us one way or the other.
- It just seems like caring for them would sap all our energy because there're so many of them, so apathy is just the best way to deal with it.
- We're not connected.

Sometimes we very easily put even the stranger into the category of friend or enemy, even though we don't know them. We could see how swiftly we judge people by what they look like or how they walk or how they talk or dress.

What word do you keep hearing whilst we're discussing this? What word? *ME!* [Laughter.]

How much the whole discrimination into friend, stranger and difficult person, depends on how we perceive somebody else relating to us. And yet in this whole process, we don't feel like we're discriminating people on the basis of how they relate to me. We feel like we're looking at what they're like from their own side, objectively. When there's some person that is just so wonderful, whom we're so attached to and want to be with, we're convinced that that person is

wonderful from his or her own side. We don't think, "Oh, I think they're wonderful because of what they're doing towards me." We think that there's something in them that makes them more wonderful than anybody else in the world.

And similarly, when there's somebody whom we consider really obnoxious and difficult, we don't feel that that perception is something that arises dependent on us or on the situation. We feel like that person is obnoxious and rude and inconsiderate from his own side. [Laughter.] I just happened to walk down the street and here is this jerk out there ...

*[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]*

... realize that the friend, the difficult person and the stranger are basically creations of our own mind, that nobody is a friend or a difficult person or a stranger from their own side. They only become that by us labeling them that. We label them that on the basis of how they relate to me, because it's obvious—I'm the most important person in this world. It's very clear. If this person is kind to me, they are a good person from their own side. If they're kind to somebody else whom I think is an idiot, then they're foolish. We feel like we're looking at them objectively, but we really aren't, because their kindness is not the determining thing. It's who they're kind towards. If they're kind towards me, they're a good person. If they're kind towards somebody else I don't like, then they're not.

Similarly, we consider somebody an idiot or a jerk or an enemy or a threat, basically because of how they're relating to us, not because of some quality that

they have in and of themselves. If they're very, very critical of us, then we say that they're a difficult person, they're rude, they're obnoxious. If they're very critical of somebody else that we also happen to be critical of, then we say they're very intelligent. Their being critical isn't the point. It's who the criticism is getting shown towards, that's what the basis of discrimination is.

We're not really seeing people objectively, really seeing them for what their qualities are. We're constantly evaluating them through the filter of *me* because I'm so important. When there are difficult people in our life or when there are enemies or people we feel uncomfortable about, they are a creation of our own mind because we have labeled them that way. We've perceived them that way. We're not seeing the totality of who that person is, because no matter how mean that person has been to us, that person is kind to somebody. And similarly, the person who's so wonderful to us can be very mean to other people.

If we begin to realize how we create the friend and the enemy and the stranger, we begin to realize also that these categories really aren't necessary. We will realize that if we took the "me", the "I" out of the picture, it might be possible to see all people in some kind of equal terms, because all of them have some good qualities and some faults. They are all very, very similar that way. The person who has some fault can show it to me, or they can show it to somebody else. Same with the person who has some good quality. So based on that, why should we cherish some beings, have aversion to others, and apathy towards a third

group, if all of them really are capable of acting in any of the three ways to us at any particular time. Why cherish some and not others?

We think, “Somebody was kind to me, that’s why I should cherish them.” Well, let’s say there are two people. The first person gave you a thousand dollars yesterday and slugs you today. The second person slugged you yesterday and gives you a thousand dollars today. Now which one’s the friend and which one’s the enemy? They’ve both done both things.

If we have a big mind and take a long-term perspective, and we’re able to see that we’ve had lots of relationships with all the different sentient beings at one time or another, that everybody at one time or another has been kind to us, everybody at one time or another has been mean to us, and everybody at one time or another has been neutral, then what’s the sense of being attached to some and having aversion to others and not caring about the third group? What sense is it to have this discriminating mind, this partial mind?

If we really contemplate how the relationships change, we will see how silly the attachment, aversion and apathy are. You just look at your life. When we were born, everybody was a stranger. Now, in the midst of that, we felt a lot of apathy. Then some people began to be kind to us and we had friends. And we felt attached. But then some of those friends later on became strangers again. We lost touch with them.

Others maybe even have become enemies. People who were once very kind to us, we don’t get along with them now.

Similarly, we might have lost touch with people

whom we used to not get along with, and so now they've become strangers. Or some of them have even become friends. So all these three categories—strangers becoming friends or enemies, enemies becoming strangers or friends, friends becoming strangers or enemies—all these relationships are in a state of constant flux. When we don't see that all these things are in constant flux, when we don't realize that everybody has been everything to us at one time or another in all of our beginningless lives, then we will just take the superficial appearance. We will take how somebody is relating to me now as a concrete reality and as a reason to either cling to them or have aversion towards them or be indifferent towards them.

## **Questions and answers**

*[Audience:] If we aren't attached to our friends, won't we feel not as close and involved with them? We'll be disengaged in some way.*

Actually, what we're getting at here is the attitude of attachment. We want to let go of the attitude of attachment. Being attached to somebody is very different than appreciating or feeling close or grateful to them. We can still feel close to some people, still feel grateful to them, but not be attached to them. With attachment, we're exaggerating their good qualities and then clinging to them. Attachment has this quality of "I need to be with this person. I want to be with this person. I've got to possess this person. They're mine." Like all the love songs, "I can't live



without you.” [Laughter.]

By freeing the mind of that clinging, it doesn't mean that you disengage from the person. Rather, I think it means that the mind is much more balanced, so that we can still feel close to that person, but we can also recognize that they have some faults, that they may not always fulfill our expectations or be there when we want them to be. That is not because they mean any harm but because that's the nature of life.

So we let go of the expectations and the clinging, but we can still feel involved and engaged.

*[Audience:] So you're saying that the nature of relationships is that they do not remain static, they're constantly changing?*

Yes, continually changing. Relationships continually change. Holding onto anybody at any particular time or pushing anybody away with aversion at any particular time—both of those are unrealistic because as you can see, they change automatically. What we're really hammering away here is our assumption that we know who somebody else is and we know who they are and how they're always going to relate to us. We can bank our nickels on that. We don't realize that that's totally false. The fact is, we don't know.

*[Audience:] So our perception of relationships is very closed-minded, very myopic?*

Right. One reason is because we're only looking at it

from the very narrow view of how they relate to *me*. And second of all, we're only looking at how this relationship is right now at this very moment, not recognizing in previous lives, that person has been very kind to us, and also sometimes, they've harmed us. And also realizing in the future, it could be the same.

I think this meditation is quite powerful in breaking down a lot of our preconceptions and a lot of our very rigid mind that thinks we know who somebody else is. The mind likes to put people in nice, neat little categories and decide who we're going to hate for as long as we live because we know who they are. [Laughter.]

There's a lot of this, isn't there? To tell a story. I remember as a kid, my family had a summer property where everybody went for the summer. But one side of the family didn't speak to the other side of the family. They all came to the summer house on summer vacation—one's living upstairs, the other one's living downstairs—but they didn't talk to each other. That was when I was a kid. Now, my generation is older, and not only do the adults not speak to each other, but some of the kids also don't speak to each other. You talk about taking vows, "I vow I will hate you for as long as I live." [Laughter.] And families keep these kinds of vows. It's so outrageous. It's such a tragedy. You look at what's going on in Bosnia. It's the same thing. People taking precepts to hate each other and destroy each other because they think they know who somebody else is, because of the way their ancestors have acted towards each other.

*[Audience:] Don't we categorize people so that we can feel secure knowing who they are and how they relate to us?*

Wanting to put people in boxes so that we know who our permanent friends are and who our permanent enemies are. You just look at the world political situation. When we were kids growing up, Soviet Union is this incredible enemy. Now, we're pouring money into them: "It's great!" Politically, there's no security in any of this. Friends and enemies change all the time, just look at US foreign policy. [Laughter.]

So what we're getting at is how unrealistic these attitudes of attachment and aversion are. What this meditation is directing us towards is a feeling of equanimity towards others. Equanimity doesn't mean indifference. There's a big difference between equanimity and indifference. Indifference is you're disengaged, you're uninvolved, you don't care, you're withdrawn. That's not what equanimity is. Equanimity is you're open, you're receptive, but equally, to everybody. The mind's free of partiality and prejudice. The equanimous mind is a mind that is involved with others in a very open-hearted way. And that's what we're aiming at by freeing ourselves from the clinging attachment, the aversion and the apathy. That would be a nice state of mind to have, wouldn't it? Where everybody you saw, you can have some kind of equal-hearted openness towards them instead of feeling fear or suspicion or need or something else.

This meditation is actually quite powerful, something we can do again and again and again. And each time you do it, you use different examples. You

will really begin to see how the mind works.

*[Audience:] Our mind may be equal and impartial towards everybody, but externally, we may still behave differently with different people, isn't it?*

Yes. What we're aiming at is a mind that's equal and impartial towards others. That doesn't necessarily mean we act the same way towards everybody. Because obviously you have to treat a child differently than you treat an adult. So having an equal internal attitude doesn't mean that externally our behavior is the same with everybody. Because we have to treat people according to social convention, according to what's appropriate. You speak one way to a child, another way to an adult, another way to an older person. We treat people in different ways. You might speak one way to a boss and another way to a colleague, but inside in your mind, you have equal feeling towards all of them, a heart of equal openness towards all of them, even though externally our behavior might be somewhat different.

In the same way, if there's a dog who's wagging its tail and there's a dog who is growling, you treat them differently but that doesn't mean in your heart that you have to be attached to one and hate the other. We can still have an equal feeling towards all of them, recognizing that both the dogs are living beings that want happiness and share common qualities. We can recognize that on an internal level, and yet externally deal with the dogs as appropriate.

It's the same with human beings. We're working at an internal change in our perception here. So you can

still have friends. We're not saying, "Get rid of friends, get rid of relatives, move out, go home tonight, pack up, say 'Look, I'm supposed to be equal, so this is it.' [Laughter.] We're not saying that. You still have people that maybe you're in closer contact with, that you have more common interests with. There's no problem with that. It's the attachment that makes the problem. That's what we're trying to work with.

Let's sit quietly for a few minutes to absorb this.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Seven Points of Cause and Effect**

We're on the section on developing bodhicitta. For this, your outline is important. The outline was made for a purpose, so that you'd have all the main points listed. We'd know what they are and be able to meditate on them. The outline will help you follow the teachings, and it'll also help you to remember the order in which to do the meditation when you're at home. All these things that we're talking about in class are for the purpose of meditation. It's not just information gathering, and it's not just knowledge. But they are things that we really have to think about repeatedly, over and over and over again so that it seeps into our mind at some level or another. Whatever you hear in class, try and think about it when you go home, really apply it to your life, and get some taste from it.

We're at "The Actual Stages of How to Cultivate the Altruistic Intention". If you can remember the different steps of the bodhicitta meditation, go over them. Cause and effect works, and if you go over these again and again, you will develop bodhicitta. If you create the cause, you get the result.

It's important also to think of the advantages of bodhicitta, not just the ones listed here in the outline, but also the additional ones I went over about how bodhicitta is our best friend, and how it's a good anti-depressant. It's good for loneliness, and these things. To really think about that in order to get an

understanding of how it works in your life. The more we can see the benefit of something, then the more keen we are to practice it.

## **Review of equanimity meditation**

Last time, we went over the equanimity meditation. That's where we imagine the friend and the enemy, or the friend and the person you don't get along with. Whenever it says "enemy" in the teachings, it doesn't mean arch enemy, it just means whoever it is who bugs you at any particular moment. For that moment, they are a person you don't get along with. A friend, a person you don't get along with, and a stranger—visualize these three, asking ourselves why we're attached to one, have aversion to the other, and apathy towards the third. Recognize that these feelings come from a very self-centered viewpoint. We create our own friends, people we don't get along with, and strangers. We create them in our mind and we believe what we create.

Incredible, isn't it? We make so many problems for ourselves. A lot of Dharma is just the process of undoing our hallucinations, stopping making problems for ourselves, allowing ourselves to be a little bit happier. Saying that these are creations of our mind is one way to meditate on it. Also, see that these relationships are not fixed. They continually change. The person who is kind to us today isn't kind to us the next day. The person who is mean to us today is kind to us the next day. And so because everybody has harmed us at some point, and everybody has helped us at some point, then there's no reason to cherish

some beings over others, or hate some beings over others. Everybody has done everything to us before. It is very helpful to think like this.

### **Freeing ourselves of the tendency to help our friends and harm our enemies**

If we're able to free ourselves from this attachment, aversion and apathy, then we automatically avoid something that most worldly people consume a whole lot of time in, which is helping their friends and harming their enemies. When you look back at your life, how much time did you spend helping your friends out of attachment, not out of genuine sincere love, but out of attachment to get something back? How much time did we spend harming the people we don't like? We futilely spend so much time doing this! At a certain point we look at that and say, "This is stupid! This is what politicians do. I don't need to do it. [Laughter.]"

This is also what animals do. Look at the animals. This is what they do—help their friends, harm the ones they don't like. There's nothing particularly gracious or noble about being like that. I love teaching this at Tushita. Those of you who were at Tushita—remember the little dogs and then the monkeys coming? The monkeys would sit up high and the dogs would be underneath barking, "This is our property. You can't come here!" They're exactly like people, except maybe people take out their shotgun, or they scream in a different language. Very similar! When it's lunch time, the dogs would come and sit on your lap. They're nice and friendly. You feed them and they



love you. That's the same way people are.

This whole thing of helping friends and harming the ones we don't like, even animals do this. This whole mind of attachment and aversion just makes us waste our life that way. It's good to look back at your past and see how much time has been spent like that, and really make a determination to try and develop this equal feeling towards everybody so that we don't have to waste time in that way. Remember that this equal feeling is an equal openness. It's an equal concern. It's not a withdrawal or detachment from sentient beings.

### **Equanimity does not mean withdrawal from sentient beings**

And this is something, I think, that we Westerners often go to the extreme of, when we get into Dharma. It's that we become so aware of our attachments and all the problems that come with our attachments, that we then go to the extreme of, "Well, I'm just going to withdraw from everybody, because all the contact I have is out of attachment." We eliminate any kind of positive feelings for others, confusing positive feelings with attachment.

It is true. Sometimes, especially when our mind isn't real astute, it's very hard to discriminate between these things. As soon as we have positive feelings, we very easily generate attachment. But the way to combat that isn't to withdraw from society. It's to become aware of how the attachment works, and the futility and the un-reality of the attachment, and then to let that go. But to remember that care and concern

for other people is very much a part of Buddhist practice.

Especially at the beginning, a lot of our relationships might be really mixed with both love and attachment. Some might be definitely more towards the attachment side, and some mixed with love and attachment. What we need to do is work at freeing ourselves from the attachment, and developing the love. Remember that that love can be not just for that one person, but for everybody, so that when you walk into a room, you can feel that same affection you feel for one person that's really close to you, for everybody in the room. That would be really nice, wouldn't it? Wouldn't it be nice to walk into work and just feel the same love for everybody there that you felt for the person you were in love with, except without all the clinging? It would be very nice, wouldn't it? Work would be great! This is what we're aiming for. One technique to develop this is the seven points of cause and effect, which helps us to develop not just love and compassion, but also the altruistic intention to become a Buddha for the benefit of others. Another technique is through equalizing and exchanging self and others.

### **Seven points of cause and effect**

Tonight we'll start the technique of the seven points of cause and effect. Out of these seven points, the first six are the cause:

1. Recognizing that each sentient being has been one's mother

2. Remembering their kindness to you as your mother
3. Wishing to reciprocate that kindness
4. Heart-warming love—seeing others as lovable
5. Great compassion
6. Great determination

With these six as the cause, then the result is

7. The altruistic intention, bodhicitta

## **1. Recognizing That Each Sentient Being Has Been One's Mother**

### **Developing a feeling for rebirth and multiple lives**

The first of the seven points is recognizing that everybody has been our mother. This is a very difficult point, because understanding this point means having some feeling for rebirth and for multiple lives. We come right back to the issue that we talked about at the beginning—this whole idea of rebirth and the fact that we aren't just who we are in this life. We aren't just this body. We try to get a feeling for this, that our body and mind are two separate things.

The body has its causes. Our consciousness has its causes. The causes for the body, we trace back to the sperm and egg of our parents, and then of our grandparents, and great-grandparents.

When we look at the cause for any moment of mind, we can say it's the previous moment, and we trace back that continuum to the time we were an

infant, to the time we were in the womb, to the time of conception. Where does the mindstream at the time of conception come from? Nothing starts without causes, it had to have a previous cause. So we say the cause of the mind at the time of conception is the previous life, the mindstream in the previous life. We get a feeling for that, that who we are isn't just this body.

I think one of our biggest difficulties in understanding this is the grasping at an identity of who we think we are, and identifying especially with our adult body. To start to loosen that, it's very helpful to try and imagine what you felt like when you were a kid. What it felt like to be four years old. What it must have felt like to be a month old. Try to remember that this *was* our past, it is part of our history, even though we can't remember it. Sometimes even in the process of remembering some of these things, we recognize that there was a sense of "I" then, but who we felt we were isn't exactly the same person we are now. We're different people then and now. We've changed, and our body certainly has changed. Remember that this change is happening all the time: we aren't just this person with our present personality in this body. We were once a child with a different personality in a different body. We can be somebody in another life with a different personality in a different body. And it's all on the same continuum.

When we get some kind of feeling about that, or some kind of space in the mind about that, then who we are takes on a whole different feeling. When we say "I", we don't just think of *me* this very moment, but to remember that I have a history, and that I have

a future. It's not going to end with death.

Even though we may not have a direct perception of our past and future lives, and even though this whole issue might be a little foggy for us, if we can allow just some space to say, "Well, let's try this on and see how it feels, see what it can explain," then there might come some understanding at some point.

I personally find this idea of a number line very, very useful. Just think about the number line. Here I am today, and each way I look at the number line, there is another number, as if each number were like a cause or something. Remember that there is no end to the number line either way. It can't have any number on the number line without having the other ones that are on either side of it. Similarly, we can't be here today unless there was a cause for us, which is something that you trace infinitely back in the past, and also unless there's going to be a future of our mindstream. Hopefully, it will not remain a samsaric mindstream, but will eventually become an Enlightened mindstream.

If your mind says, "But there has to be a beginning!", remember you are not a four-year-old in Sunday school. Look at that mind that says there has to be a beginning. Who says there has to be a beginning? Why is it that there has to be a beginning? Why? When you look at any particular object, e.g. a glass, we could say in one way there is a beginning to the glass, in the sense that at one point, this glass didn't exist. But if we look at all the parts of the glass, and the atoms and molecules that make up this glass, can we ever find any beginning to them? I mean you start tracing atoms and molecules back and back and

back and you just have this perpetual, continuous transformation of energy. How are you ever going to have a beginning?

If our mind still insists, “But there *has* to be a beginning!”, then put yourself at that beginning point. Let’s say there’s a beginning. Now, how did the beginning start? If there’s a beginning, it had to start. If the beginning started, that means something caused it. This means the beginning wasn’t the beginning, because something else was around before it. If the beginning didn’t start, or if it’s started without a cause, how can anything exist in this universe without a cause? What exists without a cause? Nothing can exist without a cause. There has to be something that caused it. If we get really stuck in: “There has to be a beginning,” then try and prove to ourselves how there can be a beginning. Soon you get really confused and then you decide, “Well, maybe there doesn’t have to be a beginning after all.”

Having this feeling of beginninglessness can be disorientating at first. We like to think of “1993” as if it’s solid. But 1993 is just a conceptual construction. It’s just some number we decided to assign. There is nothing solid about this. If we start looking back and we think, “OK, before this life, I had another life.

And I had another life before that, and another one before that, and another one before that ... ad infinitum. I’ve been born everywhere in this entire universe, and even before this universe began. And I’ve been born everywhere in all different sorts of universes. I’ve done every possible thing there is to do in samsara.” All your wildest dreams, everything that you’ve always wanted to do in samsara, you’ve done

it millions of times. We've done it all! We've done everything except practice the Dharma. In samsara, we've done everything else. We've had millions of dollars. We've had ten million boyfriends and girlfriends. We've done it all.

**Realizing that our bodies and relationships change constantly; and the possibility that every being has been our mother**

If there's just this unending regression of previous lives, then we have to think, "Well, in a lot of those previous lives, I had mothers. At least when I was born as an animal, when I was born as a hungry ghost, when I was born as a human being, I had a mother. My present-life mother hasn't always been my mother. In previous lives, in these different rebirths, other beings have been my mother. When you think of infinite lifetimes, then there's plenty of time for all the countless number of sentient beings to have been our parents. Once, twice, ten times, a million times, infinite times. It's like you can't count the number of times we've been related to other sentient beings in terms of their being our parents.

Here, the image of mother is chosen because in most cultures, the mother is the one that people feel closest to. That isn't necessarily true in our culture. But I still think it is useful to think of other beings as having been our mother (we'll get into this in a minute), to use the mother as an illustration of that close connection that we've had with others. If you don't feel comfortable saying all beings have been my mother, you can say father or caregiver, or whoever

you want, but somebody who has been close to us, who has helped us, who has taken care of us. To see that everybody has been close to us in that way, having cared for us when we were helpless, having taken care of us when we couldn't do things for ourselves. Allow this to seep into the mind.

One difficulty we have in allowing this to seep into our mind, is again that it is hard for us to imagine other beings as having been in different relationships to us than what they are now. Every time we look at somebody, we think that all they ever are, all they ever have been and will be, is who they are now.

Can you look around the room and try and imagine what everybody here looked like when they were a baby? It's hard to imagine, isn't it? Try and think of everybody here, what we all look like a few decades ago. It's hard, because everybody seems so real and so solid that to think of them not being who they are now and being an infant is hard. And yet, we know it's true.

In the same way, it's hard for us to believe that other beings may have been our parents. We'll stick with the image of the mother here. Remember, though, it could mean anybody who has been a caregiver to you. Everybody has been our parent. Everybody has had different bodies. They haven't always been who they are now. They haven't always looked like what they look like now. They had different bodies. We had been related in different ways. They have all been our parents in that way. Not just once, but an incredible number of times.

It's interesting to train your mind in this. When you're driving on the freeway, when you're sitting in



the bus, when you're walking down the street, to look at all the different people and animals, and think, "That person or that being hasn't always been who they appear to be right now. One time they've been my parent." It's an interesting thing to play with, even though you may not believe it immediately. Play with that idea in your mind. It's a very interesting one. It really makes you look at people differently and say, "Well, why not? Why couldn't they have been my mother before?"

I may have told you the story before, but it's a good story. One of my friends, Alex Berzin, told me this story. For those of you who know him, he is an old Buddhist practitioner. He had this uncle whom he was very, very close to. There's a lot of affection between him and this uncle. His uncle died and he was grieving about that, quite upset, missing his uncle. After the funeral, he went back to Dharamsala, India because he was living in India at that time. And in Dharamsala during the monsoons, we get these really big spiders. Really nice, big ones. Alex didn't like spiders. Sometimes in your room, you get nice, big spiders, more of them in the room than you.

There was one spider on the wall one time, and his instant feeling was disgust, "Get this thing out of here!" It's like, "I want to kill it but I can't because I've taken the first precept." [Laughter.] And then all of a sudden, he thought, "Wow, that could be my uncle!" And it's like why not, it could be. We don't know. [Laughter.] It sounds strange to think of Uncle Joe being born like that, but it is a possibility. It's definitely a possibility. And he said after he thought of that, he didn't want to kill this spider anymore. His

whole relationship with spiders changed. He began to see that this being who is living inside this body hasn't always been living inside that body.

It's really interesting too when you see people and when you see animals, to think, "This is a mindstream living in a body." That's all. It's a mindstream in a body, and that mindstream has lived in other bodies before. Not always in this one. And so, if that mindstream has lived in other bodies, and we've lived in other bodies, and we've all had infinite previous lives, then there's plenty of time when all those other beings have been our mother. Again, we loosen the mind and play around with this. It's very interesting.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

You ask if animals can accumulate good karma by themselves. I think it's quite difficult for them to have deliberately positive thoughts. Achala [the cat] might come to teachings, but I don't think he gets more than a warm lap out of it. The way for an animal to accumulate good karma would be basically through hearing prayers and mantras, and having contact with holy objects, and by the power of the holy objects, by the power of the mantras, then there're good seeds planted in his mind. But it's difficult to accumulate good karma as an animal. That's one reason why they say a human life is very precious.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Exactly. And that's why when we meditate on precious human life, we think, "I could have been

born as a cat. In fact, I have been a cat in previous lives. And now I don't have that obstruction this lifetime." We realize, "Wow, that's incredible. That's amazing!" We begin to get a feeling of how big that obstruction is. We always complain we don't get to see His Holiness very much. Or we don't get to see Rinpoche very much. You could be born as His Holiness' pet dog and see him a lot, but would you rather be His Holiness' pet dog or a human being? You really see the advantage of a human life. A human life is very, very precious. Particularly our kind of human life where we come into contact with the Dharma—we are very special that way.

OK. The first step is to get this feeling that we haven't always been who we are now. We've been other people and other beings have also been other people, and we've had different relationships with them. They've all at some time or another, been our principal care-giver and life-giver, somebody like our mother. When you start looking at others in this way: "Well, it could be," then your vision of others changes. They stop seeming distant, cut-off and unrelated. Remember that, "The mindstream that's in that body, I was very close with that person before in a different life, in a very loving relationship. They've changed bodies. I've changed bodies. The relationship is changed, but there is still that remnant of affection or understanding." Automatically, just by this first step, how we look at other people changes a little bit. We start feeling closer to them, not so cut off.

## **2. Remembering Their Kindness to You as Your**

## **Mother**

The second step in this meditation is remembering the kindness that others show to us when they were our mother.

Again, the mother is used as an example because in most cultures, the mother is the one that people feel closest to. But it could be anybody. It could be your father, or babysitter. You choose whoever it was who was kindest to you as a child. By using the example of how that person was kind to us, remember that they were kind to us like that in previous lives, and not only were they kind to us in that way, but all these other beings who at one time or another have been in that same role with us, have been kind to us in that exact same way. You might do this meditation using a care-giver, whoever was kindest to you when you were a child.

## **Meditating specifically in terms of our parents of this life**

But I still think, and this is my personal opinion, that at some stage it is very helpful to do this meditation specifically with reference to our parents of this life. Initially, we might do it in terms of a care-giver, or somebody else because it's easier when we remember somebody who is really kind to us and then think others have been kind to us in that way, to get the feeling of this meditation. But my personal experience is, it's still very useful to later return to this meditation and look at the kindness of our parents in this life, precisely because we often have so many problems in

our relationships with them. A lot of the problems in our relationships with our parents is because any relationship has some help and it has some harm. We focus on the harm, we develop unfailing memory and single-pointed concentration on the harm, [laughter] and we forget some of the other things that they have done for us.

Now, go back and do this meditation specifically in terms of the parents of this life. Personally, I found it very healing though incredibly difficult. I haven't had an easy relationship with my parents. I won't tell you my whole story now. [Laughter.] But I haven't had an easy time with them, and they haven't had a particularly easy time with me either! We got along great until I turned about seventeen. Actually, we didn't always get along great before that, but it got worse at seventeen. [Laughter.] I found it very helpful personally, to go back and think through many of those things in childhood, to recognize the positive things that my parents *did* do for me. In our culture we are brought up to remember what our parents didn't do.

When you were a kid, when you were a teenager, what do you do? You complain about your parents. That's what everybody does. If you don't complain about your parents to your friends, your friends will think you're weird, that you're too dependent or something. You have to complain about your parents. We've gotten into that habit, and it has left a lot of scars inside of us.

When I'm talking here about the benefit we've received from our parents, and their kindness, I'm not trying to whitewash any kind of abuse. There are

abuses in childhood situations, and we're not pretending that those don't exist. They do exist. But we're also trying to have a more complete picture of all of those things. Instead of just taking the abuse and putting the abuse under the magnifying glass, and putting the benefit under a stack of books so we don't see it, we're going to try and look at both the abuse and the benefit with a more realistic attitude.

Try taking some of the drama out of the abuse, and opening ourselves up to see the benefit that we have received in our life. It can take some time. One meditation on this isn't going to do it. In fact, one meditation initially might make you more confused. That's OK. There's nothing wrong with getting confused. I know we don't like being confused. But sometimes confusion is the step to understanding. Especially when we meditate, all these other questions come up, and things you haven't looked at come up, and doubts come up. Don't be afraid of them. Just write them down. We can talk about them. When confusion comes, it's also indicating that you're ready for a deeper understanding than you were before. I don't think we need to be afraid of our confusion.

### **The kindness of our mothers**

Talking about the kindness, and I'll say 'of the mother' here. But again, you can adapt it for your situation and you can come back and look at it in terms of your mother.

### ***Giving birth, and welcoming us into their lives***

First of all, our mothers gave birth to us. I think it'll be nice to have some of the mothers in the room talk about what it's like to give birth. From the very time before we were born, somebody was aware of our presence, and changed their whole life because we were entering it. Before you have a baby, you can do a whole lot of things, and once you have a baby, your lifestyle changes. Our parents were very, very happy to change their lifestyles to accommodate us.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

You may not have wanted to change your lifestyle. But you did it and why did you do it? There's some underlying care and affection for that being. Somehow that underlying care and affection overrode your own personal preferences, whatever you wanted to do at that moment. If there were no underlying care and affection, you wouldn't have changed your lifestyle at all. There was something there.

They always say, how would we react if somebody showed up at our door and tapped on the door to say, "Hey, can I move in with you for the rest of my life?" [Laughter.] We wouldn't welcome a total stranger into our life who's going to move in with us for the next twenty years. But when a woman gets pregnant, she and her partner welcome a total stranger into their life for the next however many years. The baby is a total stranger: you don't know who they were in their previous life. But somehow, in spite of being a total stranger, the baby is completely welcomed. Our parents welcomed us. They did. We were born. We are here.

They adjusted their lifestyle because of some underlying care for us. Just the whole process of carrying the child, and I think here, you guys know more than me [laughter], but I can imagine at some point it must be quite uncomfortable, I don't know—the morning sickness at the beginning, having the belly out to here at the end, or the birth process. But again, our parents, specifically our mother, went through all these different changes within her body, the discomfort in her body, the birth process, the whole thing. They went through it for our benefit, so that we could be born. They went through a lot, but it's done with a feeling of love for the child. Even though you don't know who this child is, even though it might be inconvenient, or whatever, there is that basic kind of love.

### *Taking care of us when we were infants*

It's important for us to remember that, and to remember that we came into this world with that basic kind of love and support system. We do tend to forget. For example, the whole time when we were infants, we couldn't take care of ourselves at all. We were totally helpless. We couldn't feed ourselves. We couldn't clothe ourselves. We couldn't keep ourselves warm, or keep ourselves cool. We couldn't tell others what we wanted. And now we're so proud of ourselves because we're so independent, self-sufficient! If it hadn't been for the kindness of the people who took care of us when we were infants, we couldn't have stayed alive. We didn't have the ability to keep ourselves alive. It's that simple: that our



whole life is due to the kindness of other people. If other people hadn't taken care of us when we were little, we would have died. Very easily.

For all that time when we were little, they fed us, even in the middle of the night. We cried, and we howled and we carried on. Our mother was exhausted and hadn't slept, but she fed us and she took care of us. This wasn't just one night. It was many nights. It was year after year, feeding us and taking care of us. Putting clothes on us and changing our diapers. Have all of you changed diapers before? Changing our diapers with so much love. Taking care of us. Putting us to bed. Waking us up. Taking us to the doctor. Giving us polio vaccines.

And then all the times when we were young when we could have so easily killed ourselves. We were always getting into all sorts of mischief: going towards the edge of the bed, putting things into our mouths. When we were little, our mother is always looking after us, because it was easy for us to get hurt. Incredibly easy.

I remember one incident. It was right at the time when they were recognizing Lama Osel. Lama Osel and his mother were at Tushita in India. He was just a toddler at that time, a little over a year. He had something in his mouth and he was choking and beginning to turn blue. Nobody knew what to do. His mother ran up and swung him up by the feet, upside down, and whacked him until it came out. She knew exactly what to do! If it hadn't been for her, he would have gotten just bluer and bluer and bluer!

How many times when we were children did we put things in our mouth and start to choke, or get

dangerously near a step, or the edge of the bed, or slip in the bathtub? We probably all have lots of stories that our parents have told us or that we remembered of how we were hurt when we were young? People always took care of us when we got hurt. Also, all the times when we didn't get hurt because they were able to catch us before we did, because we didn't know any better. How many times did they intervene so that we didn't accidentally harm ourselves?

### *Educating us*

Once we got older, they had to educate us. Our whole education came from the kindness of our parents. Here particularly think of the mother in the sense that she spends more time with the child, talking to the child, etc. I don't want to diminish fatherhood, don't get me wrong. But usually it's the mother who spends a lot of time talking to the child, even though the child doesn't understand anything. That's how we learn language. Our whole ability to be able to speak, to communicate, to verbalize and conceptualize, to use language, came from our parents who taught us how to speak.

Then the whole time in school, the kindness from our teachers, but also the kindness of our parents, making sure we went to school. How many times did you try and get out of going to school? Our parents made sure we went to school, even if we didn't want to. They made sure we did our homework, even if we didn't want to. We might remember being a kid and having all sorts of conflict with our parents over homework, or going to school, doing all these things,

and yet at the end, as an adult, we say, “I’m really glad that my parents made me go to school and made me do my homework, because if they hadn’t done that, I wouldn’t have had the education that I have. I wouldn’t have the skills that I have now. I wouldn’t be able to function in the world. Even though they had to sometimes do things that we didn’t like at that time, they did it basically for our own good.”

That is why I say it’s really good to look at the example of our parents in this life. For me, when I started to do this, I began to see that a lot of the things that I didn’t like about my parents, were things that from their perspective, they were doing for my own good. From my perspective, I didn’t see it at that time.

I remember very often, there would be different activities or something and I wouldn’t want to go, and my parents would really push me and say, “Just go and try it. Go one time. We know you don’t know anybody there. We know you’re afraid. But just go and try it.” They pushed me and I hated it. Now, I’m so glad they did it. I’m so glad, because actually I learned many things that I wouldn’t have learned if I hadn’t done those things, if they hadn’t pushed me. Also, it gave me some ability to try new things even when I was feeling a little bit shaky about it. This was a habit I had from childhood.

Looking back also, many of the things that I got disciplined for as a child, I thought were tremendously unfair. In high school, I always had the earliest curfew of anybody. It was a drag. It was horrible when you’re the one with the earliest curfew. But I realized now why my parents did it. I see that there was some reason for it, even though I didn’t particularly like it

at that time. There were many things like that. Many of the things that I got disciplined about as a child, I hated it then, and I thought my parents were wrong. Maybe some things they disciplined me about, they were wrong. They didn't understand the situation. I remember those quite well too. [Laughter.] Looking back at many of them when they did discipline me, I didn't like it, but actually, I'm very glad they did it because they taught me some basic manners. If they hadn't disciplined me, I would have been worse. [Laughter.]

### *Providing us with food and material comforts*

They had to put up with a lot, to do that kind of disciplining with somebody who is very independent and strong-willed. When we go back and look at all these things, what our parents did to make us into a reasonable human being, I think about my dad who went to work, year after year after year. He was a dentist. He spent his whole life looking in other people's mouths, so that I could eat. If you think about it, year after year of filling teeth and making dentures and bridges, and things like that, and I didn't appreciate it as a kid. I wanted this toy and that toy and the other thing. I didn't ever think about how hard my folks worked to get the money. As adults, when we look back and really think what our parents went through to get the money to support us, it's quite amazing. They did a lot of work. All the worry about not having enough money, wishing that they had more money to buy us more things. We were hardly ever in tune to what their situation was, and the worry they

had about being good parents or being able to provide for us.

Think about all the time your mother spent cooking dinner for you. Who cooked dinner for you when you were little? How many dinners did they cook for you? How many times did they go to the supermarket to shop for you? Year after year of doing these things. I don't know about you, but I don't particularly enjoy cooking. That's why I don't invite anybody over to lunch. I don't subject them to it. [Laughter.] When you eat with me, everything is in one pot.

You think about the person who cooked for you all those times when you were little, or whoever it was who bought you TV dinners, when you ate TV dinners. Or whoever it was who gave you the money to buy your own TV dinners. The dependence we had on the people who took care of us. Without that, where would we be?

And then all the different things that our parents encouraged us to do. Either to play some kind of sports, some kind of musical instrument or who knows what. All the many activities they pushed us to do. They tried to help us broaden what we know.

And then also many times, our parents couldn't spend as much time with us as they wanted to. Maybe they had their own problems. Health problems of some sort. Or they had some financial problems. Or they had who-knows-what, and they wanted to spend more time with us, but they couldn't. That's also a possibility.

Just to look at all these different things, how we benefited from our parents over the years. Even with the difficulties that we've had with our parents—very

often we can look back and see that we've grown a lot through these difficulties. Having the problems as a youngster, for example, gave us some kind of compassion for other people who had similar problems.

It's important to think about these things, and to let ourselves feel loved. Because I think often, we don't let ourselves feel loved. We don't let ourselves feel supported. We feel quite lonely, quite cut off. It's quite interesting. I was just doing this yesterday, looking back. I was looking back at some difficult situations in the past. In those difficult situations, at that time, I felt like I had no support, but looking back upon it then, I had tons of support. I couldn't see it. I couldn't appreciate it. So to look not only at our adult life, but in our childhood life, too. Of course some things were missing. Our parents weren't perfect. But to recognize the support and the care that we *were* the recipients of.

### **Seeing our parents' harmful actions as stemming from their confusion**

When we do notice the harmful things that happened in our childhood, understand that it wasn't that our parents deliberately inflicted harm upon us. It wasn't that they thought, "I can't stand this child. I'm going to beat him up." If our parents were angry, or even if they did hit us, it was because of their own confusion, because of their own emotional turbulence and their own distress at that time. It wasn't that they really wished to harm us. Their minds were out of control. We know how that is, because we know how our

mind can get out of control. We all have the capacity to hurt the people we love very much when anger overtakes us, when confusion overtakes us. We can look at whatever happened in our childhood that was harmful and say that's because of other people's confusion.

Within the scope of what our parents were capable of doing, they did the best they could. Of course they weren't perfect. Neither are we. But within the scope of what they were capable of, given their own upbringing, their own psychology, sociology and economic circumstances, they did what they were capable of at that particular time.

One person just told me recently he had quite a difficult childhood. One thing that helped him was to hear his father's story. He had always seen his father as harmful and bad. He said one time he went out with his father and just started asking him questions. Over the weekend, his father started telling him his story, how the situation appeared from his father's eyes. He said all of a sudden, he was able to see his father as a human being who suffered and was confused. By understanding the past, a lot of the hatred or the grudges just naturally faded away, because compassion was there for somebody who was confused.

It's very helpful to try to understand others; to recognize that our parents weren't perfect. One of the things in this whole wounded, inner-child syndrome that's very popular nowadays, which I have some questions about, is going back and saying, "Oh, I didn't get that one when I was a baby. I didn't get that and my parents weren't there for me then ..." We are

trying to find fault in our parents, as if they should have been perfect. As if our parents should have clairvoyant and omnipotent powers, who should have been able to fulfill our every wish. It's very helpful for us to realize that we are in samsara. The very nature of cyclic existence is dissatisfaction. Not all our wishes can get fulfilled. The fact that our every little wish doesn't get fulfilled isn't the fault of our parents.

How did we get born here? It was our own ignorance. We're the responsible ones for being born here in the first place. If we hadn't spent so much time playing volleyball on the beach in our previous lives and had done some Dharma practice, we may not be here. We might have had some realizations by now. To expect our parents to be perfect, to expect a perfect childhood, what's that about? Why do we expect that? That's not realistic. We can expect it if we want to, but we're setting ourselves up for a lot of disappointment. If we can let go of some of those expectations, or that feeling that things shouldn't have been the way they were, as if the universe owes us something—"It should have been different!"—then it's very helpful. Accept life the way it is. We learn from life.

### **Dealing with painful experiences in childhood**

There're many ways of looking at our childhood. As I said, we're not trying to ignore the pain that's there. By acknowledging the pain, if we can deal with it, the suffering can be a strong impetus for us not to play so much bingo in this lifetime and actually get some realizations instead. We can see that pain is the nature



of samsara, being caused by afflictions and karma.

***Acknowledge negative experiences as the results of past karma; this allows us to act to create a better future***

One way is to say, “This happened to me because of my own karma. That doesn’t mean I’m guilty. It doesn’t mean I’m bad. It doesn’t mean I’m evil. It just means that in previous lives, I made some mistakes.”

Everybody makes mistakes. We’ve made mistakes this lifetime, too. When we can see, “I must have harmed somebody else in my previous life. Do I want to continue to do that this lifetime? If in a present harmful situation, I again generate anger and want to retaliate, I’m again creating more negative karma to find myself again in this same unpleasant situation. I’m perpetuating this cycle.” You can see it working in families in this very lifetime. If you’ve been abused as a child, if you don’t get your act together, chances are you’re going to abuse your own children. At some point we have to say, “This is going to stop with me!”

I know for myself personally, when I have problems, if I can actually say to myself, “This is the result of my own negative actions,” then that gives me some feeling that I can do something about the situation, that I don’t have to be a victim to the situation anymore. It’s not saying I deserve the harm. It’s not saying I brought it on myself. It’s saying if this is a result of my own negative actions, then I want to clean things up because I want to do something better for the future. I have the ability and the power to be able to do something. I don’t have to be victimized by

the situation.

If I bear a grudge and I'm resentful, and I blame other people, I become a victim of that situation. My own way of thinking won't let me be happy. But if I can change my way of thinking, then there's a possibility to be happy. If you look at it, in an abusive situation, there was the unpleasant feeling that we experienced in that very moment, and then there's all the conceptual thoughts that we have about it afterwards. The situation happened when it happened. It is no longer happening at this moment. Whatever horrendous thing happened in your childhood, it is not happening at this very moment. But if we sit there, not allowing ourselves to grow up, and we keep saying, "That happened to me. That person did that to me ... " We make it so solid that we relive the situation every day in our own minds. We torment ourselves more than that other person who originally tormented us. That's a function of an affliction. That's how afflictions work. They disturb our peace of mind. They won't let us be happy.

When we encounter a painful situation, we must be careful not to say, "It was my fault." We can say "I created the cause for this to happen to me." But the word "fault," to blame ourselves, is unnecessary. When we say, "It's my fault," what are we getting into? "I'm going to hate myself. I'm going to beat myself." That isn't what karma is talking about. We don't have to blame anybody for a bad situation. We don't have to blame ourselves because we created the mistake in a previous life that got us to where we are. We don't have to blame the people who harmed us, because they're under the influence of afflictions.

But rather, we can have compassion for the people who harmed us. They are under the influence of their afflictions. We can have compassion for ourselves, because under the influence of our afflictions, we did something negative in previous lives. Maybe we don't know specifically what negative thing we did. When things happen to me that cause me a lot of pain, I usually try and think of the opposite thing. For example, if it is a situation where I feel really hurt by somebody else, then I just think, "I've hurt other people in the past. Forget about previous lives, this life, if I think of how I've behaved with other people, I've hurt a lot of people this lifetime. I've done it in this lifetime, who knows what I did in previous lives?"

The point is, whatever mistake I made, what I'm experiencing right now is the fruition of my mistaken actions. Now that karma is done. By that karma ripening, now it's done. It's brought its fruit. The point is, what do I want to do in the future? Do I want to continue to create this kind of karma, or do I want to get my act together? And that's the question. The past is over. It's like whatever I did in the past that was harmful, who knows whatever it was, I know that I now need to purify all my negative actions, especially the ones in this lifetime that I can remember. I need to put some energy into not repeating that behavior, and instead put some energy into creating some good karma. Clinging to memories all the time is the wrong kind of visualization.

To accept the reasoning that I have just described, you have to have some space in the mind for the idea of karma and rebirth and purification and Buddhahood. The fact that there is an end to all these.

If you don't have this world view, then this kind of approach isn't going to work for you.

### ***Acknowledge the pain***

For somebody who doesn't have this world view, what I would try and get them to do is first acknowledge the pain. At the beginning, our pain needs to be acknowledged. Before the pain is acknowledged, it's very difficult to hear anything. It's a funny thing the way we are. It's like we have to feel hurt and accept that "OK, I'm in the middle of the pits, but if somebody can hear and accept me, then maybe I can get myself out of it." The last thing we want to hear is, "You shouldn't feel that way." You have to start out with acknowledging your own pain. But we have to grow out of that, too.

### ***Recognize the confusion of the people who inflicted harm; and develop compassion for them***

Think about what the mind of the person who perpetuated the pain was like. What their life was like. What that person's life story is. What was going on in their mind? We get in touch with that confusion that must have existed in their mind for them to inflict the harm.

Sometimes the confusion is immense. For example, I was reading in the newspaper about the Holocaust museum. They just opened it in Washington D.C. As a kid, I used to read a lot about the holocaust. I used to read this and say, "How can this happen? How can human beings do this?" You can look at Bosnia right

now and say, “How can this happen? How can people actually do this?” What is going on in somebody’s mind that they can go into a village in Bosnia and murder people?

When you look at it, you can see that they have incredible confusion, pain and affliction. It’s almost as if people are crazy. It is. When we’re under the influence of our afflictions, we are, in fact, mad. We know that this has happened to us too. We can all look at our lives during the times we’ve been under the influence of our own afflictions. We’ve gone berserk. Thank goodness we haven’t harmed anybody that much. But you can see other people, with that same situation accentuated, the stress, the pressure in their own mind, and the force of the society telling them to act in a certain way, they do unbelievable things. When you try and think of that kind of person, what their mind must have been like, I find it hard to hate somebody like that.

When I went to Tibet, I saw these monasteries, totally, unbelievably destroyed. Ganden monastery is up on top of a hill. To get up there, we took a bus. It was difficult for the bus to get up. During the Cultural Revolution, they didn’t have buses. They walked up there. This is like 14,000 feet. You’re panting. The effort they put in to walk to the top of the hill, to smash buildings made out of stone—that takes a lot of energy. The whole monastery (there were like three or four thousand people living there at that time), the whole structure except for one building was totally knocked apart. I was thinking about that when we were going up, “What would it be like to have been either a Chinese soldier or a young Tibetan during the

Cultural Revolution to do that?” I couldn’t hate them. I couldn’t hate them because their minds must have been overwhelmed by afflictions. They went crazy.

When we truly try to relate to others in this way, then there’s a possibility for some compassion to come in. You begin to identify the afflictions as the enemy. Sentient beings aren’t the enemy. The afflictions are.

OK. Let’s just sit quietly for a few minutes.

## **Review of the first two points**

### **Point 1: Recognizing that each sentient being has been one’s mother**

We’re in the middle of talking about the seven points of cause and effect, a technique to generate the altruistic intention to become a Buddha. On the basis of equanimity—which has an equal openness to everybody and isn’t a biased, prejudiced or partial mind—we start meditating first that all other beings have been our mother. With this one, we talked last time about having the view of rebirth, or perhaps just provisionally accepting it, so that we can get more of a feeling that others have been our mother in all those previous lives when we’ve been born in all those incredible number of different realms doing different things.

### **Think in relation to present life’s parents, friends, strangers, enemies, then all sentient beings**

Here, it’s very helpful to start with your present life’s

mother, and remember that she was your mother also in previous lives. And then move on to your father, and think that your father was your father or mother in your previous lives. And then take a friend or a relative, and think that they were also this caregiver for you in your previous lives, many, many times. And then after you do it with a friend, then do it with a stranger. Think that person has been related to you in this very close relationship of parent and child in previous times. And then move on to somebody you don't get along with very well. And think that person has been your kind parent in previous times. Then watch your mind start to fight. [Laughter.]

But it's interesting. Give your mind that space to play with it instead of seeing people as solid, fixed entities, always with a certain kind of body, in a certain kind of relationship with you. Experiment around. Imagine that this person has not always been who they are. They were once my mother and my father, a very kind person to me. And then from there, think about all the other sentient beings. So you see, it's a very progressive way of thinking. It kind of loosens your mind up. You start with your present life mother and think she has been the mother in the past. Then go to the friends and relatives. Then go to the strangers, the people you don't get along with. And then to all sentient beings.

It's important in all these meditations to think about specific people instead of just, "Oh yeah, all beings have been my mother before. All sentient beings have been my mother." You start taking the people you know and imagining them in different bodies and different relationships to you, then you can

really begin to see how your hard concept of reality has to budge a little bit. It's quite good when that happens. Shake up that concept of reality a bit. Rattle it around.

### **Imagine meeting your long-lost mother/caregiver**

Another thing that you can use in terms of helping to recognize other people as your mother. If you start feeling doubtful: "How can these people be my mother?", then just think of whoever it was who was really kind to you when you were little. And imagine that somehow, when you were very little, you were separated from that person, and you didn't see them for another twenty-five, thirty-five years. And then here you are, walking down the street, and you see a couple of beggars or homeless persons on the street ... and you know how our usual attitude is, just look the other way and pretend I didn't see that, I don't have anything to do with that kind of person. But let's say initially you had that kind of reaction, and then you look back again and you recognize that that is your mother whom you haven't seen in all these years. Then all of a sudden, you have a totally different way of relating to that street person or that junkie. You have a totally different feeling of, "Wow, I have some relationship with this person. There is some connection here. I don't want to just turn and walk the other way."

In that kind of situation, at first when we didn't recognize them, we felt like, "Urgh! I have nothing to do with them." Then when we recognized them, we felt the closeness. In this situation too, when we don't



recognize others as our mother, we tend to tune them out. But when we can have that kind of recall, “This person has been my mother in the past life,” then there’s that feeling of knowing that person. There’s some kind of feeling of closeness and involvement. So it changes the attitude.

I just talked to one person in another city. When she was ten or eleven, her mother just vanished. She didn’t know what happened to her mother. She just vanished. The family didn’t want to talk about it. She said she went through years and years feeling awry and very motherless, and then just recently (she’s probably around fifty years of age now), she found her mother in New York. And she’s leaving tomorrow to go meet her mother, after twenty-five or thirty years! If you can imagine that feeling. At first she might not even recognize her, but when there’s the recognition that this person has been my mother, then even though you may not recognize them (because the body is so different now), the feeling of closeness is there.

So we can try to imagine this situation, not just after twenty-five years in this lifetime, but bridge it from one life to the next. The body would have changed a lot, so we may not initially recognize that person, but when we do, it’s like we’ve found our mother that we haven’t seen in a long time.

We can all make prayers that they have a good reunion tomorrow. I think that must be quite something, huh?

**Point 2: Remembering their kindness to you as your mother**

When we think about the kindness of the mother, or the caregiver—whoever was kind to us when we were little, we use that as an example—we think of all the different ways that we were cared for by that person when we were young, physically and emotionally and mentally, in terms of our education, protection and so many other ways. And then again, take that feeling of fondness and care, when we remember how well we were cared for as a child, and generalize it to the friend and relative who was my mother before in the past lives. And then the stranger who was my mother before in the past lives. And then the person I don't get along with. Then all sentient beings. So you do that same process there. Remembering all these different groups of people as very, very kind.

The thing is that if somebody was very, very kind to us before, we remember it even now. If your life was in danger and somebody came and saved your life, you would remember it very much, even though that incident happened many, many years ago. That kindness, that feeling of gratitude remains very strong in your mind. So in the same way, if we can develop this feeling that all beings have been our parents in the past, and feel all the kindness that they've shown us in the past, then the fact that that was in the past doesn't really matter very much because it still comes very vividly to the mind, in the same way that if somebody saved your life ten years ago, it would still come vividly to your mind.

And in the same way, it wouldn't matter so much that we don't recognize them. We meet people and it seems like, "Oh, I've just met this person. I've never met them before." That's because we're just looking

at them as their present life body. But in this meditation, we really begin to cut through that, so that there is some feeling of connection with all the different beings before. And some feeling of reciprocal kindness to them.

I think my talk in the last session probably pushed a lot of buttons. Talking about the kindness of the parents and having to go back and look at it in our own particular instance, not just at the things we didn't like that happened when we were kids, but also at all the kindness that in so many ways, had gone unnoticed.

It was quite interesting. I feel that in the last session when I talked all about kindness, all the questions afterwards centered around, "But they did this and this and this ..." [Laughter.] I was thinking about it afterwards, that somehow, so easily, we slip back into our old pattern of "but, but, but ... these are all the reasons why I can't accept that somebody else has been kind to me." Like I said, we don't want to whitewash any kind of harmful situations that happened in the past, but what we're trying to do is to open our heart to let ourselves realize that we have been cared for. Our society doesn't teach us very much to open our hearts and let ourselves feel cared for.

## **Learning to open up and let in affection**

It's quite interesting because many people have great difficulty receiving love. Giving love is a problem, but for some people, receiving love is even more of a problem. Sometimes even receiving gifts is a problem

for us. We've had discussions about this at Cloud Mountain (retreat center), how somebody gives you a gift and you feel like ... [laughter] We feel embarrassed. We feel obliged. We feel uncomfortable, or we feel manipulated. We never let ourselves feel loved. I think it's really important that somehow, we open the mind a little bit to let the love and care and affection that others have given us seep in. When we instantly go into the defensive of, "Well, they abused me and they didn't do that, and they hurt me this way and that," then we're putting up all the walls, trying to prove that nobody else has ever loved us.

Maybe a lot of people have loved us but we can't let ourselves see it. And when we can't let ourselves feel that we're good enough to receive other people's love, or that other people have loved us, then it becomes quite difficult to see others as lovable and to love them in return. So we have to somehow give ourselves some credit as being somewhat lovable, and recognize that other people have loved us.

It's interesting. I think this somehow relates to this other thing we've talked a lot about in the West: low self-esteem and self-hatred. Not feeling loved. Not feeling worthy of other people's love, and so going through our whole life feeling, "This person didn't love me. That person didn't love me ...", when maybe a lot of people actually took care of us. I think it's important to let in some of this care and affection, because some of you might notice in your personal relationships—even friendships and intimate relationships—how that feeling of not being lovable comes in and creates difficulties: "How could this person love me? Nobody has ever loved me." Here

we go back on the defensive again. So to somehow give that space to let in other people's affection, but without expecting them to be number one perfect and always be there every single moment that we need them. So something realistic. While we accept that somebody has cared for us, let's not then expect them to be God. To realize that they are human beings.

Also when we're thinking about the kindness of the mother or caregiver when we were little, it's helpful too to think of the kindness animal mothers show for their young, and just how instinctive that affection is. I remember when I first heard this teaching, I was at Kopan. There was one dog there. Her name was Sarsha. I'll never forget Sarsha. I think she's long gone. She was an old white mangy dog whose hind legs were—I don't know what happened, she might have gotten into a fight or something—her hind legs were totally crippled, so she just dragged herself around by her front paws. She dragged herself all over Kopan like that. Sarsha had some puppies. And I was thinking how difficult it must have been for her to be pregnant and to give birth with her hind legs completely deformed, and yet when her puppies came out, she just loved them to bits. She took such good care of them. And all the discomfort completely gone from her mind. She just loved her puppies.

Everywhere you look in the animal world—the cat mothers, the dolphin mothers, the elephant mothers—there's all this kindness going from the parents to the young ones. To remember to see that kind of kindness, and to remember also that in our previous lives when those beings have been our mothers, they have been that kind to us. When we've been born as animals in

previous lives, whoever was our mother was that kind to us. Really letting ourselves feel the universe as a kind place, because there is a lot of kindness in it, if we let ourselves see it.

### **3. Wishing to Reciprocate That Kindness**

And then the third step, after we've seen others as our mother and remember their kindness, is to have a wish to repay their kindness. Why do we wish to repay their kindness? Not because we feel obliged, not because, "Oh this person was so kind to me, so therefore I owe them something," but rather, by recognizing that all of our happiness comes from all these beings who have been kind to us at one time or another in our infinite lives, then automatically a wish comes to give something to them in return.

#### **Spontaneous wish to return kindness, not out of obligation**

This involves a slight shift from how we often think in the West. Because often in return for kindness, when people have been kind, we feel obligation. This is why I think, so often we have a hard time accepting things. Because instantaneously, our mind puts on ourselves—it's not coming from others—"Oh, they gave me something, therefore I owe them something back." And then as soon as we *have* to give something back to others, as soon as we *have* to, then it becomes a burden. And we don't want this burden. So it just becomes very distasteful.

So here when we're talking about repaying the kindness of others, wishing to repay it, it's not coming from that sense of obligation and being put upon. "Others have been nice to me, so okay. All right, grandma, thank you note. Okay, I'll be kind to others." Not like that. [Laughter.] But rather, we've received so much and we want to give something in return spontaneously. And this may have happened at certain times in your life, where very unexpectedly, someone did something very kind, and you just instantaneously felt, "I want to share this."

I remember this one instance. I was in the Soviet Union many years ago. I was a student at that time. I was either at Moscow or Leningrad, as it was called in those days. I was in the subway station, and a young woman just came up to me (I was obviously a lost somebody from somewhere else), and she helped me out. She had a ring on her finger. She just pulled it off and gave it to me, and then she disappeared. This was twenty years ago, and it's so vivid in my mind. Here's a complete stranger giving me something which was obviously very valuable not only monetarily, but also to her personally. When you get that kind of kindness, it's not like, "Oh I want to possess it and hold it all for myself. I can't share it." Rather, we feel it's such a beautiful act; we feel we have received so much and so we automatically want to give something to others as well. It's that kind of feeling that you want to cultivate here. The wish to repay others. The spontaneous wish of wanting to share.

One of my friends' mother has Alzheimer's and her mind is completely gone. She is in a care facility right now because her family can't take care of her. My

friend lives in India and from time to time, he comes over to visit his mother. She's just completely disorientated. She sometimes doesn't recognize people, tries to put lipstick on her toothbrush, puts seven pairs of pants on at one time. Her mind in many ways, is very gone, but he told me that her basic quality of kindness is still there. He went one time and brought her some kind of goodies or pastry or something, and immediately after she got it, she had to go share it with all the other old ladies, all of whom were worse than she was in the ward. She didn't want to take the goodies she had received and just hide them all for herself and eat them. Her spontaneous nature was, "Oh I received something good. I want to share it with other people," before she even took one. I thought that was so remarkable.

This spontaneous wish to share is different from obligation. Especially this one with Alzheimer's, there was no mind to think about being obliged. It was just this spontaneous, "I receive, I want to give." And that joy that comes from giving—that's what we want to cultivate in this third step.

Here, it's very helpful to think, if all these other beings have been our mothers in the past, and they've been kind to us, their present situation—looking at it from a Dharma perspective—is not really that great, in the sense that they want happiness and don't want suffering, but they're creating a lot of negative karma and it is almost as if they are running towards suffering. Sometimes in our world, we can see people create negative karma with so much joy and glee and enthusiasm, as if they can't wait to create the cause of suffering. When we look at this situation, and we



think that all these other beings have been our parents in the past, then automatically we want to do something to help them.

Just in an ordinary situation, if our parents are miserable, especially in old age, they look to their children for help. And if the children don't help their parents, after what their parents have given, then the parents are in a big jam. Then there's a problem. If the parents can't rely on the kids at some point, then who will help them? Social services downtown? Maybe.

But we want to develop some kind of feeling that after we've received this much, just as parents would focus on their kids, the kids would want to help back. Then similarly, if all beings have been that kind to us and given us so much, then we want to help them back. This feeling of, "If they can't count on me for help, who can they count on?" In the same way, in the family, if the older parents can't count on their children, then who can they count on? I know in our society, this really pushes buttons, doesn't it? In our society, things are quite difficult that way, and very different.

I remember in Singapore there was one young woman at the university. She was studying so hard to be an engineer. Her father died in her senior year, and she was very upset about it, not only because she missed him, but because she really wanted to support him. She really wanted him to be able to retire and for her to work and support him after how he had supported her during her whole education. I was so amazed. You hardly ever hear anybody in America say things like that. We usually look at it as, "My parents are so loaded. When are they going to give me

some?" [Laughter.] We hardly ever look at it the other way around. This is a completely different attitude that this young woman had. She was only like twenty-one, twenty-two. Really wanting to take care of her parents.

So again it's this feeling that we want to cultivate, of wanting to reciprocate the kindness that has been shown us. Not seeing caring for others as a burden, but as something that we really want to be able to do.

### **Gift of the Dharma is the highest gift**

The best way to repay the kindness of others is by teaching them the Dharma, by leading them in the Dharma path. They say the gift of the Dharma is the highest gift, because when we're able to help other people in the Dharma way, then we're giving them the tools to free themselves. So that gift of the Dharma is the highest gift.

If we can't give the Dharma, then we can give whatever it is that people need, and whatever it is they are open to receiving. So it's not a thing of trying to convert people and force the Dharma on them, but if we have this kind of inner wish in our heart, that if I can eventually go and teach others the Dharma, especially if I could teach my parents the Dharma, then that would be really wonderful.

I don't know about your parents, but my parents of this lifetime, I think it's going to be a little difficult to teach them the Dharma. Sometimes it feels funny, because I really cherish the Dharma, and I would love to be able to teach my parents the Dharma. I found so much benefit from it myself, and they have done so

much for me, I'd love to be able to share it with them. They don't have the same opinion though, so it doesn't become possible. But then sometimes when I'm teaching, I'll kind of realize, "OK, well this life's parents, maybe I can't help directly, but all the other people in the room are past lives' parents, so I'll help these past lives' parents instead of this life's parents." And so it changes the attitude somehow.

### **A more forgiving attitude towards others who harmed us**

Similarly, if we have this feeling of other beings as our mother, then when they harm us .... Like if your mother just suddenly went berserk. If your mother just had incredible mental problems and started doing crazy things, you wouldn't hate her. But rather, you would recognize here's somebody who is mad, and compassion comes. Because you know that your mother doesn't have to be this way, but because of causes and conditions, she just flipped out. But you wouldn't hate her and be angry for whatever harm she did.

Similarly, we can look at all beings in that way, and recognize that when people harm, it's as if they have gone crazy through the power of their own afflictions. Because when we're under the influence of our own afflictions, whether it's wrong views or ignorance or jealousy, it's like we're crazy at that particular moment. We don't have control over our mind. And so in that way, if we can, when people harm us, look at them as we would look at our mother who for some reason went mad—maybe our mother had some kind

of environmental pollution and was taking some medication and suffering from the side effects and just went crazy—you wouldn't blame her for whatever she did. So similarly, when we received harm, to look at those who harmed us as people who are mad, under the influence of their own afflictions.

And it's true, isn't it? When people have a lot of anger in their mind, they're really like crazy. We can look in our own mind, when we're angry, completely, it's like we're a totally different person. When we really lose it, when our anger just rages, we're a completely different person, we're not like ourselves.

Similarly, whenever others have harmed us in that way, it's really because they're temporarily flipped out.

Like I was saying the last time, when we received harm, it is very helpful if we can think of what that person's mind was like at the time they were harming us—how confused it was. You look at somebody like David Koresh, and what he's done. You try and put yourself in his shoes and think what his mind must be like. Incredible pain and confusion and fear. I look at the theology he gives and it's so inspired by anger and fear. To have his kind of mind must be a complete torture. And so rather than look at him and criticize, to understand it's incredible suffering for him.

And then of course all the karma somebody like him creates under the power of those afflictions, and when you think of the result of that karma that he's going to face, then again, how can you hate somebody who has deliberately created the cause for so much misery in the future? How can we wish that kind of person ill?

It's not a thing of saying what he did was OK, but it's a thing more of looking deeper at what was going on.

## Questions and answers

*[Audience:] I find that it's easier for me to forgive someone like Hitler who has done so much harm to people, than someone who harms me in a much smaller way. Why is that?*

Adolf Hitler maybe we can forgive, but the person who said bad things about me behind my back, "Urgh!" I think there, sometimes what's happening is that Adolf Hitler didn't harm me. They harmed somebody else. Whereas this person, even if it's a small, tiny harm, it happened to *me*! We know who's most important in this place, don't we? [Laughter.] So I think it's because we over-emphasize our own value. "How *dare* anybody treats *me* like this!" We take it so personally that even if it's a tiny, small matter, we hold on to it very tenaciously, because they were directed at *me*.

Have you ever had it happen, that a friend came to you and told you their problem. You hear their story: this person did this, that person did that ... and you can look at it and say, "Wow, there is just a lot of attachment there. They're making a big deal. They don't really need to be quite as miserable as they are." Have you had that happen when friends have complained to you about things that have happened at work, or what their parents did, or something, and you can see very clearly, "They don't really need to take it

so personally, it's not such a big deal."

But on the other hand, when those things happen to us, "This is *really* important stuff." [Laughter.] Really meaningful. And the only difference is, one happened to me and the other one didn't happen to me. It just shows how, as soon as we get the "I" involved in it, we really solidify things. So I think sometimes when we have that perspective and we can realize that our mind is adding some extra flavor there, that maybe we don't need to continue to add on the flavor, then we can begin to let go of it.

*[Audience:] When we see that someone obviously has a distorted mind, like Hitler, it's easier to think in this way. But isn't it difficult for us to see the people who harm us in ordinary circumstances as having a crazy mind? Like when someone criticizes us or ruins our reputation.*

They should know better, shouldn't they? [Laughter.] When somebody is crazy enough, we'll forgive them. But this person isn't really crazy. They really should know better. So the mind, again, doesn't want to forgive.

Well, I think, firstly, recognize that a person is actually just as crazy under the force of afflictions, whether they did a big thing or a small thing.

Another thing that I find very good in this kind of situations, especially criticism or when your reputation is at stake, is to say, "Oh I'm so glad this happened. I'm so glad this person is criticizing me. I'm so glad this person is wrecking my reputation." Because the mind tends to fight it, "I don't want

blame. I don't want a bad reputation. I don't want to be threatened this way." It's all out there. It's like, "I got to build up my defenses real strong here." So to completely take it the other way and say, "Actually, I'm quite proud and I have a big problem with always putting myself up. So it's quite good that this person comes along and knocks me down a little bit. Actually it's not doing a whole lot of harm. And even if this person wrecks my reputation with a few people, it's okay. I'll definitely live through it, and it could really benefit me in the sense of helping me let go of wanting to parade myself around as a superstar. So it's quite good somebody knocks me off my self-created pedestal."

I find that as soon as I say that to myself, then I don't get angry about it. And then there's almost some humor in the situation. Instead of taking it so seriously, I can really laugh and see the humor in it. Makes some sense?

Also, when you think like that, it prevents you from creating negative karma. It also prevents the situation from escalating. And when you prevent the situation from escalating, then you also prevent the other person from creating more negative karma.

This current thing, they still reap the karma from that. But you really cut it at that point, instead of letting it fester and build up. We have incredible ability in providing very good circumstances for other people to create negative karma. So when we can cut that off, it does help a lot.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Well, I would think more in terms of using these things as ways of protecting our own mind from generating negative thoughts. So in the sense like if we want to protect our own mind from generating negative thoughts, if we can develop a sense of love and compassion, and then send that out to the other person in the form of white light which goes into them and purifies them. So doing that kind of visualization but with love and compassion for the other person.

*[Audience:] Is it good to blank out negative thoughts?*

That depends on what your attitude is when you're doing it. Because if you deliberately try and push negative thoughts away, then they just come back and they often come back stronger. You don't want to push the negative thoughts away because you're afraid of them, or you don't like them. But rather, I use the example of, "I've run this video before." We all tend to have circular types of negative thoughts. And it's really like a video. There's a "Who do they think they are to say that to me" video, and there's the "Poor me, everybody's always taking advantage of me" video. [Laughter.] And when we go through that in our meditation, we begin to see how, it is almost as if we've installed a video and clicked on a whole emotional response, a whole pattern. We just put it on automatic and make ourselves so miserable.

What I find really helpful is if I can catch my mind at the beginning of the video, to say, "I've seen this video before. I don't need to see it again." That kind of putting the thoughts aside is okay, because you're



not afraid of them, you're not terrified of them, it's just, "This is boring! Feeling sorry for myself is really boring." Or, "Continually getting angry at this person ... it's boring! It's painful. Who needs it?" I think that kind of way of leaving it aside is okay.

*[Audience:] We try to do good but often, we can't benefit people as much as we want to, and we feel tired. How do we deal with that?*

We can't try and be the world's savior if we're not capable of being it. It's a little bit inflated, isn't it, if we think, "Now, I'm so full of love and compassion. I'm going to take all these people off drugs. I'm going to get involved in everybody's life and I'm going to turn the world around ..." I think that the bottom-line is being practical. That's what I always come back to. We do what we can, and we don't do what we can't. And just being practical. "I can do this, and I do it. But I can't do that, so I'm not going to pretend to myself or to the other person that I can. Because if I do that and I bite off more than I can chew, then I'm going to be disappointing somebody else, and making some more confusion." So sometimes I think it's actually rather compassionate to let people know clearly what we can't do, instead of making them think we can do a whole lot of things and then let them down later, because we bit off more than we could chew.

So, on those times when we're over-extended and we're stretched, take time out to rest, and get ourselves back in balance. We don't have to withdraw into a totally selfish mode of, "I'm going to block out

everybody else and take care of *me!*” Rather, we think, “I need to take care of myself so that I can take care of others. It’s stupid to pretend that I can do things that I can’t do because that’s not being very kind to other people. If I’m going to be kind to them, I have to keep myself together. So now, I need the time to be quiet and to put myself back together.” One of the things in the far-reaching attitude of joyous effort is knowing when to rest. Resting when you need to rest. It’s so funny. We go on Protestant work ethic over-drive [laughter], and we get this thing of, “I’ve *got* to do this. I’ve *got* to do that ...”

Many times, we tend to think, “I should be a bodhisattva!” “If I were only like Rinpoche, I wouldn’t sleep. And it’d be so easy. I could do it all!” “So I’m going to push myself, I’m not going to sleep!” [Laughter.] I think that’s one of the hardest things because it’s very tempting to get into, “If only I had more compassion, I would be able to do this.” Well, it’s true. Maybe if we had more compassion, we could. But the fact is, we don’t. And so, we are the way we are. We can be kind, but we have to accept that we’re limited beings. “I will admit it. I am a limited being. I’m not going to pretend that I am a bodhisattva. But just because I’m not a bodhisattva doesn’t mean that I have to hate myself. I’m a bodhisattva in training. So I still have some way to go.”

*[Audience:] What’s the hardest thing to deal with on the bodhisattva path?*

I think one of the hardest things is to not expect

something in return. I think that's really one of the hardest things in the bodhisattva path. And why they talk about the bodhisattvas being really courageous. Because the bodhisattvas are helping others even when the other people don't say, "Thank you", or don't get better, or don't fulfill all their expectations. And I think that's where the real courage from the path comes from. Just to make our help a completely free gift without the expectation of being satisfied, being thanked, feeling rewarded. But just doing it, and be satisfied by the doing of it. And be satisfied by our own good motivation. And make our help a free gift that they can do what they want with. And it's very, very hard to do.

We can see it so much when we help somebody. We give our friend a little bit of advice, because of course we can see their situation so clearly and they can't, and then they don't follow our advice. "I spent half an hour ..." It's quite hard.

It's so surprising sometimes how we can help somebody without our even realizing it. I think we've all probably had some experience of it. It was a meeting that you didn't think much of, and somebody's come back and said, "Wow, you said this to me ten years ago and it really helped." And you're sitting there going, "Really?" And just to see that helping others sometimes is not always something we can plan.

And I think sometimes helping others isn't something we do. It's something we be, in the sense that sometimes, if we just are a certain way, our way of being helps somebody without us having to sit there and think, "Well, how can I help them?" I think that's

why there's that one dedication prayer, "May anyone who sees, hears, remembers, touches or talks to me be removed from all suffering and abide in happiness forever." "May my presence have that kind of effect on others." Not because it's *me*, but simply because of the energy and the atmosphere created. So there is a purpose for that kind of prayers. I think it would bring that result.

#### **4. Heart-Warming Love—Seeing Others as Lovable**

The next point is heart-warming love. There're different kinds of love. There's one kind of love that wants others to have happiness and its causes. This kind of love is slightly different. This kind of love is just seeing others as lovable, seeing them with affection. This particular kind of love arises from having cultivated the first three steps. After you've meditated on those first three steps of seeing others as our mother, remembering their kindness, and wanting to repay their kindness, then this one automatically arises. It doesn't need to be meditated on specially. It's a natural feeling of affection for others, wanting to care for them as if they were your kids. In the same way that the parent so readily takes care of their child, having that same kind of feeling of ease in caring for somebody, and real joy and pleasure in doing it.

I think they use the example here of parent and child quite deliberately. After hearing these teachings, I started doing some research, talking to some parents,

and finding out how it was that they help their kids. And I remember my grandmother saying that because my dad grew up in the middle of the Depression and the family was quite poor, there wasn't much food and she would just give it to my dad and my uncle, and not eat herself. And it didn't bother her at all. The idea of taking care of her kids was just what she wanted to do. It wasn't a sacrifice. It's just what she wanted to do. I think very often parents have that kind of feeling for their children. I talked to one other woman when I was in India who was saying that too. She said you just did things for your kids so naturally that you wouldn't do for anybody else. Who else whose diaper would you change? [Laughter.] Somehow, whatever the child does, the parent always looks on in fascination at who this child is.

I remember my cousin had a baby, and we had a family get-together. I hadn't seen him in years and years and years. He barely looked at me. He was just like completely fixated on the child. The child couldn't do anything. My cousin was just following him around.

So this feeling of seeing others as beautiful and attractive as a parent sees their child. And here, it's not just for those of you who are parents, looking at your own children like that, but taking that feeling you have for your kids, and then generalizing it towards all beings. Because wouldn't it be nice to be able to look at all beings with that same kind of love that a parent looks at their child?

This is what the heart-warming love is about. It's seeing others as really lovable. Instead of the mind making all its lists, "I can't be friends with this person

because they did this and that. That one I can't love because he did this and that ...” All of our reasons why everybody is so objectionable. It's really putting that down and just letting ourselves see that others are lovable. Why? Because they've been our mother and they've done all these incredible stuff for us in previous lives.

Let's sit quietly for a few minutes.

We've been talking about the seven points of cause and effect for generating bodhicitta. The first four points are: (1) recognizing sentient beings as our mother, (2) remembering the kindness of the mother or whoever the caregiver was while we were a child. And then (3) having a spontaneous wish to give something in return to those who have been kind, and from that, naturally, comes (4) the heart-warming love, or the love that sees others as lovable. [The remaining 3 points are: (5) Great compassion, (6) Great determination and (7) Altruistic intention or bodhicitta.]

#### **4. Heart-warming love—continued**

##### **Different types of love**

There are several kinds of love. There's the heart-warming love [point (4)] that sees others as lovable. This is the love that comes spontaneously from the first three causes [points (1) to (3) mentioned above], and acts as the propelling agent for the great compassion, which is the next step [point (5)].

In addition, there is the great love which wishes

others to have happiness and the causes of happiness. You can meditate on this great love either before the great compassion, after the great compassion, or together with the great compassion.

### **Eight benefits of meditating on love**

Nagarjuna's text, "Precious Garland," describes eight benefits of meditating on love. This is nice to think about as an encouraging factor. Although the fact that we all think of a heart that has love as something that is especially desirable, that we all want to have, somehow when it comes to meditating on it, we think, "I just don't have the energy. I'd rather watch the news, and get depressed, than meditate on love." Do you see what is going on in the mind then? You sit and watch the news. You are completely passive. You just let the TV run your mind. Meditating on love, we actually have to be active. We have to cultivate something within ourselves. Maybe we should meditate on love and then watch the news. And then meditate on compassion after the news.

a) and b) The first two benefits of meditating on love are that the gods (the celestial beings) and also human beings will be friendly to us. We can readily see that. People naturally gravitate towards those who are very kind, who have a loving heart. They don't need to do very much to have friends. Whereas people who aren't very loving, who are quite defensive and easily annoyed, then it's much more difficult for other people to be friendly to them. We can naturally see these first two benefits from our own direct

experience. Not only human beings but also celestial beings and the gods, benefit from meditating on love. They say that there are different beings in the god realms. Some of them might even be coming to listen to teachings tonight. Actually, before His Holiness teaches, or before the lamas teach, they do a special prayer inviting the gods to come and listen, because some of them can practice Dharma too.

c) Even **nonhumans will protect you**. Here we're thinking about animals and also different spirits. Again, other beings willingly protect people who are kind. When people who aren't very nice get harmed, other people stand around and think, "Oh, good. I'm glad you got it. You deserve that." [Laughter.]

d) **We'll have mental ease** and our mind will be happy and relaxed. When we meditate on love, when we genuinely wish others well, our mind is happy and relaxed. When we wish others harm, when we cling onto hurt and pain, our minds aren't relaxed at all. Our minds are quite tight. We have to take Valium, or we have to call in a therapist, or do something, because the mind is unhappy and really tight.

e) **We'll have much happiness** meditating on love. Not only mental ease, but just generally, in the conditions of our life, there's much happiness. Our body will also be relaxed. You can see how the mind affects the body. When the mind's quite tight, then you get ulcers. The immune system goes down. When the mind is very loving and very relaxed, then the body also tends to be relaxed.



**f) Poisons and weapons won't harm you.** I dare say that if you meditate on love, you probably wouldn't be involved in too many wars and be around many weapons. Therefore it will be difficult for anyone to harm you. But I guess this benefit is referring to some kind of special ability that comes as a result of karma. For somebody who meditates regularly on love, even if weapons or poisons are directed towards them, they will not work because of the person's accumulation of good karma.

Actually, love itself has the power to subdue. There's the story of the Buddha's cousin, Devadatta, who was so jealous of his cousin (the Buddha) that he sent a wild elephant to charge at the Buddha. But when the elephant got in the presence of the Buddha, the elephant was so overwhelmed by the power of Buddha's love, that it bowed down to the Buddha.

One time I was in Malaysia somebody was telling me that they were having problems with another person. They meditated on love so that the other person would stop bothering them. [Laughter.] I said, "Are you meditating on love because you really love the other person, or because you're thinking about your own benefit and you want them to stop bothering you? One way you're meditating on love, the other way you aren't."

**g) Effortlessly we will attain our aims.** Even in worldly things, if we have a kind heart, a loving heart, then things very easily get done. Having a nice demeanor, when we approach people kindly, the other people usually want to help us. Our worldly aims get accomplished easily. Our spiritual aims also get

accomplished easily when the heart is very loving. Love is one of the causes for the bodhicitta or the altruistic intention, and then with that, the mind becomes very powerful, creates a lot of positive potential, has abundant energy to collect both the positive potential and the wisdom necessary to attain the realizations. Our spiritual aims also get accomplished quite easily when we meditate on love.

**h) We will also be reborn in the world of Brahma.** That's if you dedicate for that. Hopefully, we won't dedicate for that.

Brahma is one of the form realm gods. Form realm is one of the realms. It's considered more pleasurable than the human realm. You get born there by having deep states of concentration, and Brahma is the King of the form realm.

Actually, it's quite interesting. I'm just going to sidetrack for a minute about Brahma. There're some similarities between the Hindu view of Brahma and the Christian concept of God, because in Hindu society, Brahma is seen as the creator, and the different parts of the world are created from different parts of Brahma's body.

From the Buddhist viewpoint, in the evolution of the world, the higher realms get created first. So the form realm was created first, then the human realms and then all the other lower realms. In the evolution of this particular universe, Brahma came into existence first, and then humans and animals and everything else followed. By the time humans and animals came, Brahma was already there. They say, "Well, he created us." And so that's how Brahma got

this status of the creator, from the Buddhist viewpoint, not from the Hindu viewpoint.

It's interesting when you think of the Christian concept of God, because there are some similarities, such as Brahma being seen as a creator, as a very powerful being. Who knows, maybe what the Christians worship is Brahma, but they call him God. Well, some Christians, not all. It's hard to say, because everybody's concept of God is quite different.

Anyway, the reason being born as Brahma is considered a benefit of meditating on love, is that for worldly beings (there are many, many Brahmas, by the way), it's a position of status, fame, well-being and good things happening to you. From a Buddhist point of view, even being reborn in an upper realm like that is unsatisfactory, because after you used up that karma, then again you have to take another rebirth. You're still bound in the cycle of existence.

That's why it's important not to dedicate our positive potential to be born as Brahma, but as a Buddha. We want to become a Buddha. The meditation on love is referred to as the Brahma Vihara. Those of you who follow the Vipassana tradition, when you meditate on the four immeasurables, it's called the four Brahma-Viharas, the abode or place of Brahma. The reason it is called that is because every time you meditate on love, you will be reborn as a Brahma the same number of times as the number of beings you included in your meditation on love. Doing the meditation on love with single-pointed concentration leads to that particular kind of rebirth. But again, that's if you dedicate it that way. We're trying to dedicate the merit for something

else.

*[Audience:] If we don't want to dedicate our merit for a rebirth as a Brahma, why is it listed as an advantage?*

This is similar to the advantages of bodhicitta. Maybe your level of mind isn't quite so high. First what might get you excited is the possibility of some immediate gain. They get you interested in that way, and then they say, "Nope [laughter]. Got to be a Buddha. Can't be contented with this kind of rebirth."

*[Audience:] Is Buddha formless?*

The Buddhas take a form. It is a manifestation of their wisdom. Take for example Shakyamuni Buddha or Avalokiteshvara; they are manifestations of their mind and their subtle energy coming out in that physical form. But the Buddha's mind is totally formless. We shouldn't think of Buddhas like some isolated person inside a body, nor do we need to think of a Buddha as just some kind of an amorphous blob (excuse me, Buddha!) [Laughter.]. When we think of the qualities of wisdom and compassion and the skill of the Buddha, those factors don't have form because they are mental qualities. They are things developed in your heart, in your mind. They don't have form. But in order to communicate with us, the Buddha appears in forms. That's the only way we can relate to them. We don't have the hotline for the Buddha's Dharmakaya mind.

## **Meditation on love according to the Theravada tradition**

In the Theravada tradition, they have a way of meditating on love. I think it's quite nice, and I think it's good if we can incorporate that in our practice. And it can be used here, too.

The way you do it is you start off with yourself and wishing yourself to be well and happy. The idea being that if you don't love yourself, it's hard to love others. Here we come back to the old theme of self-esteem and wishing ourselves well, which sometimes is our biggest obstacle. To sit and start out, we can say, "May I be well and happy." Think of the different kinds of happiness, the different kinds of well-being. Don't just wish to have hot fudge sundaes and banana splits, but truly wish yourself well in the sense of "May I also have all the conditions necessary to practice Dharma. May I also meet pure teachings and teachers. May I quickly gain the realizations and free myself from cyclic existence. May I have the happiness of liberation and enlightenment." Truly wish yourself well. That's caring for ourselves.

Wishing ourselves to have a nice house and a nice car isn't necessarily taking good care of ourselves. That might relieve some problems but cause other problems. Whereas if we really wish ourselves to have the realizations in a very kind way, we see that we can free our minds. We want to wish ourselves all the different kinds of happiness, both worldly happiness and spiritual happiness. Spend some time thinking about that—not sitting and thinking and increasing your mind of attachment, but developing a feeling

inside the heart of real affection for ourselves in wanting ourselves to be well and happy, not just because I'm me, but because I'm also a living being needing compassion.

From there, start with people whom you are close to, whom you get along well with, whom you have a lot of affection for, and wish them to be well and happy. You can think of your good friends, or other people close to you, because spontaneously, it's easier to wish them to be well and happy. Again, think of the different kinds of happiness—may they have a good job, may they have security, may they have nice relationships, but also may they have the conditions to practice the Dharma. May they gain the realizations. May they be free of cyclic existence altogether. Spend some time cultivating this feeling, so that your attitude changes; some feeling of warmth for them comes.

From there we share our loving kindness with strangers—the guy on the street, wishing him to be well and happy. Recognize that all these strangers are human beings just like us—we have the same wish for happiness and to avoid pain. The things that we wish for ourselves and people we are fond of, we wish to strangers. We work on the mind thinking about this until the mind has the same kind of intensity of love towards strangers.

Then move on to the people we don't get along with very well. This one is much harder, isn't it? But try to wish the people who harm us well, or the people we don't like well. And in some ways, if you switch your mind just a little bit, it actually becomes easy to meditate on love for them. If you see that somebody has a very tormented life and carries around a lot of

guilt or hostility because of things that happened in their life, and that's why they harmed you, or that's why they do the things you find so disagreeable, you can think, "May that person free themselves from that tight mind. May they free themselves from that neurotic clinging. May they free themselves from that kind of pain." For the people we find disagreeable, we can imagine that their whole personality is transformed. They can be happy. It's quite interesting, as soon as we can imagine them to be happy, then we cease finding them so disagreeable.

And then, after we have generated love toward the people we don't get along with, we generate it towards all sentient beings.

We start out loving ourselves, then we proceed to loving our friends, then strangers, people we don't get along with, and then all sentient beings. There's a reason for doing it in this sequence. If we start with "May all sentient beings be well and happy. May all sentient beings have everything good," that's very easy, because "all sentient beings" is a safe, abstract concept that's quite separate from Achala (the cat) when he scratches you, and the other guy when he rams into your car or somebody else who criticizes you. We don't want to start out with that. It's real important when we're meditating on love and compassion, to think about real individual instances, which forces our mind to change and not just get stuck in abstractions.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

You don't see the person as inherently evil. All of a

sudden you can see what compelled them do their action. You start being able to separate the person from the actions. You see the actions as disagreeable and harmful, but the person as not inherently evil.

*[Audience:] This is very difficult. I don't think I can do it.*

Slowly, slowly, work on it. Develop the mind. The mind can change.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Who knows what his psychological factors and his way of thinking are. But he had his reasons, and from his viewpoint, what he did seemed like the best thing. From his viewpoint, he meant well. From other people's viewpoint, what he did seemed atrocious. But you can see that he as a person isn't inherently evil. He made those decisions and did those things due to certain mental factors, due to the conditions of his life, due to his habits and ways of thinking. But who he is, isn't some kind of solid, permanent personality who's always going to be like this. Just because he has some bad qualities now, it doesn't mean that he's always going to have them or that he's always going to be evil. Everyone's personality is just a combination of different mental factors that arise in the mind and go away, arise and go away.

## **5. Great Compassion**



From thinking about heart-warming love, having some experience of it, then we move on to meditate on compassion. Compassion is the wish for others to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering. Again, suffering doesn't mean just "Ouch, that hurts!"

### **Three kinds of suffering**

There are three kinds of suffering:

a) Suffering of suffering. This means the gross physical pain and mental pain, things that people in the world recognize as painful. Or you could say undesirable experiences are suffering. There are different ways of describing it.

b) Suffering of change. This includes worldly happiness. Things that we normally consider nice are actually the undesirable experience of change. Things start out great, but they will not last and will go downhill from there. This kind of worldly happiness is considered undesirable experience because it doesn't last. It doesn't satisfy. It doesn't do it all. And after we enjoy ourselves, we go back where we started again. When Amchog Rinpoche was here, he used this great expression: Struggling for pleasure. That's kind of what it is. This undesirable experience of change leads us to struggle for pleasure. We always have to exert so much effort to get one good thing. That's nice, but then it ends, or it changes, and then we have to go search for another source of pleasure, and that changes, and the process keeps repeating.

c) Pervading compounded unsatisfactoriness. Our bodies and mind are under the influence of ignorance, anger, and attachment. The whole situation is under the influence of ignorance, anger, and attachment. Even if someone is born in one of these form realms or formless realms, or nice, delightful places, still, eventually, they will come crashing down, simply because that's the nature of cyclic existence.

### **How to meditate on compassion**

When we meditate on compassion, we want sentient beings to be free from these three kinds of unsatisfactory or undesirable experiences. Usually it's very easy for us to think, "May they be free of the undesirable experience of suffering (the first kind of unsatisfactory experience)." We start with that, and then expand it, thinking, "May they be free from the undesirable experience of change." In other words, getting so attached to worldly happiness that they're always on the roller-coaster of "Wow, this is great!," crashes down, "Wow, this is great!," crashes down.

The next time you go to the cinema to watch movies, see that this is the theme of the things that you see in the movies. You can very clearly see these three kinds of unsatisfactory or undesirable experiences. Usually this is what makes up the plot of the movie. When you watch a movie, when you look at someone's life, when you read the newspaper, you can see these three at work, and then you start to begin to wish everybody to be free of their suffering, not just the basic suffering, but also the suffering of change and the pervading compounded

unsatisfactoriness. In this way compassion gets much, much greater for them.

We usually think of great compassion in this way, “OK, I’m going to open a soup kitchen and set up a shelter,” and things like that. This is all very good. I’m not putting this down in any way. It’s tremendously good. We should do more of it. But what Lama Zopa is also very quick to point out is that if people don’t learn anything about karma, about their actions, and still continue to create negative actions and not do positive actions, even if you give them food, even if you give them a place to live, again later on, they’re going to be hungry and they’re going to be homeless. Maybe not in this life, maybe in the future life, but still, because the gross physical and mental suffering are created by our karma, as long as the mind is under the influence of the three poisons, these unsatisfactory experiences are going to continue to come.

When we cultivate compassion, it’s important to want them to be free from all three types of unsatisfactory experiences. You may start out wanting them to have food and clothing and shelter. Then you also want them to be free from the unsatisfactoriness of change. And then you want them to be free of the pervasive compounded unsatisfactoriness, because this would keep the first two forms of suffering from re-occurring again and again. Make your compassion very expansive when you’re meditating on this. We need to expand our minds.

Another way to meditate on compassion is to start out with gross physical suffering, such as an animal being slaughtered. Or you can think of torture in a

prison camp. Or you can think of gang shootings. Or you can think of Bosnia. Or Somalia. Try to think of what it would be like to be those beings in that situation, and all the different things that they experience, not only the gross physical and mental suffering, but how the mind gets involved in the fear of future suffering. I think in many of the painful situations, the suffering is mental. Maybe you're living in Bosnia and you have to stay in your house because of the fear of the shelling going on. Your body is okay, it hasn't been hurt, but the fear of living in that situation and what it does to you can be devastating. Or the fear of disease. Or the fear of torture.

One way of meditating on compassion is to take very obvious examples like this and think what it must be like to be that person. Again, this is the kind of thing you can do when you're watching the news, when you're reading books, or when you're watching TV. Everything can become a kind of Dharma practice in this way.

### **Guarding against despair or anger**

I find that people in the West, when they think about the gross physical suffering, often they either get so depressed and despondent about the state of the world that they just give up, or they get angry and self-righteous. What we want to do when we're thinking about these things is not fall in either of these pitfalls. We don't need to meditate to create these states. We need to meditate to transcend them.

The despair doesn't have much compassion, does

it? That despair is much more a feeling of helplessness. What we're trying to generate here is a strong mind of compassion that really wants to help and sees that things don't always have to be this way. With despair, it just seems that this is all inevitable and we just say, "I give up! Everything is screwed."

With compassion, we see that whatever suffering someone is experiencing is a caused phenomenon. It doesn't arise independently. It doesn't arise causelessly. Things arise due to causes and conditions. If we can change any of the causes and conditions, either with the external ones or the karmic internal ones, then we can change that situation. Compassion is quite different from despair and despondency.

Similarly, the other thing that we often get into—which is just the flip side, it's very inter-dependent with despair and despondency—is we just change ever so slightly and our feeling turns into outrage and anger. That's not a real healthy attitude either. When we're outraged and we're angry, it's like our energy is just going out into space and evaporating. Nothing very productive is coming from it. It's just getting scattered and we're being quite miserable.

Instead, we could take that same energy and channel it into something that is positively directed, like compassion. Compassion is very upbeat. Compassion knows that suffering doesn't have to exist. Suffering exists only because the causes and conditions for it exist. Within compassion, there's a lot of hope. That's why people say His Holiness is so optimistic. He always talks about having hope, not hope in the sense of preconceptions about the future, but hope in the sense that things can change and they

can be improved. That's quite important. When we start out meditating on compassion thinking about things, please be careful that you know exactly how it's supposed to be practiced, and which way we want to steer our mind. We don't meditate incorrectly and then either get despondent or angry.

Another way that you can meditate on compassion is to think of the lower realms of existence. Think of what it's like to be in a life form of excruciating pain. Or in a life form of continuous dissatisfaction such as hunger and thirst. Or a life form of stupidity and the different sufferings that animals go through. Think of yourself as being born into one of those situations. If you can't think of the lower realms, because maybe that gives you some problems, then think of yourself as being born in a township in South Africa, or being born in Armenia. Or being born in Kashmir or some place like that. And think of what it's like, and then go from your experience to everybody's experience.

You are imagining what it's like, but actual people are living in those situations, and everybody, at one time or another throughout cyclic existence, has lived in a similar situation. Try recognizing that even though some people might be fed and happy now, as long as they are in cyclic existence, they will find themselves in suffering situations later.

## **Having compassion for both oppressor and oppressed**

We need to be sure here that our compassion isn't just for the people who have gross physical suffering. This is another pitfall, and it is similar to the outraged

anger one, which is having lots of compassion for the oppressed while having lots of anger for the fed and happy people. Buddha's compassion isn't like that. He recognizes that the fed and happy people had been the suffering ones, will be the fed and happy ones later, and then at some point becoming the suffering ones again. As long as the mind is under the influence of the three poisons, everybody will keep changing places again and again. Therefore we don't want to fall into partiality, caring about the oppressed but not caring about the oppressors.

If we had clairvoyance, we might find that the oppressed and the oppressor switch from life to life. The person who is the perpetuator of the harm, in the next life becomes the recipient of the harm. Everybody keeps changing places. Ideally we would not develop hatred or anger towards people who seem well, but recognize that we're all in the same boat; we're all on the same merry-go-round. It's just that some people's carriages are higher and others' are lower, but it could all change in five minutes.

## **Dealing with our fear of pain**

One of the most difficult aspects of meditating on compassion is that we don't like to think about pain. We like to pretend it doesn't exist. Because of our dislike for pain, our society develops taboos against talking about death, against talking about sickness, against helping people who are old or letting them live in the society. The societal taboos that we don't like actually come from this same fear which, lo and behold, we find in our own mind! Isn't that

interesting? The fear that doesn't like to look at pain.

It's very interesting to explore that fear when we find it blocking our mind, "Where's that fear coming from?" I think that often, we don't like to look at others' pain because at a gut level we are acutely aware that there is very little difference between us and them. Looking at somebody else's pain and letting it into our heart means opening up to the fact that we could be in their shoes. This is very scary. We don't like to think of ourselves in those shoes, or see ourselves in that situation, so we block it out.

That's why we find it difficult to visit Aunt Ethel in the hospital who's dying of cancer. We don't like to see that pain. We don't want to see cousin Sam who's dying of aids. Why? Because at some level, we recognize that it could be us in that situation. It is too frightening to look at. We push down our fear, and then we develop other distracting emotions or actions, like being despondent or outraged, or going on a crusade, or doing something else to distract ourselves from this very basic thing of looking at what cyclic existence is.

If we have the idea of past and future lives—this has been me, and this could be me in the future—then at some point we're going to have to change. When we can let ourselves acknowledge that, that's when the determination to be free enters the heart. Finally, we are actually acknowledging our own vulnerability. It isn't pleasant. But if we know that it doesn't have to exist, that it only exists because there is a cause, then we can develop the determination to free ourselves from it, and to attain enlightenment.



## Compassion isn't feeling sorry for other people

Meditating on compassion isn't feeling sorry for other people, "Oh, those poor people. They have so many problems in their lives." Compassion is based on a fundamental honesty with ourselves about our own vulnerability to suffering, and recognizing that everybody is in the same situation. There is no difference between us. Our heart has to open some way. You can see that one of the blocks to helping people who are suffering is the fact that we don't like to look at our own pain. I'm sure Lee, who is a hospice nurse, has lots of experience with this. She could probably tell you incredible stories of how people who are very close to each other can't help but be afraid. They can't witness their loved one's pain because it touches their own pain. Fear actually prevents us from helping. Our own fear prevents us from reaching out to the people we care about so much.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

*[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]*

I think it's a way of avoiding looking at our own pain also. That doesn't mean that we then criticize those people. We shouldn't say, "Look, you can't face your own pain so you're not nice to Aunt Ethel who's dying of cancer!" It's not a thing of blaming ourselves or other people for our own inability, but it's important to just recognize what's going on. We're all very much alike, and this is a reason to have

compassion.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Many people believe that, “If I think about this, it might really happen.” This is a very common belief in many cultures. When I lived in Singapore, you weren’t supposed to talk about death because if you talk about death, it might happen. If you went to somebody’s funeral, you might actually get influenced by death. I think what’s happening at that point is we’re giving too much credit to the power of the mind. Also remember that when you’re thinking about this, you’re not wishing it for others. You’re just recognizing that this is a possible circumstance. Your motivation is not at all wishing.

*[Audience:] When I think about other people’s pain, it generates so much pain in me that I can’t get out of my own pain to help them with theirs.*

When you were talking, what popped into my mind is doing the taking and giving meditation. When you feel the pain so much that you feel overwhelmed by it, I think part of the feeling of being overwhelmed is the feeling of helplessness. If you do the taking and giving meditation, you’re imagining, “OK, I’m taking this, and I’m accepting it, but I’m also using it to destroy my own selfishness and my own ignorance, then I’m going to give to others what they need and imagine them being well and happy.” Instead of being stuck in that emotional feeling, you transform it.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Right. Exactly. Because then we're just stuck, "This is awful. This is terrible ..." It's like we're the relative of the person who's dying, and we're outside the hospital room crying and crying because they're dying. We're not available to help them when they're dying because we're crying so much. When you're doing the taking and giving meditation, imagine you're not rejecting the suffering, you're taking and accepting it, and then you're using it to transform that hard "I." You do the meditation on emptiness like that and then imagine giving to them. Compassion and love have to go together.

*[Audience:] How do I take on their suffering in the meditation?*

You imagine the suffering of the person who's being tortured. You imagine the suffering of the person who's doing the torturing, and how afflicted their mental state is. You say, "May I take all that pain and this situation upon myself." Imagine that the suffering leaves them in the form of smoke. You inhale it, and it transforms into a thunderbolt which destroys your own lump of ignorance and self-centeredness, and then the light in your heart radiates out to them, wishing them to have temporal and ultimate happiness. Does this make sense?

*[Audience:] Could you explain how to do this taking and giving meditation?*

You imagine others around you with their suffering. You develop a feeling of, “May I take their suffering upon myself so they can be free of it.” You imagine they are suffering, and their pain is leaving them in the form of smoke. You inhale it.

When you take in that smoke, it transforms into a thunderbolt, and it strikes at the lump of self-grasping fear, self-concerned immobilization at your own heart. You’re taking what others don’t want—their pain, and you’re using it to destroy what you don’t want—the cause of your own pain, that grasping mind—so that thunderbolt strikes and knocks at the lump of self-grasping and self-centeredness.

And then you sit in that open space. You remember emptiness. From within that open space in your heart, you imagine light, and you imagine transforming your body, your possessions, your positive potential and sending it out so it becomes all the worldly and trans-worldly happiness that other people need.

Remember your emptiness in this meditation. It’s very important. I was just reading “Grace and Grit”. It’s Ken Wilber’s story of his wife who is dying of cancer. She’s doing this meditation, but when he wrote it up, he left this part out of the meditation. It’s a very, very important part. It is very important that you use it to destroy that self-grasping, and that you recognize, “Oh, this is empty. My grasping, my fear isn’t there anymore.”

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Actually, if that happens and you start feeling physically sick, then you should say, “Oh good. It’s

working!” [Laughter.]

Tonight I want to explain the rest of the seven points of cause and effect. The last time we met, we talked about love being the wish for others to have happiness and its causes, and compassion being the wish that they are free of the three kinds of undesirable experiences and their causes.

Compassion is a really essential part of the path. You’ll see this in many of the texts. In one of the great texts by Chandrakirti (in which most of the text is spent talking about emptiness) the prostration verse, which is the first verse in the whole text, is “Homage to Great Compassion.” These texts, then, really emphasize compassion; you’ll find this again and again in the scriptures about how important great compassion is.

## **Great Compassion at the beginning of the path**

Chandrakirti was saying that at the beginning of our Dharma practice, great compassion is very important because it’s like a seed. When we have the great compassion, it becomes like the seed of enlightenment. It becomes the seed that will eventually turn us into Buddhas. Therefore, that seed is very important, because without the seed, you can never get the result. The great compassion, then, ensures that we enter the Mahayana path; that from the very beginning, we approach our spiritual practice with the idea of becoming Buddhas for the benefit of others rather than doing our spiritual practice basically for our own welfare. So right at the beginning, the great compassion is important to steer

us towards this grander scope, this more noble motivation.

## **Great Compassion in the middle of the path**

In the middle of our practice, the great compassion is very important because it's what keeps us going. It becomes the water and the fertilizer that enable things to grow. When we're practicing Dharma, we need a lot of energy. Our mind needs to get fertilized in many ways. When we have great compassion, it gives us that far-reaching attitude, it gives us the strength of mind to confront the various difficulties that arise in our practice.

Great compassion is important, also, because practice isn't easy. (Well actually, they say it's quite easy. It's just our mind won't let it be easy.) We need a certain strength of mind and a certain willingness to go through ups and downs continuously. We need that long range attitude—some kind of really deep motivation, a strong motivation to keep us going—because trying to subdue the attachment and the ignorance doesn't always come easily, as we see so readily in our daily life. We think we're really getting somewhere and then we lost our temper. It's compassion that keeps us going long term, that gives us the energy. Because you see, if we are working basically for our own benefit, then when things start going wrong in our practice, we just lose our energy, and we say, "This isn't doing any good. I'm not getting anywhere. What's the use? This is a drag. My knees hurt. My head hurts. It's boring. Let's go to the ice-cream parlor." We just want to drop everything

and split.

It's compassion, then, that keeps us hanging in there, instead of letting our mind get overwhelmed by discouragement. With compassion, we have a much bigger scope. We recognize we're not doing this just for ourselves alone; it involves the happiness of many, many other beings. Because many beings' happiness is involved, we get some extra energy to do something.

You see how this works just in very ordinary circumstances. When you really care about somebody, you have extra added energy to do something. When you don't care, you don't have that energy. Normally you wouldn't get up at two in the morning to do something for somebody. But if your child is crying, you get up at two in the morning, and it's okay. So the compassion gives you an ability to do things that normally you may not do if you are doing it for just yourself.

You've heard of these extraordinary stories of somebody who has been pinned down under a rock or under a car, and somebody comes and lifts the rock or the car so the other person can get out? This kind of extraordinary thing can be done through the power of compassion.

I met one woman who's very, very heavily into drugs. When she got pregnant, she stopped taking drugs. It was really interesting. For her own benefit, she wouldn't stop. When she got pregnant, all of a sudden, because somebody else is involved, she had the strength of mind to stop. So compassion can be very strong in keeping us going whenever there are difficulties. It really becomes the water and the fertilizer of our practice.

In another way, great compassion enriches our practice in that when we act out of compassion, we accumulate very strong positive potential that nourishes and enriches our mind and makes gaining the realizations easier. The great compassion acts as that kind of fertilizer so that all of our constructive actions become much more intense. Karmically, they're much stronger. That speeds us along in the practice as well.

### **Great Compassion at the end of the path**

At the end of the path, the great compassion becomes like the harvest, the crop that you reap at the end, in the sense that the great compassion is what fuels all of the Buddha's activities. In other words, if the Buddha didn't have great compassion (which is impossible, because then he wouldn't be a Buddha, and that's the whole point), there wouldn't be a Buddha. The great compassion is what keeps a Buddha's deeds for the benefit of sentient beings ever flowing and continuous. It's what makes a Buddha's deeds spontaneous. A Buddha doesn't need to sit there and scratch their heads wondering, "Well, how do I benefit this person? Do I feel like it today? I'm a bit tired." The Buddhas don't have all of the afflictions that we have. Their beneficial actions are just spontaneous, as spontaneously as we experience anger, or even more spontaneously than that.

We can see in this way that the great compassion is important at the beginning of our practice to get us going towards Buddhahood; in the middle of our practice to keep us going and giving us that strength



of mind and ability to create a lot of positive potential; and at the end of the practice to make a Buddha's deeds spontaneous and continuously flowing for others. That's why Chandrakirti, at the beginning of his text, pays homage to the great compassion, really showing how important it is.

If you start to look at all the different bodhisattvas' deeds, the Buddha's deeds, and all that the Buddhas do for sentient beings; if you think of a Buddha being able to manifest in millions of forms spontaneously all at the same time, to be able to benefit others; when you think of a Buddha's courageous mind that's completely joyful undergoing difficulties; and if you think of the Buddha's joyousness in doing meditation—all these different kinds of qualities of a Buddha, all those abilities and skills that are really the source of sentient beings' well-being, all come from the great compassion.

### **All happiness in this world stems from Great Compassion (the Buddha)**

It's interesting, because in the texts, they trace even the liberation of the arhats as coming from a Buddha. All the virtue, all the liberation, all the good qualities in the world come from the Buddha. Why? Because it's the Buddha that gave the teachings that enables sentient beings to follow the path, to purify their minds and gain these realizations, and to therefore gain the spiritual realizations.

It's also due to the Buddha's teachings that sentient beings know what to practice and what to abandon; therefore, they can then take some

responsibility to abandon negative actions and create positive actions.

One way of looking at it, then, is that all the happiness that exists in the world, all the happiness of all spiritual realizations, they all have their root in the Buddha, because the Buddha is the one that explained to people how to do this. The Buddha came from being a bodhisattva, because anybody who is a Buddha was initially a bodhisattva. The bodhisattva came from bodhicitta, this altruistic intention to become a Buddha for the benefit of others, and the bodhicitta arose due to great compassion.

Great compassion, therefore, becomes the source of ultimately the bodhicitta, the bodhisattva, the Buddha, the arhats, also all the temporal pleasures of sentient beings that they gain in creating good karma, and the ultimate realizations. So that all come via this root, from the great compassion. Is that clear?

That's why, when you think about it, great compassion is so important. If we think about it, we can also see how much we, personally, have benefited from the great compassion of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Whatever benefit we've received from the Dharma teachings—when you just look at your own life, whatever benefit you've received from the Dharma teachings—again it's all due to the Buddha having given those teachings. The Buddha having given the teachings depends on the Buddha having cultivated the great compassion on the path. We can just see in that way how much we personally have benefited. In this very lifetime, so much of our own confusion and spiritual malaise has been pacified, and that pain alleviated due to the existence of great

compassion.

So great compassion becomes something that's really quite admirable, something that's very special; and in that way, if we have that appreciation for what great compassion does, then our heart opens. We really want to develop it inside, because if we look at the world, then it seems that of all the things we can do in this world, there's nothing else as valuable as generating great compassion.

### **Great Compassion is necessary to achieve Buddhahood quickly**

The stronger our great compassion is, then the stronger is the bodhicitta. The stronger the bodhicitta, then the quicker we attain Buddhahood. So if we want to attain Buddhahood quickly, the root is through developing very, very strong great compassion.

It's also through the great compassion that people then attain enlightenment in that very lifetime. Because to attain enlightenment in this body, in this lifetime, necessitates entering into the Vajrayana vehicle, and the foundation for entering the Vajrayana is the great compassion. Again, we come back to the great compassion as being the source of quickly attaining enlightenment, of making quick progress along the path, of entering the Vajrayana vehicle. So it becomes really important all the way around.

Also, think of all the happiness in the world, and how all happiness comes about due to good karma, which comes because the Buddha instructed sentient beings what to abandon and what to practice. This happens because the Buddha was very selfless, and

this came from the bodhicitta, from great compassion. It's like our whole lives are wrapped up, somehow interconnected with the great compassion of those beings who have the integrity and the strength to train their minds in that way. When we see how we have benefited and we really have some appreciation for that noble quality, then something in our heart changes. Something flips over and great compassion becomes the most important thing in our life, the most worthwhile thing in our life.

At one course I was teaching, I asked people to imagine that they were dying and to look at their life: what were the things that they regretted doing in their life and what were the things that they felt very good about. We did that and we talked about it afterwards. There was incredible consensus in the group that the thing that people felt good about having done in their life, considering that they were going to die, was all the things that they shared with other people, was the love and compassion shared with other people. Universally, all the things people felt lousy about in their lives, were the things that occurred when self-centeredness had taken control of their mind.

You can see, then, that great compassion benefits others, and it's something that very directly benefits us too. If we have great compassion, then when we die, there's no regret. There's no self-hatred. There's no disappointment. So great compassion is very, very important.

## **Great Compassion as an antidote to low self-esteem**

I have mentioned that at the conference with the

Dalai Lama the Western teachers brought up this issue of low self-esteem, and how surprised he was about it. Then later on, after that conference, I heard His Holiness give some public talks, and it was so interesting, because from time to time, he would bring up low self-esteem. Before, he never used that term. Then after that conference, he started using it. He always recommended compassion as an antidote to low self-esteem. I thought, “Compassion. Why compassion?” When you’re thinking about compassion, the object in your mind is other sentient beings. How does that help you develop self-confidence, because you need self-confidence to get over your low self-esteem. How does that work?”

So I thought about it. “Why did His Holiness say this? Is it just because he always tells people to meditate on great compassion whenever something is wrong? What was the sense of it?” My own personal thinking after I thought about it, is that when we’re involved with low self-esteem, we’re really spiraling around the “I”. There’s a very solid, concrete “I”, and we’re completely spiraling around it as if we were attached to it with elephant glue. There’s no space in the mind. The mind is very tight. When there’s great compassion, the mind is so open and spacious. When there’s compassion in the mind, there’s just space. I think when there’s space, then there’s automatically some sense of well-being and some sense of self-confidence.

I wonder if we really need to meditate on self-confidence specially. I don’t know. I’m not sure. Maybe just meditating on the great compassion will do it. Because when we think about great compassion,

and when we think about the benefits that we received from other people's great compassion, then our mind gets uplifted, it gets joyful. When we think about our relationship with other beings and how wonderful it would be if we have the great compassion and give to others some of the things that we have received so kindly, then somehow, the mind, the heart, everything just opens.

Maybe we should do an experiment. We can have everybody do a personality test, and then half the room meditate on great compassion, half of the room not meditate on great compassion for a period of time, and then everybody take the test again. I wonder what would happen? It might be a good experiment to try. Just try it for a week, everyday consecutively meditating on great compassion and see what kind of change comes in your mind. We could see if by meditating on great compassion, inadvertently our feelings about ourselves also change.

Also, your feeling of refuge would probably change through meditating on great compassion, because when we meditate on great compassion, we appreciate the qualities of the Triple Gem even more. We also realize, when we meditate on great compassion, how much we need the guidance of the Triple Gem, and this understanding really increases our refuge too, because we really feel that close bond with them and appreciation for them.

## **6 & 7. Great Determination and the Altruistic Intention**

The thing with great compassion is that great compassion is for *all* sentient beings. Sometimes they split fine hairs, and they talk about the difference between an arhat and a bodhisattva: that arhats have compassion and love, but bodhisattvas have much greater compassion and love. (This is just for those of you who like to split hairs.) The idea is that the arhats have compassion for “limitless” sentient beings, but not for “all” sentient beings; and the difference being that when you go to the beach, the beach has “limitless” grains of sand, but not “all” grains of sand.

Another way that they differentiate the compassion of an arhat and the compassion of a bodhisattva, is that an arhat wants sentient beings to be free from suffering, but a bodhisattva wants to save them from the suffering him or herself. So there’s more involvement on the part of the bodhisattvas.

Other people describe the difference as that the arhats would have love and compassion, but they wouldn’t have this sixth step, which is the great determination. The great determination is this willingness to involve oneself in the actual process of liberating others. This point isn’t splitting hairs. It isn’t like the difference between “limitless” and “all,” although there is a big difference between “limitless” and “all,” isn’t there?

They say that the difference between having compassion and having this next step—the sixth step, the great determination—is that with compassion, you *wish* others to be free of suffering and its causes, but with the great determination, you are going to *act* upon it. You are going to do something about it. It’s the difference between standing at the edge of the

swimming pool, saying, “Somebody’s drowning! Somebody’s drowning! Jump in and save him!” and jumping in yourself. So there’s a big difference there, a real big difference.

With the great determination, then, there’s this real willingness to bear all the difficulties that come from getting involved with sentient beings. And as we all know, sentient beings can be very difficult. But with the great determination, there’s so much love and compassion before it, that the mind is happy to get involved. There’s a complete sense of engagement. “I’m going to do something. I’m going to act.” There’s a difference, then, between this great determination and the wish to repay the kindness of sentient beings (the third step, wanting to repay the kindness of our mothers), because wanting to repay the kindness is *wanting* to repay the kindness. Great determination is, “I’m *going* to repay the kindness.”

Somebody made the analogy that it’s the difference between shopping around and thinking of what to buy, and closing a deal. When you want to repay the kindness of mother sentient beings, it’s like you’re shopping around. With the great determination, you’re closing the deal. There’s a decision. There’s an action. The energy is going in one direction. It becomes very powerful.

### **Great Compassion/Determination inspires us to learn and to change in order to benefit others**

Then from there, because of that great determination, it’s like when you care so much for somebody that you want to free them from suffering, then you’re



going to do everything you possibly can to free them. When somebody else's pain is so close to your own heart, you're going to search for every possible method to stop that other person's pain. You might start to learn more things, do more things that you would not normally do, because you recognize you have to gain the skills in order to help that person that you care so deeply about. That's the analogy in this particular case.

When you have the great love and great compassion for all sentient beings, and you want to free them from their suffering and give them happiness, both temporal and ultimate, then you start to look around. "How can I do this? I'm just little old me. I can't even control my own mind. How can I liberate all sentient beings from samsara? I can't even liberate myself. I can't even keep my own mind peaceful for one day. I can't even keep my own mind peaceful for one hour! One minute! If I really care about sentient beings, I'm going to have to get off my butt and do something here."

We look at the situation and say, "In my present situation, how can I benefit sentient beings? If my own mind is a mess, and I try and benefit somebody else, my own mess is just going to be contagious. I'll make messes in their life." So here we start looking at who has their trip together? Who's together? Who doesn't make messes in other people's life? Who has the strength of mind to go through with all these things of helping others? Who has the wisdom to know how to help others? Who has the skill in knowing the right thing to do at the right time? Who has the consistency to keep doing it, to helping

sentient beings?

## **Only the Buddha can teach us how to benefit living beings**

When we look around for who it is who has that ability to keep benefiting sentient beings long term with skill, compassion and wisdom, we see it's only the Buddha. Only the Buddha has that ability. Mother Teresa is completely incredible. She can liberate sentient beings from dying on the street, from starvation and from loneliness, but can she liberate them and lead them to enlightenment? I mean, maybe Mother Teresa is a Buddha, I don't know, but I'm just talking about ordinary appearance.

We really have to see that benefiting sentient beings isn't just a case of putting band-aids on bad situations, and fixing bad situations. We have to see that to really benefit sentient beings is to give them the tools, so that first of all, they can abandon negative karma and create positive karma, and in that way keep themselves out of the lower realms; so that they can themselves generate love and compassion and realize emptiness; so that they can protect themselves from samsara and from getting stuck in any way.

We really come to see that enlightenment or Buddhahood is the state of mind that has the complete ability to benefit others without any hindrance from one's own side. There is still going to be hindrance from other people's side, but at least from our side, if we try and help, there won't be hindrance.

It is the same with the Buddhas now. From the

Buddha's side, there's no hindrance in helping us. From our side, there's lots of hindrance. It's like the Buddha is calling us on the phone, but we don't pick up the phone.

So what we are doing here is, due to the force of the love, the compassion and the determination, we generate the bodhicitta or the altruistic intention to become a Buddha so that we can be most effective in benefiting others. That's where the bodhicitta comes from.

## **Entering the Mahayana path**

They say when you generate the bodhicitta, you enter the path of accumulation of the Mahayana path, where you really start on the direct path to enlightenment. That's when you start the three countless great eons. They say that Shakyamuni Buddha accumulated merit for three countless great eons. Don't ask me how many years that is. But you start the process of the three countless great eons when you first generate the full bodhicitta. When we have a conscious thought to attain enlightenment for the benefit of others, that's like tasting the bark of sugarcane. It's like holding the frozen yogurt package.

It's said that when you spontaneously generate the bodhicitta, it has such a powerful impact on the mind. It's not just this conscious wish to attain enlightenment for the benefit of others, but when you spontaneously generate that wish every time you see somebody—every time you see the cat or the dog, or all these little gnats flying around nowadays, or whenever you see your boss—spontaneously in your

mind comes the thought, “I want to attain enlightenment in order to liberate these beings.” So that spontaneous thing, they say it’s so powerful on the mind. It’s such a transformative thing.

It’s sometimes interesting to sit and think about it: What would it be like to be a bodhisattva? I mean, this is a good thing just to kind of visualize and fantasize about and use your imagination. What would it actually feel like to wake up in the morning and feel really happy about life and think, “Wow, my life is so meaningful because I can use it today to benefit sentient beings.” And what would it be like to get up in the morning, and the cat leapt on your leg and grabbed onto you, and your thought was, “I want to lead him out of suffering into enlightenment.” And what would it be like when you went out of the house and there’re all these gnats flying in your face? Or when you’re driving on the highway and somebody cuts you off? Or you get into the office and your boss dumps on you?

So just to have this spontaneous wish, “I want to attain enlightenment for the benefit of these sentient beings. These people are so precious. I really want to benefit them.” Just think, what would it be like to have that kind of approach to life? I think we’ll probably be a whole lot happier than we are now! And yet it’s so funny, isn’t it? That even though we have the wish to benefit others, we ourselves will be so much happier than we are now; that in spite of that, what do we do? We just keep thinking about ourselves and how to make ourselves happy. We spend all this time just thinking about how to make ourselves happy, and we never get happy. We just

keep going around in circles. “I want this and I can’t have it. I want that and I can’t have it. I don’t want ... Why don’t these people do something? How come these people treat me this way? Nobody appreciates me ...” We try so hard to make ourselves happy. We never succeed. And yet we’d be so much happier ourselves if we just have this open-hearted loving compassion for others.

But you can begin to see that with just a slight shift in the mind, from cherishing self to cherishing others, your whole life experience goes completely upside down. Everything just looks totally different.

## **Pitfalls in Dharma practice**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

You just brought up two very important pitfalls. I think it’s good if I explain these. One of the pitfalls is this view of “Everything is perfect.” This is the New Age pitfall. “Everything is perfect as it is.” You hear this in Buddhism too, but we misinterpret it. When Buddhism says “Everything is perfect as it is,” it doesn’t mean “OK, therefore I just sit back and be lazy. Violence on the street is perfect, is okay.” It doesn’t mean that. This is the New Age pitfall of misinterpreting and thinking that ‘everything is perfect’ means letting everything be and not having some feeling of universal responsibility for the benefit of others. Having a sense of universal responsibility is very, very important, not only for our spiritual practice, but basically, to live peacefully on this planet. Feeling inter-related with each other.

The other pitfall you brought up was the over-achiever pitfall. “*I’m* going to attain enlightenment.” This real strong “I”. “I have to do everything perfect and this big ‘I’ is going to become a big Buddha because this big ‘I’ wants big glory and big recognition.” So making the “I” real solid there. That actually isn’t real bodhicitta. If you want to become a Buddha so that you can be better and stronger and have everybody call you ‘the child of the Buddha’ and make offerings to you, then that isn’t the bodhicitta because the bodhicitta is a real un-self-centered motivation. If you grab on to the self as this really strong, inherently existent thing, and you’re doing it for your own fame and reputation and pride, then it never really becomes the bodhicitta. I guess it’s the difference between buying a real ‘members only’ jacket and some old rag. There’s a real big difference.

There’s also another pitfall which is called “Mickey Mouse bodhisattva”. I remember once when I lived in France, we had this tradition that every time Lama Zopa came, the members of the institute would put together a skit, a Dharma skit, and present it. So one year they did “Mickey Mouse bodhisattva”. It was so funny. “Mickey Mouse bodhisattva” worked in the Dharma center and somebody came and said, “I want to go to the retreat and I can’t afford it. Please can you help?” So “Mickey Mouse bodhisattva” opens the Dharma center’s coffers and says, “Here, have some money. It’s okay.” Completely became this Pollyanna, goody-goody, totally irresponsible.

So that’s another pitfall—‘Mickey Mouse bodhisattva’—being really irresponsible about how we help others. Bodhicitta isn’t, “I have such great

compassion for this alcoholic who is having DT, so I'm going to give him a bottle of booze and calm him down." Bodhicitta isn't giving everybody everything they want. It isn't giving your kid their fifth set of Lego's, or three ice cream bars in a row. It isn't just giving everything people want. It has a certain wisdom to it.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Equalizing and Exchanging Self and Others**

Sometimes we have some understanding of the preciousness of the bodhicitta teachings, and how difficult it is to have the opportunity to hear these kinds of teachings.

When we really listen, we can feel the impact they have on our mind, and then we realize how revolutionary these bodhicitta teachings are compared to the way we spend most of our life.

When you think of how little time we have and how brief this lifetime is, and how precious these teachings are, it seems almost a miracle that we have the opportunity to experience these teachings in this lifetime.

This gives us a special aspiration to really try and put the teachings into practice because we don't have the opportunity to come into these teachings often, and usually spend our precious time idling away.

Human life is precious and it's difficult to create the causes for it. What are the causes for a precious human life? There are three of them:

1. Pure ethics
2. Prayers and dedication
3. Practicing generosity and the other perfections.

Generosity helps to create the cooperative conditions which give us the wealth, the opportunities and the ability to meet teachers, etc.



Ethics is the principal thing that is going to get us a human rebirth. That's why it's listed specially first. It's the state of our ethical conduct that determines where we are reborn. Ethics or non-ethics means either the accumulation of good karma or accumulation of bad karma through our conduct. Ethics is the chief thing that's going to influence which realm we're born into. This isn't theoretical, intellectual stuff. If you value your life and think you have a good deal compared to the worms and the crickets, then it's helpful to know what to do to get this opportunity again.

We have some sense of how difficult it is to get this opportunity. It's hard to create good ethics, isn't it? It's hard to stop lying. It's hard to stop ticking people off. It's hard to stop speaking cruelly to them. It's hard to be generous. We would much rather keep things for ourselves. It's hard to make prayers to have a good human life because we usually don't pray for future lives, but for the happiness of this life. Accumulating the causes to get a precious human life is incredibly difficult, and then on top of that, to create the cause to hear the teachings on bodhicitta is even more difficult. You get a sense of the impact these teachings have on your mind, and you see how special they really are. When you're drowning in the ocean of your own self-involvement, you want to cling to the lifeline of the bodhicitta teachings like flies to fly-paper—it's that hard to find the teachings.

**Cultivating bodhicitta through equalizing and exchanging self and others**

There are two ways to develop bodhicitta. One way is the seven points of cause and effect. The second is Shantideva's method, called equalizing and exchanging self and others.

Shantideva is the author of the "Guide to the bodhisattva's way of life". He was a great Indian pundit who completely blew everybody's mind. When Shantideva lived in the monastery, they said he only did three things: he ate, he slept, and he went to the toilet. That was all they saw, and they criticized him a lot.

Although he was an incredible practitioner, they wanted to kick him out of the monastery because they thought he was just a drag in the monastery. They tried to humiliate him and asked him to give teachings, thinking that he wouldn't be able to say anything. They wanted an excuse to say, "Oh look, this guy is just an idiot in the monastery who does nothing but eat. Let's kick him out!" So they set up this really high throne without any stairs so he couldn't possibly get on, and asked him to give teachings. Shantideva put his hand on top of the throne, brought it down, stepped on it and went back up again.

And then he proceeded to give the teaching which was the "Guide to the bodhisattva's way of life." When he reached the ninth chapter on "Emptiness", he disappeared into the sky and all they heard was his voice. They decided to keep him after all. They thought, "Well, maybe this guy knows what he's talking about."

## **Equalizing Self and Others**

When we talk about equalizing self and others, it can include equalizing friend, enemy, and stranger, but it also includes equalizing ourselves and others: how we ourselves and others are equal. When I had teachings on this from Serkong Rinpoche, he taught it in nine points. It's a unique method which is quite powerful.

### **LOOKING FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF OTHERS ON THE CONVENTIONAL LEVEL**

#### **1. Everyone equally wants happiness and freedom from suffering**

Serkong Rinpoche said the first step in equalizing ourselves and others (the first part of equalizing and exchanging self and others) is to remember that everybody wants happiness and nobody wants suffering with equal intensity. When you really sit and think about it, you realize that as intensely as you want happiness, so does everybody else. Similarly, as intensely as you do not want pain, so does everybody else.

What's the difference between me and everybody else? How can I go around and say, "me, me, me," when in fact we are all exactly equal in wanting happiness and not wanting pain? This is again something that's very obvious, but when we let it sink in our mind, it's really profound.

When you apply it to situations when you have a conflict with somebody—you want to do this and the other person wants to do that—it helps if you reflect

deeper and ask yourself, “What’s the difference between me and this person? We both want happiness, we both want to avoid pain.” And then our own thought of having to get our own way evaporates, because what do we back it with? I want to have it my way because “It’s my way!” That’s the only reason, but obviously invalid.

That’s not to say that we always give up our way. If we have a reasonable position that can be explained to others, that is something beneficial, that’s one thing. But here we are talking about the kind of mind that just gets into, “I want it my way because I want it that way!” This is where we really think about self and others wanting happiness. But it’s hard to maintain that view. For example, you get on a crowded bus, you feel tired and you want to sit down. Then you think about it and say, “Oh but the other guy wants to have the seat as much as I do.” You start applying this to many areas of your life.

## **2. Despite varied needs, all have the wish for happiness**

A good way to illustrate the second step is to imagine ten beggars on the street. All of them might want something different, but they’re all the same in that they need something. There’s no real difference between the beggars. All of them need something even though what they need might be something different. But their state of neediness is the same. And so in the same way, we, our friends, our enemies, strangers, all sentient beings equally are in that state of needing happiness, needing something, feeling

unfulfilled. We realize again that there's no difference between ourselves and others. There's no difference between friends, people we don't get along with and strangers in feeling unfulfilled, insufficient, in need of things, and wanting happiness.

### **3. Despite varied needs, all have wish for freedom from suffering**

To understand the third step, imagine if you have ten sick people and all of them want to be free of their suffering. Although they might have different illnesses, that feeling of wanting to be free of the misery of sickness is exactly the same. And so again, just like the example of the beggars, we realize how our dear ones, strangers and people we don't get along with, are not any different from us in that they are all in this state of just wanting to be free of their pain.

These are things that you should really allow to sink in your mind. Don't just keep them on the fuzzy intellectual level with words, but take out specific examples of people and reflect deeply about them.

### **4. The kindness of others**

The fourth step is to remember that others have been kind to us and how all of our happiness comes from others.

When we were talking before about the kindness of sentient beings, we used the kindness of our mother or caregiver when we were little as an example. Here, we are not limiting it just to other sentient beings

when they were in the role of being a caregiver, but to other sentient beings at this very moment; how all of our happiness depends on them.

Here you have the meditation of looking at your food and looking at one grain of rice, and thinking how many different beings are involved in your having that one grain of rice: the person who cooked it; the person who bought it at the store and who carried it to the store, who harvested it, who grew it, who planted it, who tilled the ground, who developed the machines for tilling the ground, etc. All these different implications come up when we start thinking of one grain of rice and all the different beings who put effort into our having that one grain of rice.

When you think about the broccoli and the carrots and the tofu, the amount of effort that other people put in for us to get one meal is quite remarkable. We hardly ever really think about that. It's like the food is there, and we finish it like a vacuum cleaner. But when we think again, how many beings went into the production of this food, it's really tremendous.

Think about the clothes you have on. You think of all the people who bought you clothes, who gave you money to buy the clothes, who gave you the job, who gave you the education to get the job. Where did your clothes come from if you're wearing cotton? Who sewed the cloth? Who designed the cloth? Who dyed it? Who cut it out? Who packaged it? Who grew the cotton? Who designed and made the machines that harvested the cotton? Who made the thread? You keep going on and on, and see so many sentient beings are involved in just the clothes that you wear.

Go on to the house that we live in. All the sentient

beings involved in building our house, from the people who designed it, the plumbers, the electricians, the architect, the engineers, and just how everything we have, all the things that we use so naturally, came because of the kindness of others, because of the effort they put in. How everything we know, our whole education, again, comes from the kindness of others.

All the knowledge we have, the know-how, just being able to read—it all came due to others. Sometimes I think we take the ability to read for granted. Once when I was in Tibet and way out in the middle of nowhere, we stopped in one small village and stayed at someone's house. The son of that house owner was twenty-three years old and he wanted us desperately to take him to Nepal because he wanted a better life. He didn't know how to read.

I thought, "What would it be like to be twenty-three years old, and not know how to read?" What can you do? What can you learn? How limited your life is by not knowing how to read. This made me reflect on all those teachers who spent so many hours teaching me how to read. And all those people who wrote the SRAs that I hated so much. Remember SRA? But it was because of all those people who designed the SRA that we learned how to read. And all the people who wrote the spelling books. Remember those obnoxious spelling books? But again, it's due to their kindness. We look at them as if they were obnoxious, but it was really due to the people who spent hours and years writing, designing and teaching us all that, that we know how to read. They have made our life so much more complete and

given us hope and potential.

When you start to really think of all the things we know and all the people that were involved in giving us an education, it's totally mind-blowing! We begin to really sense how, if it weren't for the efforts of others, we wouldn't be able to do anything. Zilch! All the things that we think, "Oh, I'm talented. I'm so good at this. I'm such an expert in this." This really comes from the people who taught us. Let that sink in your mind.

When you get in the car to drive home, think about all the people who made your car. All the people who worked at Toyota, or who worked at GM, or wherever your car is from; all those people working in the factories, hour after hour after hour, building those parts, or working in the mines, getting the raw materials to make the car.

And all the people who made the roads. It's horrendous making roads. When you're in India, you go on some of these roads in the mountains, where the cliff is here and the cliff goes down there, and the road is right in the middle; there are actually people working with hammers to build the roads. Forget about machinery, they are out there with hammers, hammering the rocks. They take the rocks down, mix all the tar, build the fire and then mix the tar and the asphalt right along the side of the road. It really stinks, and they breathe that in all day. They make a fire on the side of the road and put all the stuff in this cut-out garbage can and stir it around. They then pour it over the side of the road. Some of the people even die making the roads that you drive on.

We are totally dependent on others for the many



things that you and I use all the time but take so much for granted. Really let that sink in the mind. We could go on and on and on about this. Take any little thing. You can take the clock or the glass of water and you start thinking about all the people behind it. How kind others have been to us. How much we have received from them.

## **5. The benefits we have received from others far outweighs the harm**

And then a question comes. “Yes, but they’ve also harmed me.” They did this and they did that: “They made the roads but they screwed up. They stole the taxpayers’ money and the roads don’t last very long. They put the ‘Stop’ sign at the wrong place and they put these obnoxious speed bumps in. They put circles in the middle so you don’t know whether to go this way or around them.” “They harmed me so much. I’ve been abused. I have been led into this. This is unfair and this is untrue. These people lie about me. They destroy my reputation. They talk behind my back. They blame me for things I didn’t do. They don’t appreciate the things I do.”

When we talk about the things that people do wrong, the incidents come to our mind effortlessly. But when we talk about how others have been very kind, we have to slow down because they don’t come easily to our mind. [Laughter.]

But the doubt comes, “They’ve also harmed me.” When we start thinking about it, in reality, the harm we’ve received is nothing compared to the benefit we’ve received. We’re not whitewashing the harm,

but the benefits just totally outshine the harm. Just think of anything you have that you enjoy and any kind of harm that you've also received, and you realize that you've received much more help than harm from others in this life.

I was talking with my sister-in-law over the weekend. She was telling me that my brother took my two nieces skiing in Colorado just before that. She said that when they grow up, they'll remember, "Dad took us here. Dad took us there. He was real kind to us." But they won't remember all the loads of laundry she did and all the lunches she packed. All the times she picked them up and gave them a ride to school; all the times she cleaned up the mess on the floor. I told her that it was through Buddhism that made me really start appreciating what my mother had done, because I started thinking of all the meals she must have cooked her whole life for me. And I started thinking about that: 365 days a year, multiplied by how many meals each day and packed lunches, and the many years she cooked—it's a phenomenal number of meals that she had cooked!

And then I think of going shopping in the supermarkets. I hate shopping, but she likes it, thank heavens. Still, I thought about all the hours she spent shopping for the kids and doing housework. So I told my sister-in-law that it took me a while, but eventually I began to appreciate it—how many loads of laundry she did, and things like that.

When you really start thinking about how much help you've received from others compared to the amount of harm you've received, the harm really pales. Truly, it pales. What makes the harm stand out

so vividly in our mind is simply this factor of inappropriate attention. Remember we talked previously about the causes for the arising of the afflictions, and the last one was inappropriate attention or unreasonable thinking? That's this one. The harm becomes so noticeable and well-remembered simply because we put our attention on it. If we put that same faculty of attention on a more appropriate subject and we start remembering all the help and benefit we have received, then all the harm would appear to be small in comparison. All of this really has to do with how much attention we put on things.

When you look at a drawing of an optical illusion, what you pick out of the background depends on how you look at it. You might see a box or a square, an old crow or a beautiful woman. But it's actually the same drawing. How we look at things determines how they appear to us: what we perceive and what we remember.

We should remember the kindness of everybody, not just those who are related to us. Then upon deeper reflection, we realize the harm that we have received is nothing compared to all the benefits we have reaped.

## **6. Letting go of anger**

From there, we move on to the sixth step, which is another part of our mind saying, "Yes, compared to the amount of benefits they've given me, they haven't harmed me much. But when they've harmed me, shouldn't I get my revenge?"

Our mind comes up with lots of things. “OK. Sure, they’ve helped me more than they harmed me. But still, I want my revenge for the harm they’ve given me.” And then the question comes up: is revenge worthwhile? Someone gave this example, which I find quite effective: imagine if somebody was on death row and they were going to get executed tomorrow morning. That person spends the night thinking about how to harm their enemies or the people who have harmed them. For someone who doesn’t have very long to live, it would be foolish to spend that short amount of life left plotting how to harm somebody and how to get revenge.

If you were with someone who was dying, and they were telling you how much they wanted to harm somebody before they die, it would seem so stupid. What do you get out of it? Zero. You’re going to die! And compared to oneself dying, who cares about getting revenge? Anyway, after we die, we won’t even be there to enjoy the revenge. And even if we’re there, what’s there to rejoice about harming somebody else?

We begin to see that wanting revenge is a completely ridiculous attitude. It’s really good to search our own minds, because we may not overtly think that we want to avenge something harmful that has been done. But look at the different grudges we hold. Look at the residual thing of, “I’m not going to forget that.” Look at the bad feelings that we hold year after year after year inside of us because of things that happened in the past. What use is it? What benefit does it do? We don’t know how long we’re going to live. What use is it to spend the time that we

have and the preciousness of this life holding on to grudges?

In thinking about all these points, it makes us look at our relationships with people from a really different perspective. It also helps us recognize their kindness while letting go of the grudges and the wish for revenge. In the process, we learn to appreciate that others and ourselves are exactly equal in wanting happiness and not wanting pain. In fact, when you think deeply about these points, it transforms the way you relate to other people and the way you think of yourself. And we realize that somehow, we can't continue in our same old ways.

But then you might find there's part of you inside that says "Yes, but ...". There's always resistance. If I look at people in a different way, if I let into my heart how much kindness people have shown me, if I let go of my grudges, who am I going to be? I won't be *me* anymore. I won't know who I am. I won't have my identity. I won't have my life purpose. Then you can really start to see how we create our concept of self, and how we solidify it and cling on to it out of fear. Even though it causes us so much trauma and misery, we continue to hold on to it because we are afraid that if we don't have it, who are we going to be? If I actually forgive this person who harmed me, who am I going to be? If I actually stop feeling like this isolated island, who am I going to be? If I let myself look at other people and strangers with an eye of kindness, who am I going to be? You can start to see ego shake. That's okay, let it shake. That's a good kind of earthquake.

We can look at the whole issue of self and others from a different perspective. The points we just looked at examines the relationship between self and others from the relative point of view. We recognize that although we see ourselves as very separate entities in society, in actual fact our functioning and our ability to function as a person in society is interdependent with others. These six points deal in a relative way about how we aren't separate, isolated islands. Even if we wanted to be, there's no way that we could possibly be. We know everything that we are, in a relative functioning way, is interdependent with other sentient beings.

## **LOOKING FROM ULTIMATE LEVEL**

Then the last three points here, are seeing how the self and others, in terms of ultimate truth, aren't completely separate independent categories. Looking in a relative way, we aren't completely isolated and independent. Looking in an ultimate way, we aren't either. Why not?

### **7. Friend, enemy, and stranger changes constantly**

One reason is that if friends and enemies and strangers were well-defined categories that inherently existed, and somebody was always one of them, then nobody would ever change places. If somebody was a friend, we couldn't quarrel with them, and somebody we quarrel with couldn't become a friend; then no one could become a stranger.

In other words, we would always relate to

everybody in exactly the same way. There are these solid, fixed categories of friend, enemy and stranger. Remember 'enemy' doesn't mean Saddam Hussein. It means anybody whom we don't happen to like at any particular moment.

But these aren't inherently existent, solid categories. They're categories that are fluid and dependent. One moment somebody is in one category and one moment they're in the next, and then they go to the next, and then they go to the next.

What we're getting at, is that friends, enemies and strangers aren't independent inherent categories that somebody always belongs to. They're things that arise dependently. And if there were inherent friends, enemies and strangers, if there was an inherent me and an inherent other, then the Buddha will see it. The Buddha has an omniscient mind that knows all of reality, he'd definitely be able to see that there are these fixed categories. But for the Buddha, there aren't fixed categories like this.

They tell the story: one side of the Buddha, there's somebody coming and offering him things, praising him and saying everything good we fantasized about that we wish somebody would tell us, "You're so wonderful. You're so good."

On the other side: somebody is beating him up. They're antagonistic. They're harmful. They're trying to harm the Buddha. From the Buddha's side, he has equal feelings towards both these people. Whether somebody loves him and praises him or somebody hates him and tries to destroy him, from the Buddha's side, there is equal feeling for both these people.

Again, if they were inherently good or bad people,

inherently existent friends, enemies and strangers, then the Buddha would definitely see it because of his omniscient mind. But the Buddha doesn't see that. Buddha looks at these two different people as totally equal. This is another reason, why there aren't independent categories. This might seem difficult for us to understand: "Obviously something must be wrong with the Buddha, if he looks at the person who praises him and the person who harms him with equally kind eyes. How could anybody in their right mind do that?"

## **8. Our relationships are not fixed**

The Buddha could do that because of his ability to look beyond the superficial appearances. He recognizes that the person who praises you today but harms you tomorrow, and the person who harms you today but praises you tomorrow, are both the same in praising you and harming you. Why discriminate between them?

If you can remember that the person who is threatening you, has at some time in the past benefited you and saved your life, then you can recognize you don't have a fixed relationship with this person. Nor does that person have a fixed character where every interaction is harmful to you. But the person who is threatening you now has saved your life before, and that person who's saving your life now has assaulted you before. You should not just stick to what's happening to you at this very moment, but get a bigger picture of who is helping and who is harming.

We can see how easy it is to look at somebody, and



think that the relationship with them are very fixed and cast in concrete. But they aren't. Maybe some of your friends are now your enemies after just one week. Some of your enemies are now your friends. And strangers are now friends. It's strange, isn't it? Just one week. And yet last week, we were so sure that things would stay the way they were.

## 9. Self and others don't exist inherently

The last reason why self and others aren't isolated, independent units, is because they arise completely in dependence on each other, like this side of the street and the other side of the street. I'm here, and I look and I say, "*That* side of the street." And "*This* side of the street." And it looks like a completely inherent thing. *This* side of the street is *this* side of the street. It's not *that* side of the street. And *that* side is *that* side. It's not *this* side. But all I have to do is cross the street. And *that* side of the street becomes *this* side of the street. And *this* side of the street becomes *that* side of the street. *This* and *that*, close and distant, completely arise and depend on each other. One side of the street isn't inherently *this* side, and the other isn't inherently *that* side. It's only labeled *this* or *that*, depending on where you have to be.

Similarly, I always feel like I am inherently *me*, and you are inherently *you*. But this again arises in total dependence because if I were inherently *me*, then you would look at me and say "me". And you would call yourself "other", because I'm inherently *me*.

If I'm inherently *me*, completely independent of other things, then everybody should see this body of

mine as “me”. That means, when you look at me, you should say, “me”. Since you are inherently *other*, when you look at yourself, you should say “other”. We’re looking at it from *my* point of view and I’m right. [Laughter.]

But “me” and “you” don’t exist as those hard and separate categories. Depending on which side you identify a person from, it can be “me” or “you.” This whole feeling we have of “me,” “I’m so important,” “My needs. My wants. My wishes. My concerns. How I fit in. My neuroses.” From somebody else’s point of view, it’s like looking at “other.” It just depends upon which side of things you’re looking at it from.

It’s like the streets. Depending upon which side of the street you are on, it becomes “me” or it becomes “other”—*this* side of the street or *that* side of the street. Whether something is “me” or “other” is completely dependent on labeling. It’s not inherent. We look at this and we feel like inherently *me*, especially with our bodies. “My body is me. This is me. *That’s* you. *This* is me.”

But if you look, when you sit there and you feel all the different parts of your body, and you say, “What is inherently *me* about this body?” You begin to recognize that this thing that feels so strongly like “me” is actually an accumulation of broccoli and carrots and cauliflower and noodles. And if you eat meat, your body is an accumulation of fish and lamb. All these other sentient beings who are “other,” have become “me.” What was “other” is now my body. What was somebody else’s body, that we ate, now became my body.

We begin to see that the object of our strong attachment—our body, ‘*me*,’—is something that’s totally dependent on where you happen to be standing. And what you look at, because there’s nothing particularly *me* about this body.

Here’s something real interesting: Next time you cook for somebody, dish out two plates of food. You think, “If I eat this plate, this plate is going to become me. And that plate is going to become my friend. If I eat that plate, that plate is going to become me, and this plate is going to become my friend.” And then you begin to get this weird feeling of, “What is my body?” This could become me or that could become me. That could become my friend or this could become my friend, depending on which one I eat.

Similarly, when we look at our body and somebody else’s body, what is it that causes us to be attached to our body? Why do we cling to this body as *me* and not to the other body as *me*? Kind of weird, isn’t it? We begin to see that self and others do not have hard and fast distinctions. When we begin to loosen that up, it becomes much more possible to feel the equality between self and others. It just depends on which plate of broccoli you eat. The broccoli is the same, isn’t it? So why do I cling on to this body—it could have been this plate of broccoli or that one—and make such a big deal out of it? Why don’t I have nearly as much concern with somebody else’s body? It gives us some kind of insight how our mind identifies things and makes things really solid and quite separate.

A pregnant lady probably doesn’t have much of a sense of the baby and her being real different. It’s like

your belly is out to here, but the whole thing is me. At one point, it's me, and then five minutes later, when the baby is born, "Oh, there's you!"

You can really see how labeling 'I' and "other" is very relative. When we look at our body to start with, we feel like, "My body is *me*." But actually, our body belongs to our parents. Our body is our dad's sperm and our mom's egg. There's nothing particularly "me" about this body. I didn't create it. It isn't mine. It actually belongs to them. It's funny—all the different ways you can look at your body. It isn't mine at all.

It belongs to others. Totally.

## Questions and answers

*[Audience:] If I'm not me, why do I have to get enlightened as opposed to the other?*

You aren't inherently you, but you are relatively you. The river isn't an inherent river. It's this changing, continuation of things. You have special karmic connections with certain people simply due to all your history in cyclic existence. Because of that previous connection, the easiest way for some sentient beings to become enlightened is by listening to you and your guidance. So you have to get enlightened to help them.

There's no difference in terms of your wanting happiness and, say, a plumber wanting happiness. There's no inherent you and there's no inherent plumber, but on a relative level, you exist. The plumber exist. Both of your happiness and suffering exist and he is a sentient being who has benefited us

and who wants to be happy. On a relative level, all these things exist.

But if the plumber rips me off, it won't be an act of compassion if I don't do anything about it because there's no real difference between me and him. It's like how you would deal with your child if he misbehaves. If I think that just because there's no difference between me and my child, I can patiently allow him to do anything he wants, he's going to grow up like an animal. He won't have any discipline. Out of compassion for him, you have to guide him properly.

Similarly, out of compassion for the plumber, we will have to say or do something to stop him from creating negative karma in future lifetimes. But what it takes is re-training our mind to think in this different way. It takes time to get there.

I remember once, I was on the phone with somebody. Although this person got so mad, I was able to think about it and remain calm. I saw that the person was under a lot of stress. From my side, I didn't take it personally.

And then I thought, "Well, should I have gone back to this person and really talk it through and say, 'Hey, is everything okay? What's going on with you?'" At that moment I realized that I actually wasn't that compassionate by assuming that it was sufficient that I did not get angry. I didn't care enough about the other person to ask, "Hey, what's happening with you? Is everything alright?"

It was interesting because I said, "OK, at least I didn't get angry." That's something in a good direction. But it would have been nice if I was really

able to have the compassion to go back to that person and ask what's happening. The right motivation would be what is good for them, and not because I'll get anything out of it. It requires making new habits.

*[Audience:] How much can we really change given that so much of what constitutes 'me' is unconscious stuff that we have no control over?*

I think that depends very much on the individual because what we call unconscious, from a Buddhist point of view, can become fully conscious. Buddhism doesn't have this view of the mind as all those things that are perpetually unconscious, and which can never become conscious. From the Buddhist viewpoint, it's just a matter of our mindfulness and our awareness. If we really work at it slowly, like peeling layers of the onion away, all these things can come out.

We are actually very conditioned phenomena. We're conditioned by so many things in the past. But the more we recognize our conditioning, the more it gives us the ability to accept it. And in the process of accepting it, we can also start to change the conditioning.

Let's say I have a real negative self-image, and I begin to see that this negative self-image isn't me. I realize that this is a conditioned phenomenon. When I was a kid, my teachers told me I was stupid because I could never kick the softball. That could have led to my bungling up in P.E. and to the negative self-image I have.

I couldn't play musical instruments. I wasn't an artist. I realized that this negative self-image is just a

conditioned phenomenon that's dependent on statements that I've heard at various times in my life. But that negative self-image isn't me. It's just conditioned, part depending on the outside and part depending on what's coming from me.

In other words, because it's conditioned, it doesn't have inherent existence. It isn't some solid, unchanging phenomena. If something exists due to causes and conditions, then as soon as any of those causes and conditions disappear, that phenomena disappears. There's a feeling of, "Well, all these negative self-image is just a conditioned phenomenon. If I begin to change this conditioning, then this thing is going to disappear."

It doesn't have the ability to stand up on its own energy because it didn't self-create. It's simply something that arose due to other factors. Change the other factors and this thing naturally is going to change.

We have a lot of potential for change. It's not easy or quick, but there's a lot of potential. If you examine yourself closely, you'll realize that you've changed from what you were a year, or five years ago. You'll see that you've changed. Change is going to happen whether we want to or not. The practice of Dharma gives us the power to make the change go in a positive direction instead of just letting it go in any way.

*[Audience:] Where do our thoughts come from? How do they come into existence?*

Imagine looking at a still pond and then all of a sudden, this fish jumps up. Then you wonder, "Hey,

where did this fish come from?” And then as soon as it goes, you wonder, “Where did it go to?”

It’s the same for our thoughts. When a thought appears, we wonder where in the world it came from. And when it vanishes, we wonder where it went. Again, it’s all about conditioning. Somehow at that particular moment, the causes and conditions were there, and it popped up into existence.

Thoughts are interesting in that it’s a little like the fish which simply pops up from under the water. But unlike the fish which was already in existence, thoughts are different.

This is where Buddhism differs from psychology. Psychology would say your anger is there, whether you’re angry or not right now. It’s like the fish that’s under the water. The fish is there. You just don’t see the fish.

From the Buddhist viewpoint, you’d say that the seed for the anger is there, but the anger is not there right now. When the anger comes up, then that seed becomes a plant. Then it goes down into the seed again. But it’s not like it’s there as a solid thing, haunting you, trapping you, eating away at you. The potential is there. The whole full-blown plant isn’t. It’s as though there’s a lot of potential for all these thoughts, and as soon as the conditions come together, the seed sprouts into a full-grown plant.

*[Audience:] What about our feelings? Where do they come from?*

It’s our thinking which creates feelings. It’s not like the feeling was there all this while, and your thinking



about it took the cloth off and revealed it.

It isn't as if your jealousy for somebody is there, but you're not seeing your jealousy because you're looking at the pizza right now. It's not like that. Rather, there's the potential for jealousy. The seed of the jealousy is there, but the feeling of jealousy isn't there. When you start thinking, "This person says this to that person and that person says this," and so on, then what you're doing is adding water and fertilizer to the seed and making it grow into a plant.

### **The mind creates everything**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

It's amazing how we piece together the different things that happen outside and how we interpret the information.

This came so clear to me during the second retreat I did which was a Vajrasattva retreat. I was sitting there in India, Tushita, during the monsoon season, trying to think about Vajrasattva. Instead I was thinking about the place where I used to live in LA. I was thinking about grammar school and college, among other things. As I thought about these things, I would feel these intense powerful emotions. And then all of a sudden it would dawn on me that none of these things is here right now. These incredibly strong emotions and those things which caused them, aren't here in that room then. Where were those emotions coming from? That's because I happened to be thinking about something. I had looked at it in a certain way, and I developed this whole thing out of a

conception in my head. It's incredible how when you meditate, it becomes really clear.

I got this great letter from one friend in India, who was at a course I had taught a few years ago. He was at a retreat. He said the morning sessions were wonderful. He felt like doing retreats forever. He just loved everybody. He loved the retreat. Everything was going well. And then about an hour after lunch, he would start getting so depressed. He hated himself. He missed his girlfriend terribly. He hated the retreat. He couldn't meditate. But by the evening, he was alright again. And he said he really began to get a sense of how much the mind creates everything: the external circumstances are basically the same—sitting in the same room, doing the same meditation. But the mind just creates two different dramas.

*[Audience:] I can see that it's possible to believe in these thoughts and that it's also possible not to believe in them. But how do you handle that part of your mind that doesn't believe?*

Sometimes I think it's just a matter of what karma is ripening at what time, but also we don't want to leave it just to karma. I think if we actually begin to—and this is where meditation helps—recognize thoughts as thoughts, and not as reality, then that automatically gives us a little bit of space. Because the thing is that very often, we're not even aware of what we're thinking. When you start to slow down and meditate, you start to become more aware of the thoughts that are going on, and then you start to be able to discriminate which thoughts are accurate and which

thoughts aren't. The more you can develop that discriminating mind, and the more you can develop the mindfulness to catch the thoughts, then the less they're going to control you.

Two things we need to do: developing the mindfulness to be able to recognize the thoughts, and the discrimination to be able to know a realistic one from a ridiculous one. It's a practice in training. That's why you try and catch the things when they're small.

Sometimes as we go through the old patterns, because they're so familiar, we forget that they're patterns. Again, we begin to think that the thoughts are reality. It's just recognizing this again and again. And I think this is where I can recognize, "This is a video. Here, I put in this video again. That's all it is, it's a habitual video."

There're some things that I can't just say right away, "Oh, this is a video." I have to completely convince myself that I'm not perceiving the situation accurately. In other words, it's not always sufficient for me to say, "Oh, this is an anger video. Let's change it." When the mind is going, "But they did this and they did that!" I have to really sit and say, "Well, yes, and then?" It's kind of like having to prove to myself again and again, why anger is unrealistic and not the only natural response to a situation. Again and again I find I have to convince myself that being angry isn't seeing the situation properly. The more and more I convince myself of that, then the easier it is to say, "Oh, it's a video and I'm not going to play it again."

But I think we do have to convince ourselves again and again that this is an affliction because we have

spent a long time convincing ourselves that the same thought is reality.

## **Dealing with anger**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

It depends a lot on the particular situation. Sometimes just getting ourselves to deal with our own emotions takes all of our own energy completely. And so at that point, we really can't expect ourselves to reach out and try and deal with the other person's stuff, because at that point, just trying to remain calm is our foremost job.

Let's say somebody said something, and I start to build up this incredible story of anger in my mind. I start to say, "They said this and they said that!" And then I might say to myself, "What was really going on? What do they really mean? Why did they say that?"

And then I might realize, "Well, actually, I don't really understand why they said that. Actually I don't understand what they meant by this comment. I thought I understood, but I actually don't. What I need is more information. My anger comes about because I jump to conclusions, thinking I've understood the other person's mind. But in actual fact, when I asked myself, there's a lack of information here. I don't understand what they really mean. I don't understand why they said that."

This is when I need to go back to that person and ask for information. And then very often, we realize that they were saying something for a totally different

reason than we thought they were. The process of going and talking with the other person gives us the information that automatically releases the anger.

*[Audience:] Is it better to help ourselves before we start helping others?*

At times, before we can care about the other person, we have to get ourselves to a balanced state of mind. It helps if we get ourselves to a balanced state of mind before we help the other person with what's going on within them.

## **REVIEW**

There are two different ways for generating the altruistic intention. One method is the seven points of cause and effect. The other is equalizing and exchanging self and others which was elaborated upon by the Indian master Shantideva. They say the advantages of equalizing and exchanging self and others, is that if you do this, you don't need health insurance, you don't need divinations, and you don't need pujas when you're sick, because you have a capacity within yourself to transform everything into the practice.

This process of equalizing and exchanging self and others and the *lojong* or the thought transformation practice which follows it, isn't about stopping external problems. It's about stopping the mind that dislikes the problems. Whenever we have an external problem, we also have a mind that dislikes it. The mind that dislikes it labels that thing as a problem, and

then exacerbates both the external thing and our internal experience of it. When you do this kind of practice, you may or may not affect what other people are doing towards you, but you're definitely affecting your perception of it and your own dislike of it, which really gives you some ability to control your experience. They say that this equalizing and exchanging self for others is for students of higher capacity, for the more intelligent students, so that's us, right? [Laughter.] OK, let's go for it.

### **Equalizing self and others**

We talked last time about equalizing self and others. We went through how friend, enemy, and stranger are equal, and how we and others are equal. We are equal because we all want happiness and we all want to avoid pain equally. We're also equal because the whole discrimination of self and others is an arbitrary one. It depends upon which side you're looking at it from. Remember last time I was saying, this is *me* and that's *you*, but from your side, this is *you* and that's *me*? So it's a very arbitrary discrimination. And it's only by the force of familiarity that we've gotten really attached to our own side and made it really solid and inherent and independent in our own vision.

In actual fact, self and others are very dependent. They're not two inherently independent things. Self and others are dependent. First, all of our happiness comes from others. We're very dependent on others; we're not isolated, independent units. And second, we become self simply because there's a discrimination of others, and others become others simply because

there is a discrimination of self. So this whole division is something that depends on each other. You can't have self without others or others without self. Although we have this feeling of "me" existing independently, it isn't so independent; it's dependent on the discrimination of there being others.

In the eighth chapter of Shantideva's text, "Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life", there is a huge chapter about equalizing and exchanging self with others. Shantideva's text is so great because within the text, he responds to all the 'but's'. In the text there's always this one little voice that says, "Yes, *but* I still can't do it because ...". And then Shantideva proceeds to demolish that objection. It's very effective because these are the same kinds of objections that our mind comes up with.

### **What it means to equalize and exchange self and others**

I'll go through some of those objections. But first, I want to clarify that when we equalize and exchange self and others, we're not saying, "I become you and you become me." And we're not saying that we switch bodies, or something like that. What we're really trying to equalize, and then later exchange, is who we consider to be the most important. Right now, it's not very equal. "I'm most important. It's very clear. And I'm attached to my own position." What we're trying to do, is first equalize the importance of self and others so that they become equal in importance. Later we exchange who we hold as most dear and who we cherish. Currently we cherish

ourselves, but we want to exchange it so that it becomes others. We very naturally and easily begin to cherish others and want their happiness with the same kind of intensity that we now cherish ourselves and want our own happiness.

This whole feeling we have of 'I', the solidity of the 'I', and the inability of 'I' to become anything else, is solely due to familiarity, due to habit. In other words, we have a body and a mind neither of which are independently or inherently existent, and on top of that, we have posited an 'I'. Which is okay, but then we make the 'I' or the self too solid. We identify the 'I' or the self with the body and with the mind and make everything terribly solid. What we're trying to do is lessen that feeling of attachment, lessen the feeling of the solidity of 'I', and lessen the attachment of that 'I' to this body and mind, recognizing that this all comes about because of familiarity. Then we begin to recognize that because of the way labeling works, we can actually begin to label others' bodies and minds 'I', and cherish them with the same intensity that we would cherish our own present happiness and the welfare of our own body and mind. This is a way to develop very deep and strong love and compassion. Actually, they say the love and compassion and altruism you develop through this method is much stronger than from the other method, the seven points of cause and effect.

The great bodhisattvas who practice this method identify themselves so closely with others that they can act on the behalf of others without any ulterior motivation. In other words, it doesn't become, "I'm helping you." But it just becomes helping. It becomes



a very pure action on the behalf of others without ulterior motivations or expectations, without co-dependence and dysfunction.

We take care of our own body and mind, because we feel it's appropriate. We don't do so with any great expectation on our body and mind. We don't see them as separate from us. That happens again, because of familiarity. What we want to do is to develop that same kind of attitude towards others so that we can help others, simply because it's appropriate, and without any grandiose expectations of being approved of, rewarded, or getting something in return. With the same naturalness that we help ourselves, we want to train ourselves to help others by identifying with them, by shifting the emphasis from this label 'I' to others, so that the object that we cherish becomes others instead of 'I'.

Understanding these teachings is not easy. It was very interesting for me preparing for these talks because I started learning this method many years ago and now I'm able to see over the years how something is sinking in and how it's making much more sense. The teaching on exchanging self and others can initially be quite shocking because it approaches things in a very different way. To really understand it is going to take time. It's going to take purification, collection of positive potential, and study under a teacher. And it's going to take much perseverance on our own part.

So equalizing self and others means that we seek the happiness of others and to separate them from their suffering to the same degree that we seek our own happiness and to separate ourselves from

suffering. Exchanging means that we do it more for them than for us.

## **OVERCOMING RESISTENCE**

### **Suffering is suffering**

At this point, one of the “Yes, but” minds comes and says, “Yes, but other people’s suffering doesn’t affect me. So why should I work to get rid of it? When somebody else gets smashed in a car accident, I’m fine. I’m walking down the street. Their suffering doesn’t affect me. Why should I do anything about it? People are starving somewhere else in the world. People are starving in our own country, but their starvation is their problem. It’s not my problem. Why should I do anything about it? My friend is completely miserable and crazy, but that’s her problem, not my problem, so why do I need to get involved?” This is the kind of mind we have.

Yes, it’s true that somebody else’s suffering doesn’t affect us the same way as it affects them. However, their suffering is no different from our own. In other words, suffering is suffering, it doesn’t really matter who it belongs to. When we look at somebody else’s suffering, that suffering so easily could be our own. It’s not like it’s a different kind of suffering that only they are liable to, but I’m not. Because we cherish our own body, we can’t bear to see it harmed. And it’s only because we don’t cherish other peoples’ bodies that we feel apathetic towards their suffering.

But again, it is just a really superficial discrimination that we’re labeling ‘I’ on this body and

not 'I' on another body. Remember, from the other person's view 'I' is labeled on their body. Our biggest obstruction to understanding this is our own grasping at 'I' and then identifying 'I' or the self with our own body. Self and others aren't two distinct categories like a chair and a table, or like the color yellow and the color blue. Yellow can't be blue, and blue can't be yellow. A chair can't be a table and a table can't be a chair. But the discrimination of self and others isn't like that, because this discrimination is made just depending on viewpoint. From one viewpoint, this is 'I' and that's 'others'. This one's happiness is most important and that one's happiness isn't. But from the other viewpoint, you say 'I' and your happiness is more important than my happiness. 'I' becomes 'you' and therefore less important.

So you see the discrimination of self and others isn't a hard and fast thing like the discrimination between yellow and blue or the discrimination between chair and table. Discrimination between self and others is just dependent on where you are in the situation, just dependent on your viewpoint. The difference between self and others is like this side of the street and that side of the street. It just depends on which side of the street you're standing on, which side becomes 'this' and which side becomes 'that'. If you cross to the other side, then that side of the street becomes 'this side', and this side becomes 'that side'. It's very dependent, it's not hard and fast categories. It's only because we've identified overly strongly with our side that we feel that others' suffering is less important than our own. It's an erroneous perception.

## **Suffering of self and others is merely labeled**

But then our doubting mind isn't happy yet. It says, "Yes, but really, others' suffering doesn't harm me. So really, why should I do anything about it?"

Shantideva said, if we're only concerned with our own present happiness now, and what we identify as 'I' right now in this present moment, our present body and mind, why then should we take care to eliminate our own future sickness or our own future suffering? In other words, if we're only concerned with 'me' and this present moment, why should we care about what happens to our own self in the future because it isn't the same 'I' as we're experiencing now.

In other words, if we're thinking, "I'm just working for 'I' and 'me', whoever is me right now. You're not me, so why should I bother about you?" Shantideva says, but yourself tomorrow isn't you right now, so why should you care about what happens to yourself tomorrow? Get it? If you're only concerned about your own benefit, then why do you care about what happens to yourself tomorrow? Why do anything for yourself tomorrow? Tomorrow's discomforts, tomorrow's sicknesses, none of them harm you right now, so why do anything about it? The self today doesn't experience the suffering of tomorrow's self.

In a similar way, the hand helps the foot without making a big deal out of it. The hand just helps the foot. The hand doesn't say, "Look, your suffering isn't my suffering, so I'm not going to help you. Tough it out, old foot, pull out your own thorn! I'm not going to help you. [Laughter.] It's not my suffering. It's not my problem. Don't get me involved."

In both of these cases, Shantideva is saying we shouldn't take care of the suffering our own future self will experience, and the hand shouldn't take care of the foot's suffering, because it's not its own.

But we do help. The hand helps the foot, and we help our own future self, because we consider ourselves part of the same thing. In other words, who I am today and who I am tomorrow, they're part of the same continuum. They aren't exactly the same, but they're part of the same continuum. Similarly, the hand and the foot aren't exactly the same, but they are part of the same collection. That's why we tend to help them.

But neither of these things are inherently existent. In other words, if we attach 'I' onto this continuum of moments of self and grasp it as an inherently solid thing, then that's a mistaken notion on our part, because this continuum is only a bunch of moments of self. We associate tomorrow's suffering and the day after tomorrow's suffering with the self that experiences tomorrow's suffering and the day after tomorrow's suffering and the self that experiences today's suffering. We associate them simply because they're all moments of the same continuum, but that continuum isn't one solid, inherent, independent unit. It's just the collection of parts of different moments. Anything that's a continuum isn't a solid thing.

It's just a collection of parts like an hour. An hour isn't one solid thing. It's a collection of minutes, it's a collection of seconds. Similarly, the self now, the self tomorrow, and the self in five years, we take care of them all, but none of them are inherently existent. It's just a dependent continuum, upon which we merely

label 'I'. There's no inherent 'I' in any of that. That's looking at it from the point of view of continuum.

From the point of view of collection, the hand and the foot are part of the same collection. On top of all the different parts of the body and mind, we label 'I', but again that collection isn't a solid, independent, single collection. The collection is simply a group of different parts. So to make the 'I' that's labeled on top of that collection too solid is a misperception. We're trying to chip away at the solidity of the 'I' because it's by making the 'I' very solid that we feel, "This is me, independent here, and that's you. So your problem is your problem and my problem is my problem. Mine is most important." What we're trying to do by thinking this way, is to chip away at how we view the 'I' as a really solid thing. In this way we're integrating the teachings on emptiness into the development of bodhicitta, which is why this method becomes very profound.

There's no independent suffering. There's no independent 'I' which is the possessor of the suffering. There's no independent 'I' which owns the suffering. So what are we getting so hung up about? How can we claim that my suffering is more important than anybody else's if there's no independent person that is possessing that? If the person that is experiencing that suffering, is something that exists just by being merely labeled on top of that collection, or on top of that continuum of moments, how can we hold on so strongly to that 'I' and the position of that 'I', if it's something that's merely labeled?

So the suffering of self and the suffering of others,

both exist by being merely labeled. They both equally exist by being merely labeled. They must both be equally dispelled simply because they're painful. In other words, pain is pain. Since there's no solid person that is possessing the pain, then it doesn't matter whose pain it is, it's pain to be eliminated. Similarly, it doesn't matter whose happiness it is, it's happiness to be developed. There's no independent 'I' there that's going to cling on to this happiness anyway. It's just something that's merely labeled. Both the happiness and the 'I' or the self who is the possessor of the happiness, exist by being merely labeled.

### **Compassion protects and benefits us**

Then the doubting mind says, "Yes, but it's really too much of a burden to cherish others more than myself, and I have enough suffering already, why should I get involved in others'?"

The answer to that is that when we develop the compassion that cherishes others more than self, that compassion actually serves to protect ourselves from suffering. In other words, it doesn't become a burden to take care of others, work for their happiness and eliminate their suffering. When you do it with a mind of love and compassion, you do it with a happy, joyful mind. It doesn't become suffering for you. It's not like you're taking on more burden or more suffering than you have already. You're doing it with a joyful mind, so actually your mind is happier than before.

There is a big difference between caring for other people in a co-dependent, dysfunctional way, and caring for people in a bodhisattva way. When we care

for people in this sticky gooey codependent way, it seems ostensibly that, “Oh, I’m working so hard for the benefit of others,” but when you really look deeper, one is working for one’s own benefit. It’s like I get something out of this relationship, so I’m going to perpetuate it. The way I perpetuate it is by doing all these things that look like I’m taking care of others, but basically I’m trying to protect my own interest. I’m not taking care of others because I really care about them. I’m doing it because I feel guilty; I feel obliged; I feel afraid of what’s going to happen if I don’t do this. That’s what’s going on in an unhealthy relationship. It seems like we really care for others but that’s not the case.

I think this is where a lot of the recovery movement has gone slightly askew, in that they get everybody saying, “I’ve taken care of others my whole life. Now I’m going to take care of myself.” When the actual fact is, they haven’t really taken care of others their whole life, because there’s been a lot of expectations and impure motivations. All they’re really doing is exchanging one selfish motivation for another, and neither frees the mind from the pain. When you think, “I’m taking care of myself now because I’m tired of taking care of others. I’m tired of sacrificing for them my whole life,” there’s so much anger in that, how can one possibly be happy?

Then there is the whole thing of setting limits and setting boundaries. In the recovery movement they often say, “I’m setting a limit. I’m setting a boundary. You can’t do this!” And as soon as you start setting boundaries, telling people what they can’t do, then you get into this really solid ‘me’ versus ‘them’



position. It just produces a lot of pain and discomfort because you get so defensive thinking, “Somebody’s walking on *my* territories. Somebody’s on *my* turf. I’ve got to stand up for *myself*. I’ve got to put them in *their* place.” It develops all these hostilities.

I do believe in setting limits and boundaries, but in my view, setting limits and boundaries is not a question of telling other people what they can and can’t do. We can’t control what other people do, can we? It’s not possible. We can tell other people what they can and can’t do until we’re blue in the face, but that doesn’t change anything. They’re still going to do what they want. To me, setting limits and setting boundaries is talking to ourselves and saying, if somebody does this, this is how I’m going to respond. So we’re trying to limit our own behavior, put a boundary on our own unhealthy response. We’re trying to limit our own guilt, our own feeling of unhealthy obligation, our own expectations, our own ulterior motivations. To me, that’s what setting limits and setting boundaries is. It’s working on the self, not working on others.

When you cherish others from a bodhisattva perspective, it’s not done out of guilt, obligation, ulterior motivations, or getting something out of it for oneself. It’s done just because suffering is suffering, it doesn’t matter whose it is. And happiness is happiness, it doesn’t matter whose it is. There’s no strong ‘I’ in this whole thing. So because there is no strong ‘I’, there’s not going to be a lot of suffering. And because one’s compassion and love for others is very genuine, then we’re going to do that with a happy mind, and taking care of others isn’t a form of

sacrifice making us feel miserable.

In our Western culture, we often think that taking care of others means I have to be miserable. In other words, I'm not really taking care of others unless I'm really suffering. We get into a whole martyr syndrome. In the case of a bodhisattva, taking care of others is done with tremendous joy. Although we say we take on the burden of caring for others, the assumption of the burden is done with incredible joy. You can get an inkling of how this is possible when you think about how sometimes there's been people that you really care about, and how you will go out of your way and do things that are very inconvenient for you or even sometimes physically painful for you, but you don't really mind it. You don't think about it, because your attention is so focused on wanting them to be happy. Once in a blue moon, this actually happens.

I think this is why the example of the mother is used so often. A mother makes huge sacrifices—especially the pain of childbirth—but it's done so happily, so joyfully for the infant. It's a real happy kind of thing. And we do it too, when we care deeply about other people. The fact that we can do this with one or two people means that it's actually possible to do it with everybody. We just have to become familiar with it and develop that kind of attitude.

### **The body is not our own**

Then the doubting mind says, “Yes, but how can I think of another's body as my own? And how can I think of somebody else's suffering as my own? How is

that possible? You're telling me to help others the same way I help myself. How can I do this?"

And to this, Shantideva has an answer that to me, is so profound. Shantideva said to look at your own body. We hang on to this body and identify with it so strongly. This is 'me'. But what is it? This body belongs to our parents. It's not our body! It came from the sperm and egg of our parents. It's not ours. When you think about it, this body arose because two other people's bodies came together. The sperm and the egg didn't belong to us. They came together and then all the subdivision happened after that. Why should we grasp so strongly on to 'I' as being 'I' when it's not our body, it's actually the body of other people?"

It's real interesting to sit and contemplate this. Just think of your own body and how it really is your parents' body. Half the genes are from your dad, the other half are from your mom. All the other atoms and molecules are from all the muesli and milk, oranges and broccoli, and whatever else you ate your whole life. So how is this body *me*? Or how is this body mine? It really isn't. When you really sit there and examine, you see it belongs to other sentient beings! It's very clear. Genetically it belongs to others. And the materials of which it is composed—all the food we ate—belongs to others. All that food—the broccoli and cauliflower, cheese, pizza, yogurt, and chocolate cake—didn't belong to me. They all belong to others. Other people gave those things to me and I ate them.

It's really weird when you think about it, because we identify so much with this body. But when you examine it with your reasonable rational mind, there's absolutely no basis to identify 'I' with this body. It

falls apart. It becomes like air. The reason for identifying 'I' so strongly with this body can't hold water. We see this whole identification happens simply because of familiarity. We can then begin to see that it is equally possible to identify the 'I' with other people's bodies. And we can associate the concept of 'I' wanting happiness with other people instead of with this one. It's just a matter of habit, just a matter of familiarization. It's really quite amazing when you think about it.

### **A matter of familiarity**

Then the doubting mind says, "Yes, it would be good to exchange myself and others, but it's too hard to do."

Shantideva replied that actually, it just depends on familiarity. He says there might have been somebody whom we really hated, but subsequently the relationship changed and now we love that person with a passion. And that whole incredible change of feeling came about simply because of familiarity, simply due to concept and familiarity. You can change the intense hatred into intense love. Shantideva said if you can do that by the power of familiarity, then what you identify as 'I' and 'others' can equally be changed by the power of familiarity. So when we say 'I', or when we say, "What is most important?" instead of attaching it to this body and mind, it becomes attached to others' bodies and minds. And it actually makes much more sense, doesn't it, because there's only one person here and infinite others there. If we're really going to be democratic about who

deserves happiness and suffering, then it really makes sense to take care of others' problems and others' welfare, because there are more of them than us. It makes sense to reassign where the importance belongs—with others.

## **The Disadvantages of Cherishing Ourselves**

To really develop this kind of exchange of self and others, we have to very clearly see the disadvantages of cherishing ourselves and the advantages of cherishing others. So we're moving on to another heading here: the disadvantages of self-cherishing. Self-cherishing, self-centeredness, and selfishness—I'm using them all synonymously—refer to cherishing ourselves, way up and beyond everybody else. Lama Zopa says that if you start listing the disadvantages of self-cherishing, you'll never come to the end of the list. [Laughter.] In other words, you can go on and on and on.

What we're trying to see here, clearly, is how the self-centered attitude is the cause of our problems. This is dramatically opposed to how we usually look at it. Because we usually have the view that if I don't take care of myself, who will? In other words, I've got to look out for myself. The part of my mind that says, "I am so important," is a very precious part of my mind, because without considering myself most important, I won't take care of myself, and if I don't take care of myself, nobody else will. If nobody takes care of me, I'm going to be miserable. That's how our usual "logic" goes. What we're starting to question

here, is this whole logic.

We're starting to question whether what we call 'I' and the self-centeredness, are one and the same. We're also questioning whether the self-centeredness is really necessary in order to make ourselves happy. We're questioning both of these things.

### **Are "I" and selfishness one and the same thing?**

First, are 'I' and selfishness one and the same thing? This has been the debate. In high school, we had this big discussion on "Are human beings inherently selfish?" Is it ever possible to get rid of our selfishness? Have you ever thought about that? From a Buddhist viewpoint, we say, "No, we aren't inherently selfish." We are selfish because of familiarity, because of habit, over a long time. But, this part of our mind, this attitude of cherishing ourselves, is not an inherent part of ourselves.

That takes us back to the analogy between the wide open sky and the clouds that obstruct the sky. In other words, the pure nature of our mind is wide, open and spacious, and the clouds—one of the clouds being the self-centeredness or the selfishness—are something that obscure the sky and can be separated from the sky. So we have the pure nature of our mind, and we have covering it, obscuring it, the self-centeredness. They are not one and the same thing. The clouds and the sky aren't the same thing. The selfishness and the pure nature of the mind, the selfishness and the merely labeled 'I', they are not the same thing. They can be separated out.

Selfishness is not an inherent part of ourselves.

And when we blame our selfishness for our problems, we are not blaming ourselves for our problems. Because 'I' and selfishness are two different things. This is real important. So when we're trying to see the disadvantages of the self-cherishing and blaming the self-cherishing for all the hassles it causes us, we're not blaming ourselves. Because the self or the 'I' is just a merely imputed thing on top of this accumulation of aggregates. It is not the same thing as this self-centeredness which is one of these cloud-like mental factors, or cloud-like attitudes that is obscuring the nature of the mind.

*[Audience:] Can you explain the difference between blaming our selfishness and blaming ourselves?*

Blaming ourselves? For example, I look at a situation where I really dumped on somebody because I was very self-absorbed and self-concerned. I recognize that the problem in this relationship arises due to my self-concern and self-absorption, and I blame that selfishness for the problem. But I'm not saying I'm bad. So we're separating ourselves from the selfishness, recognizing that the selfishness can be dropped and gotten rid of, but the self continues. We can blame the selfishness for the problems but it doesn't mean we're blaming ourselves. This is a subtle distinction. Although it seems subtle at the beginning, after a while, you can really begin to see it quite clearly. But it's a very important distinction. Because if we don't see this, we get into a blaming-the-victim mentality—and blaming ourselves and feeling guilty are not what Dharma is about.

## **Does self-cherishing bring happiness?**

So we're seeing that the self and selfishness are two different things. They can be separated. Our self is okay, but our selfishness is the enemy. And we're also questioning the logic that we need to be selfish in order to be happy. When we start to look at ourselves and look at our life experience, it becomes very clear that rather than being the cause of our happiness, our selfishness and self-centeredness are the cause of our misery. And we can look at this through many different ways.

### **SELF-CHERISHING CAUSES US TO CREATE NEGATIVE KARMA**

One way to look at it is that I have a problem. My life is falling apart right now. I feel completely miserable. What is the source of this problem? Maybe there's nothing specifically happening externally, but I just feel totally miserable in my life right now, confused, depressed, upset, out of touch with myself. From a karmic viewpoint, all this upset is due to our self-cherishing in the past lives. Because we got involved with just cherishing ourselves in past lives, we created negative karma. That karma ripens into our own mental unhappiness this lifetime, even if there's nothing specifically happening outside for us to be so unhappy about.

Or maybe there is something externally for us to be unhappy about: the mortgage on your house is going to come up, you're going to have to move out of your house, or your marriage is splitting up. Even if there is



something external that is causing problems, still, why is that problem happening? Because of karma. When we look in our past lives, whenever we created negative karma, there was self-centeredness and selfishness involved. So whether our present unhappiness is due to an external situation or whether it's purely an internal unhappiness, in both ways, they can be attributed to our own self-centered behavior in previous lives through which we created negative karma.

Again, this does not mean that we're blaming ourselves. It does not mean saying, "I'm the source of all my problems. Look, I'm my own worst enemy. I hate myself. I did it again!" We're not doing that. Remember, we're separating the self-centeredness from the self and we're pointing the finger at the self-centeredness and saying, "This thing is the cause of my problems. I want to free myself from it. It makes itself out to be my friend, but in actual fact, it destroys all my happiness."

When we look at the conflicts and turmoil we have in this life, even if we don't look at them from a karmic viewpoint, we can very clearly see how self-centeredness is involved ...

*[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]*

... We get into this whole thing of positioning and bargaining with other people. "I want this. I want this. I want that." Instead of expressing needs and concerns, instead of being willing to listen, we get into, "I want this and I want that," making demands on other people. And as soon as we start making

demands on other people, communication becomes quite difficult. So when we have conflicts this lifetime, we can step back and see that so often, our inappropriate styles of communication and conflict resolution are coming from over-identification with the self. It's like knocking your head against the wall because we're creating more and more conflict even though we're trying to be happy. We become completely involved in our own position, our own needs, our own wants, how the situation is appearing to me, what I want out of it. We get very, very narrow, and it creates conflicts and problems.

It's really good to look over your life and look at your problems to see how the selfishness is operating in the present to cause you problems. Look at your own unhappiness as a result of past karma and how self-centeredness acted as the cause of the problems that made you create negative karma in past lives. You can really point the finger at the self-centeredness as the cause of the problems instead of feeling guilty ourselves, or pointing the finger at the other person or at society at large. We're going to identify the proper cause of the problem here.

Whenever we created negative karma in this life or past lives, which has the result of bringing us problems, we can very clearly see that the negative karma was created because we were under the influence of our self-centeredness. Why do we kill other beings? Why do we go out hunting and fishing? Why do we smash insects? Why do people kill other people? It's not out of affection and altruism, it's out of self-centeredness! Why do we take things that don't belong to us? Why do we cheat other people

and steal their property or disrespect their property? Again, it's out of self-centeredness, not out of compassion. Why do we have multiple relationships and aren't faithful to our partner, or intervene in other people's relationships? Why do we have unwise sexual conduct that harms other people? Again, it's not done out of compassion. It's done out of our own grasping for pleasure.

Why do we lie to other people? Self-centeredness. Why do we speak harshly to them? Why do we slander them? Why do we cause conflict in other people's relationship with divisive speech? Again, because of our own self-interest. Why do we engage in idle talk? Self-interest. Why do we covet other people's possessions? Self-interest. Why do we spend time plotting how to harm other people and get revenge? Self-interest. Why do we have so many wrong views? Self-interest.

Reflecting on the ten destructive actions is a real interesting meditation to do. Go through all ten of the destructive actions and look at real examples in your life. See how self-interest, selfishness, self-concern are behind all of them. Then remember how every time we engage in these actions, we are creating negative karma and the cause for our own misery in the future. It's totally unproductive behavior. You can see how at the very moment, although the self-centered attitude is passing itself off as our friend, in actual fact, the self-centeredness is deceiving us. The self-cherishing attitude is saying, "Lie to this person; it will be better for you." However, if we lie to that person, we may get a little bit of benefit for five minutes, but in the long term, it causes us problem

upon problem upon problem.

So we can begin to see the self-centeredness as the thing that really betrays us. It pretends to be our friend but it actually just makes us get involved in so much craziness that makes us miserable. In this way, we're pointing out that the real enemy—if we're going to have an enemy at all—is the self-centeredness, not the other people.

You should remember that the self-centeredness is not who we are. We're not getting into a guilt trip and blaming ourselves. We're separating out the self-centeredness and blaming it. Because the point is, that as long as we have self-centeredness, we will have external enemies. And the way to get rid of external enemies is not by destroying them, it's by destroying the self-centeredness. As long as we have self-centeredness, we're going to get involved in negative actions and other people are going to harm us back. And when other people harm us, we call them enemies. But the principal cause is the self-centeredness. Even if we try and demolish all the external enemies, it doesn't work because by the power of our own self-centeredness, we're going to keep creating more. You can look at this in terms of politics. The government has one enemy after another, but even if it bombs every country in the world, it will still find another enemy to bomb.

Killing other people doesn't solve the basic problem because as long as there's selfishness, karmically, we're going to create the causes for our own problems. In addition, because of selfishness, we're going to interpret situations so that they appear harmful to us. So the selfishness harms us in two

ways: by making us create the negative karma, and by making us interpret the situation in a faulty way. If we recognize this, we will see that the real enemy isn't external people. Harming other people, getting revenge doesn't solve the problem at all. In addition, the self-centeredness makes us create negative karma which makes us get reborn in the lower realms. So if we don't like the lower rebirths, we should do something about the self-centeredness.

## **SELF-CHERISHING PREVENTS US FROM ACHIEVING OUR GOALS**

Self-centeredness also prevents us from achieving any of our goals, any of our temporal goals within samsara, and any of our ultimate goals. We haven't found happiness within samsara yet, because we have created so much negative karma by the force of our selfishness. Why is it that we haven't become arhats or Buddhas yet? Because of our selfishness. Buddha started out exactly like us, confused and self-centered. But Buddha wanted to subdue his selfishness so he practiced the path, whereas we just welcome our selfishness into the house, let it run the show, and spend our time feeling sorry for ourselves. We spent our time grasping after one diverting distraction and sensual pleasure after the other, and we're still here, where we are. So the whole reason that we don't have the happiness of a Buddha, is because we haven't been able to let go of the self-centeredness. When we start looking at it this way, it becomes clear what the real problem is and what are the disadvantages of the self-centeredness.

## **SELF-CHERISHING MAKES US EXTREMELY SENSITIVE AND EASILY OFFENDED**

Our self-centeredness makes us extremely sensitive and easily offended. You know that part of you that's so sensitive. People look at you cross-eyed, people speak to you in a slightly wrong tone of voice, people don't do exactly what you want, people slip up in the slightest little way that doesn't meet your criteria, and we get so offended and so upset. That's all a function of self-centeredness. All that sensitivity and being offended is not coming from the other person. We've set out this radar of how people should treat us and we're just looking for somebody to make us feel offended. It's like those days when you wake up and you're in a bad mood and you're just kind of looking for somebody to get angry at. Have you had those days? It's like I can't wait to find somebody who doesn't smile at me, so I can finally legitimize why I'm angry. [Laughter.]

Again, all of our dissatisfaction comes from self-centeredness. We're so dissatisfied because we're constantly all wrapped up in ourselves. We make such a big deal out of 'I' that it becomes totally impossible to satisfy ourselves. There's no bottom to this pit of grasping at pleasure for ourselves. And we can see in our whole life, how we run after and grasp at one distraction and another sense pleasure and another thing and another thing. There's no end to it. We just spend our whole life running around in circles looking for something, totally dissatisfied, never finding any kind of satisfaction or peace of mind, because of our self-centeredness.

## **SELF-CHERISHING MAKES US FEEL GUILTY OR ENGAGE IN SELF-PITY**

All the stinginess, the tightness in our heart, the inability to share, the sense of loss when we have to give something, it's all a function of self-centeredness. And we get so involved in guilt. "I'm so terrible. I botched up everything." That's a function of self-centeredness. All the self-pity, "Poor me. Poor me." It's all a function of self-centeredness. And it's real interesting when we can begin to recognize those feelings of guilt and self-pity that we usually identify with so much. We can see that they arise in our mind and we completely hold on to them, embrace them, and say, "This is me, this is how I feel." When we begin to do this meditation on the disadvantages of self-centeredness, it becomes real clear that we don't have to feel sorry for ourselves, we don't have to feel guilty, and we don't have to jump on the bandwagon when these thoughts arise in our mind. We don't need to believe them or follow after them. We can see that they're just another joke of the self-centered mind!

Self-centeredness will think of one thing after another to make us terribly unhappy. It will think, "I can be unhappy because this person did this; I can be unhappy because that person doesn't appreciate me; I can be unhappy because this person makes me feel like I don't belong; and I can feel unhappy because this person insulted me. I don't belong with any of these people. I botched it up again. Poor me. Nobody loves me. This is terrible. My whole life has been like this!" [Laughter.] This is all a function of the self-centeredness. We don't need to think this way. And

whatever thoughts arise in our mind, we don't need to grasp at them as reality. It's in our power to look at those thoughts and say, "That is not reality. That is not what is happening. I don't need to think like this. That is self-centeredness throwing its temper tantrum making me miserable again, and I can identify that enemy of the self-centeredness and say, "Get out of here!"

## **SELF-CHERISHING CAUSES FEAR**

All of our fear—and think of how much fear we have—comes from self-centeredness. When you think of the things you fear the most, you can see an incredible degree of self-centeredness and self-grasping involved in them. "I'm afraid that nobody is going to like me." Look at the self-centeredness. Me, me, me, me. Or, "I'm afraid of death. I'm afraid of losing this body." We're so involved in clinging on to this body as if it were me. We're so attached to this body. If clinging on to this body isn't being selfish, isn't being self-centered, what is? All that fear of death, all that fear of not being accepted, not being approved of, all that fear of being hurt, all that fear of our friends leaving us, all that fear of losing our job is due to self-centeredness. We have ten million fears!

In your meditation, take out all your different fears and look at them. Recognize how the fears function in correspondence to the self-centeredness, and how as soon as you can let go of the attachment to yourself, as soon as you can let go of all the different attachments that self-centeredness supports, then automatically all your fears go away. We have fear



basically because we're attached. We're attached because we're all wrapped up in ourselves.

When you start to look at this, you begin to see some light at the end of the tunnel, how it's actually possible to get rid of fear just by changing our attitude. All these things that we suffer so much from, in this life, future lives, all of our past suffering, the finger can be pointed at self-centeredness and all the blame laid there. And when we can really do that, then automatically our interest in being so self-centered drastically decreases. Because we realize that it's not going to make us happy. Instead it's going to make us miserable. So if we can clearly identify it as the source of the problem, as the real enemy, then automatically, it decreases.

The next thing to talk about is the advantages of cherishing others, but I think we'll wait until next time for that.

## **Questions and answers**

### **Why should we help?**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

It seems that you brought up many different points there. One of them was you said if people's suffering is due to their self-centeredness, then why should we try and help them? Why shouldn't we just say, "Well, too bad, your problem is due to your own selfishness?" That goes back to what we talked about at the beginning part of the class—that suffering is suffering, it doesn't matter whose it is. So we

shouldn't just say to somebody, "Well, too bad, you caused it yourself," and avoid getting involved.

## **The Tibet situation**

In terms of Tibet's problem, you can look at the tragedy that has occurred as a result of collective karma which was created due to self-centeredness. It doesn't mean that all the people who experienced this result now, in this life, were Tibetans when they created the cause. It doesn't mean that.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

It's real interesting because when you look at any action, you can see that any action can be done for a variety of motivations. You could stay in Tibet because you're attached to it; you may stay in Tibet because you want to stay and help the other people who are there suffering. You can leave because you're afraid and you're attached to your own safety; or you can leave because you want to preserve the religion in another country where it's safe. So it's like you can't look at only the action and say whether the action was self-centered or not, because any action can be done with very diametrically opposed motivations.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

It does. In the long run it pays off to take care of others. I'm not sure that's necessarily genetic, but there could be a genetic component. I think sometimes we go too much to a reductionist position,

and try to say everything is genetic, and negate the existence of mind.

Also along that line, it's important to realize that your mind did not come from your parents.

*[Audience:] Then where does it come from?*

It comes from previous continuity of mind. In other words, previous lives.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

The non-inherently existent self, the merely labeled self, nothing wrong with that. It's minding its own business. We don't blame that one. [Laughter.] It's that attitude that says, "Me!" that makes that non-inherently existent self into the most important one in the universe. That attitude, is what we blame.

Let's just sit quietly for a few minutes. There's a lot to think about here. Please think about them in relationship to your life.

I met a Catholic priest today and we had a very interesting conversation. Something he said touched me very much. When he first entered the priesthood—this was pre-Vatican II—he just did what he was taught to do. The whole notion at that time of what it meant to pursue a spiritual path was to build schools, tend to the bureaucracy, increase the church, talk to the people and things like that.

He did that for a number of years and then he had a mid-life crisis. He said it suddenly dawned on him that religion or spirituality was all about looking inside

at your own self and this insight really threw him for a loop. He began to question things and asked, “How many people have I ever really loved?” Then he looked at what he had been doing within the church establishment and decided to enter therapy and he also completely re-did his spiritual practice. So for the last twenty years he has had a completely different practice. He is now in his sixties.

I was really touched by that because here he had been thinking for all those years that practicing religion meant maintaining the church’s system and all the functions it performed. It was only after a number of years that it became clear to him it was instead about looking at yourself and working on yourself. He made the comment, “Well, that is what Buddhism is all about, isn’t it? It emphasizes doing that.” And it does.

Buddhism is all about getting to know our own selves and transforming our own minds. To always come back to this and to remember it whenever we are doing any kind of Dharma activity or doing anything for that matter. I think if we do that and are able to be really honest with ourselves in everything we do during our whole life, then we will not necessarily have to go through a mid-life crisis of that nature. Also, when we die, we will not have any regrets either. I was very touched by what he said and with the fact that he would share it with me so I thought I would share it with you.

**Equalizing and exchanging self and others to develop bodhicitta**

We have been talking about equalizing and exchanging self and others as being Shantideva's method for developing bodhicitta and that this method is for us to use to look at our own minds and not merely an intellectual theory. Equalizing self and others is recognizing that we are equal with others in wanting happiness and not wanting pain. It is recognizing that friends, enemies and strangers are all equal in this regard. Therefore there is no reason to cherish anybody more than anybody else, even if that anybody happens to be our own selves.

Exchanging self with others is done in terms of whom we view as most important, or whom we cherish the most. It does not mean I become you and you become me. Anyway, I do not think you would want to be me .... I would not wish that on anybody. [Laughter.] Rather it means where right now we hold the 'I' as most dear, most precious and most sacred, we exchange that and instead we hold others as most dear, precious and sacred.

### **Meditation on exchanging self and others**

When we realize that 'I' is simply a label on the aggregates, that there is nothing inherent about 'I' and nothing 'me' here so important that needs to be valued above anything else, then there is a way of meditating where you put the label 'I' on all other sentient beings and the label 'others' becomes yourself. In this meditation, when you say "I want happiness," or "I am going to get happiness," the label 'I' means all other sentient beings. Then you look at the label 'other' and say, "That other guy is lazy and

he is not doing anything,” the label “that other guy” means your old self-cherishing self. This is a very interesting way of meditating.

This meditation is done on the basis of seeing the disadvantages of self-cherishing, selfishness or self-centeredness and the benefits of cherishing others. When you really feel that very deeply, then to do this exchange of whom we see as the most important comes quite easily, quite naturally. But when we hold on to the self-centered attitude as our best friend and cherish it because we believe it protects us and takes care of us; it becomes very difficult for us to exchange self with others.

## **Self and self-centeredness**

As I explained last time, the self and self-centeredness are two different things. Self-centeredness is an attitude and it is one of the clouds that pollutes the sky, so it can be removed. Whereas the self that is merely a label on the aggregates—that remains. So from the Buddhist viewpoint people are not inherently, innately, irrevocably selfish. They are just attitudes that we cannot separate ourselves from. In this technique, we really have to see self and self-centeredness as two very separate things, so that when we see the self-centeredness as the enemy and as the thing that destroys our happiness, we are not blaming ourselves. Instead we are putting the blame on the self-cherishing. This is a real important point.

For those of you who have read the book “Wheel of Sharp Weapons”, a thought-training text, there is this line, “Trample him, trample him. Dance on the

head of this butcher of selfish concern.” This is done through seeing the disadvantages of self-centeredness, seeing this self-centeredness as the real enemy, and turning our wrathful energy towards it. So we’re not blaming ourselves, but we are singling out the self-centeredness as the source of our problems.

## **Disadvantages of self-centeredness**

When we look at all the difficulties we experience this lifetime, they are all due to our negative karma created in the past. All that negative karma was created under the influence of self-centeredness. When we look at that, it becomes real clear that self-centeredness is not our friend, that the attitude, the voice that says, “But I have got to take care of myself before everybody else,” actually is not our friend. It is the very thing that deceives us and makes us get involved in the creation of negative karma which then brings us pain, suffering and misery.

If you’re able to see that, it will be very helpful when you have problems. Really look at all the different difficulties we have in our lives and recognize that they are all caused by self-centeredness and ego grasping. Other sentient beings are not our enemies. Self-centeredness is our enemy. That is what we have to pinpoint and smash. This has nothing to do with self-hatred. This is completely different from blaming ourselves and hating ourselves.

Also, recognize that the self-centeredness makes us very easily offended. It makes us overly sensitive and very fearful because we are clutching onto everything that belongs to the self and that, in turn, makes us

perpetually dissatisfied. If we wonder how come we are not yet Buddhas, it is because of the self-centeredness.

## **Progress on the path in previous lifetimes**

In previous lifetimes we have met the Buddha's teachings and we have had the opportunity to practice, so why did we not practice and get the realizations? It is because the self-centered mind came in and said, "Oh look come on, who wants to do that? It is too hard anyway. Better go lie on the beach—your knees will not hurt so much!"

So self-centeredness is that attitude. You can see it. It is the attitude that when the alarm clock goes off in the morning, says, "I know I should get up and meditate, but I will sleep an extra half an hour. I will get up to go to work because that is really valuable. But meditation—I will do that later." That is the self-centered attitude. That is the self-centeredness that creates all the excuses and reasons why we cannot go to teachings or cannot do this or that. It is the basic source of suffering and we can just see it wreaking havoc in our own lives.

So one of the big reasons why we have not made as much progress on the spiritual path is, basically, because we have listened to this self-centered attitude instead of listening to the heart that cherishes others, or to the wisdom mind. We have listened to the wrong part of ourselves and that is why there are so many problems now.

When we understand this, it is then a real interesting thing to look at the self-centered attitude



and point a finger at it and say, “You are the demon. You are the problem! I am not going to listen to you!” So instead of all the anger and belligerence being directed towards outside people, we take the same strength of that energy and direct it against the self-centered thought.

## **The wrathful deities of Vajrayana Buddhism**

Sometimes you see the wrathful, fierce-looking deities and Dharma protectors of Vajrayana Buddhism. These guys with big fangs, black and blazing fire and eyes bulging are standing on corpses and holding all kinds of weapons. These are real fierce-looking guys. What their ferocity is directed against is the self-centered mind and its ego-grasping. These wrathful deities are not meant to intimidate us or make us feel afraid. The wrath depicted is directed towards that attitude of self-cherishing that keeps us locked up and is our jailor.

There is an interesting technique of thought training, which sounds really weird. I will explain it to you because at some time you might wish to practice it. The first time I heard this technique I thought, “What? This is the weirdest thing I have ever heard!” But one time I actually practiced it and it worked. With this technique, when you have problems, difficulties and upset, you first recognize that they come from the self-centered thoughts. Then you take all that suffering and upset you are experiencing, give it to the self-centered thought: look at the self-centered thought (which you realize is not you but just this other attitude hanging around) and say, “You are

the source of all the problems. It is because of you that all this negative karma was created, that all this suffering is coming now, so here you take the suffering, you take the criticism and you take the wrath that is being directed toward me!” In this way, instead of feeling overwhelmed by all the negative energy or suffering that is getting directed at you, you just offload it onto the self-centered thought and give it all to that thought.

It sounds like a really weird kind of technique. The first time I heard it I thought, “How is this possible?” I could not imagine it because I usually saw “I” and the self-centeredness as completely in oneness. I could not separate them and so I thought that meant I was blaming myself for my problems. I could not understand it at all.

## **On pilgrimage to Lhamo Lhatso**

Then one time a situation happened to me where I actually did this practice. I was on pilgrimage in Tibet. This was six years ago. We were going to a lake called “Lhamo Lhatso.” This is the lake at 18,000 feet altitude in which prophecies have been seen. I was on pilgrimage on horseback for several days going to this lake. There were a few other people with whom I was traveling. I had known one of them for many, many years. We had gotten along well and then at one point, I do not remember what happened .... Our relationship at the time of the pilgrimage was okay on the whole.

So we were in this group together and going on pilgrimage. The day before we climbed to the top to

reach the lake, we were walking up towards a place where we were going to camp. This man had an incredible horse. When we were in the middle of the river his horse would stop in the river and not move and somebody would have to go in and pull the horse out. After a while his horse just could not go any further and he was not going to be able to ride it. My horse was okay and I was not feeling too exhausted, and we were close friends, so I offered my horse to him to ride and said I would walk because I felt okay.

Somehow this made him so angry. He just totally blew up. Completely blew up! I think he was just feeling frustrated about everything and the difficulties of the trip. He went on this tirade saying, “You did this and you did that. I heard when you lived in France you said this to that person and you hurt that person’s feeling. When you lived in Italy, you did this and when you lived in India you did that and all these people there did not like you.” He went on and on; he was just so angry! He was completely dumping on me.

### **Practicing giving criticism to the self-cherishing thought**

Somehow, and I think this was the blessing of this pilgrimage, I had the thought, “I should practice this thought training technique at this moment.” I hate getting criticized. When you talk about somebody who is easily offended and easily hurt, I will admit to it. Normally this would have been very miserable for me, but when he started dumping all this stuff on me, I said, “OK I’m going to practice this, so self-cherishing thought, you take these all! All this

negative energy, you take it. It is all directed at you. You have it!”

I remembered Lama Zopa saying that when you really practice this you can almost say, “More, more, I want more criticism,” because you are floating it all onto your real enemy, the selfish thought. So I began to think, “OK. All this pain and suffering I give it to the self-cherishing thought. OK, come on, (let’s have) more and more criticism.” It was really an incredible experience because by the time we pitched camp I was completely okay. I was not the way I usually will be after somebody is at me. Usually I would feel crushed. I was actually completely okay. It made such a strong impression on me how powerful this kind of thought transformation technique is.

### **Why ask for more criticism**

*[Audience:] Is the reason for asking for more (criticism) because you want to give it to the self-centeredness?*

Right. You are saying, “Give me more ammunition to dump on this self-cherishing over here.” And he did. He gave me more. He complied quite willingly. [Laughter.] It was so amazing because here we were in the middle of nowhere on pilgrimage to this holy lake when this happened. This technique is very useful to use whenever there are difficulties and problems in our life.

### **Harm from others versus harm through self-cherishing**

This technique helps us to check and analyze who is our friend and who is not our friend. It helps us recognize that other sentient beings might harm us once or twice, but it is a limited amount of harm, whereas the self-centeredness has never once been kind to us. It continuously harms. So where a sentient being might harm us sometimes and help us other times, self-centeredness always harms and never helps.

And also, with harm received from sentient beings the worst that could happen is we get criticized or even die. Other sentient beings might kill us, but they cannot send us to the lower realms. No sentient being can cause us to be reborn in an unfortunate rebirth. But the self-centered attitude can. So even if another sentient being kills us and we separate from this body, we are going to have to do that some time or another so it is really not that catastrophic. But in terms of what our next life is going to be after we separate from this body, that is where the self-centered attitude comes in and completely wreaks havoc.

Other sentient beings cannot send us to the lower realms. Even if they curse us up and down and say, "May you go to hell 50 million times," they do not have the power to do so. But this self-centered mind can send us there. Be real clear that other people might bug us and we might have conflict with them at some time, but it is always possible to have a good relationship later because karmic energy changes, personalities change and people change. Whatever conflict we are having now with someone is not a permanent situation. It is possible to become friends with that person later, whereas with the self-

centeredness it is never possible. It will never be kind to us, whereas other sentient beings can be kind to us. See clearly which the enemy is.

## **The Advantages of Cherishing Others**

In addition to contemplating the disadvantages of self-centeredness, we also contemplate the advantages of cherishing others. This is a really nice kind of meditation to do, just to sit down and think about all the advantages of cherishing others. I will list a few advantages, but when you meditate you can do some research and make up some more.

### **WHEN WE CHERISH OTHERS, THEY ARE HAPPY**

The basic thing is when we take care of others and when we cherish them, they are happy. That is a really nice thing. It is wonderful that other beings are happy. We know what it is like when people care for us and do nice things for us. The very same kind of warmth or singing feeling in the heart that we get when other people are kind to us—that is the same kind of thing we can generate in other people by cherishing them and taking care of them.

Also, when other people are happy, it creates a more harmonious environment that indirectly benefits us. When we speak about creating world peace, this does not come about through legislation and it does not come about through U.N. Peace Keeping Forces. That is not how real peace comes about. But rather,

real peace comes about through an attitude that cherishes others, values them, wishes them well and wishes good things for them. This is the way to promote world peace. If we do not have that kind of attitude, then even if we do pass legislation, the legislation will not work because legislation only works when there is the attitude behind it that really wants to respect and take care of others.

This means that we do not have to see world peace as something we are helpless against. Very often nowadays people just feel helpless and hopeless when confronting the situation of the world. But if we really see that we can contribute quite directly to world peace by being peaceful ourselves and by being kind to other people, there is then definitely something we can do towards world peace.

### **Kindness is contagious**

This attitude is contagious. Just think: if you develop an attitude of kindness, then that means everybody in your whole family can relax. At least they will feel secure that you will not harm them and so they will receive much happiness. It also means everybody that you work with will not be harmed and will receive happiness; and everybody whom you come to Dharma class with will not be harmed and will receive happiness. You can see it has quite a wide-spreading effect when you think of how many people are in relationship with you even on a daily basis.

### **One person creates far-reaching effects**

If we develop that thought or that heart that cherishes others, then it very directly affects a great number of people, not only in making them happy, but also in preventing harm. When you see the harm that one person can do motivated by the self-cherishing thought, it is actually quite remarkable. For instance, look at Mao Tse Dong or Adolf Hitler. What did they do? Because of one person's self-cherishing thought, look at what happened to so many people! So if just one person changes their attitude of self-cherishing, it can have really far-reaching effects.

## **OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS OTHERS AFFECTS OUR HAPPINESS**

If we have this attitude that cherishes, respects and cares about others, we are going to be able to be happy wherever we are and whomever we are with. When we have a real positive attitude and walk into a room full of people, already the mind is predisposed towards friendliness and you can see the results of that. When you walk into a room of strangers when you are in a bad mood the results are not so good. But if you walk into that room and your mind has an open-heart, kind attitude then everybody just seems very nice and wonderful. By the virtue of the thought that cherishes others, we can be happy no matter whom we are with and no matter what is going on. We can enjoy being with the people we are with and enjoy relating with and serving them.

## **CHERISHING OTHERS CREATES GOOD**



## **KARMA AND BENEFITS US**

When we cherish others we create a lot of very good karma because we act constructively. To have the seeds of the Dharma germinate in the field of our mind, the field needs water and fertilizer. This is what good karma, positive potential is: they are the water and the fertilizer. So when we act kindly towards others, we enrich our own mindstream and that means when we meditate it is easier to get understanding from the teachings. Or, when we listen to teachings it is easier to hear them and it is easier to put things into practice. So this collecting of positive potential is very important.

### **Creating positive potential through cherishing others**

When we have a kind heart then even when we do simple things it becomes very, very rich. We were talking before about the benefits of bodhicitta, that if you offer an apple to the Buddha and put it on the shrine, by the force of your bodhicitta and wishing to become enlightened for the benefit of everybody, you create a huge amount of positive potential that helps to purify your mind and create suitable conditions to gain Dharma understandings and realizations. So if we want to develop our mind and be able to meditate better and gain some experience, then the creation of positive potential is quite important and cherishing others is one excellent way to do this.

### **Not acting out of guilt and obligation**

I should make clear here that when we talk about cherishing others, it is not done out of guilt and obligation. It is done out of a real respect and care and affection for others. Helping others because we feel guilty, because we feel obliged, because we feel that they are going to criticize us if we do not, or if we are worried about what other people are going to think about us if we do not help, is not helping and cherishing others at all. It is not cherishing others, because the heart is not thinking about others, it is thinking about itself.

So you have to be real clear here. Cherishing others does not mean running around and doing goody-two-shoes actions with an un-goody-two-shoes mind, one of guilt or obligation. That is not cherishing others. But rather, this is a real transformation, really looking at others as beautiful and worthy of respect and love. This is developed through seeing their kindness to us, which we discussed in the last few talks.

### **Through cherishing others we have good rebirths**

By cherishing others we also receive a precious human life that enables us to continue our Dharma practice. Why? Because when we cherish others we cease harming them. When we cease harming them, we do not create the negative karma that gives us unhappy rebirths. When we cherish others and treat them kindly, we create the kind of good karma that gives us the ability to have a precious human rebirth and continue our Dharma practice for many, many future lives. So from cherishing others, we benefit

ourselves.

## **Long life**

A long life is something that we all want. The way to have long life is by cherishing other people's lives and protecting their lives, not by harming or killing them. And protecting them if they are in danger.

## **Material security**

The way for us to have security in terms of our possessions and in terms of having the wherewithal we need to live and not worry about our house getting broken into or something like that, is by being generous to others and by not destroying their property. If we cherish others, we do not steal from them. We do not covet their things. We do not cheat them of their possessions. So in this way we do not create the karma to lose our things. If we cherish others, then we are generous to them and by being generous, we receive the things that we need to live.

## **Our present life as the result of us having been generous**

We have an extraordinary amount of leisure here in the States to come to Dharma teachings. It is really remarkable. Nobody here is starving. Nobody here is living on the streets. It is easy for us to jump in a car or onto a bicycle to come to Dharma teachings. Just having the wealth that enables us to practice the Dharma is a result of having been generous in

previous lives and that in turn is the result of cherishing others.

## **Harmonious relationships**

Having harmonious relationships with people, which again is something that we all want, comes from respecting other people, cherishing them and taking care of them. If we do not cherish others, we may engage in unwise sexual behavior, hurt other people through having extraneous relationships, or hurt people by lying, slandering, using harsh speech or abusing and ridiculing them. If we cherish them, however, then we stop those actions. So we stop the cause for us to have difficulties in all of our relationships with other people.

In addition, with a heart that cherishes others we are kind to other people. Karmically that creates the cause for other people to like us and be kind to us, to be generous, friendly and responsive toward us. It also causes us to be able to have stable friendships that do not go up and down like yo-yos all the time and to have long-lasting friendships.

## **Reaping good karma by cherishing others**

When you look at the kinds of things that we want to have for happiness this life and the kinds of circumstances that we want to have so we can practice the Dharma well, all of these things come from cherishing others. Also, all the spiritual realizations that will completely free our mind from all suffering and its causes, also comes through our

cherishing of others. There is only good to be gained by being kind to others. There are no negative things that can happen to us by us being kind to others. This is something to think very, very deeply about.

Really go over this again and again in our mind and contemplate karmically how this works. So often in our life our old thought pattern is, “If I give, I won’t have. If I am kind to somebody, they are going to take advantage. If I volunteer, they are going to ask for more. If I let something go, they are going to trample all over me.” That is our usual way of thinking. But I am not advocating we become a doormat.

### **Being taken advantage of**

If we have a heart that genuinely cares about others, there is no way other people can take advantage of us. Because if you look at it in your own mind, what do we really mean when we say that somebody has taken advantage of us? It is basically a situation where we have not been real clear with other people and have said, “Yes” when we meant “No.” So I think a lot of times we feel taken advantage of because of our own lack of clarity.

See if this is making sense to you. Are you thinking things like, “I feel taken advantage of because I did not really want to do this thing and I did not really want to go along. But I felt guilty and obliged and I was not very clear within, so I said, ‘Yes.’ And the whole time I was saying ‘Yes’, I was feeling a lot of resentment, so I blamed my discomfort on them and said that they took advantage of me.”

So being taken advantage of—at least I find with

me—has a lot to do with that kind of psychological mechanism. Whereas, when we have a heart that really cherishes others then when somebody comes and wants something, our heart is happy and we freely give. Even if they ask for something outlandish, if our heart is happy and we give, other people may say we are being taken advantage of, but from our side, we do not see it that way. From our side we are just happy to give.

You hear all these stories in the scriptures, outrageous stories of people giving parts of their body away or things like that and we might think, “Who in their right mind would do that?” Or take the stories in the scriptures of people coming and just asking for outlandish, outrageous things, but the bodhisattvas, from their side felt, “Why not?” and gave them what was asked. The bodhisattvas’ minds were happy. I am not saying that we should give everybody everything they ask for because sometimes people ask for things that harm them. We should not give people things that harm them, but we really need to look carefully at what is going on in our minds when we say we are being taken advantage of.

## **Lama Zopa Rinpoche**

For instance, look at Lama Zopa Rinpoche. He does not sleep and people come and talk to him and stay in his room until three or four in the morning. On one hand you could say, “Look at all these people. They are just taking advantage of him.” But from his side, he is completely happy to give. He does not see it as something like, “Oh, look at all these people. They are

making me stay up so late. I really do not want to stay up. They are taking advantage of me but I have to do it. This is part of the job description of being a Rinpoche.” [Laughter.] That is not what he is thinking. From his side, it is happiness to do these things.

## **CHANGING OUR MIND CHANGES THE RESULTS**

We can see that with a change in our mind many things that seem like, “Oh I cannot do that and I do not want to do that. I do not have enough energy,” become something that actually is completely okay to do. In fact we are happy to do it. And we do not see it as being taken advantage of. For instance, somebody calls you and they need a ride somewhere. Sometimes we say, “Oh yeah, sure. You need some help? I will be right over.” And you go over to help your friend, but you drudgingly go over because the whole time the mind does not really want to be there. You know about these things, don’t you? Or is it only me that feels this way? [Laughter.]

When somebody asks you and you really do not want to do something, but you go and do it because you know you should, the whole time you are there you might wish you were somewhere else. The mind is totally miserable being there and you do not create any positive karma at all. It also makes the other person feel lousy. All it takes to change the entire situation is just a slight change in our attitude, of saying, “Wow! This is an incredible opportunity to help another sentient being who wants to be happy

just as much as I do. This is an incredible opportunity to create all this positive potential that is going to get me closer to enlightenment. It is an incredible opportunity to repay the kindness of a sentient being that has done all these things for me, all these times since beginningless time.” This is just a switch in attitude, but then the mind is so happy to go and do it. And since you are going to go do it in any case, if you do it with a happy mind it totally changes the atmosphere.

### **Changing our mind about work**

It is the same thing about going to work. Instead of us going to work thinking, “Oh God, work!”, or thinking that the only thing getting you to work is the idea of a paycheck at the end of the month, really say, “Wow! This is an opportunity to create positive potential and to offer service. This is an opportunity to give to these people. Even if they do not appreciate it, it is okay. There have been many times in my life when I have not appreciated what other people have done for me. Even here I am working at this job and it seems other people are not appreciating me, but that is okay. I have been in the same situation many times when I have not appreciated others, but from my side now this is an incredible opportunity to really further my spiritual practice and benefit others.” So in this way we change the mind and then the whole feeling about the situation changes.

### **Questions and answers**



*[Audience:] When you direct anger at the self-cherishing, isn't that the same as getting angry at anything else and therefore an affliction?*

It is the same energy, but it has a slightly different flavor. You are right that anger in general is an affliction because it is exaggerating the harm of something else outside of us. When we are angry at another sentient being, we are exaggerating the harm. But when we direct that same strong energy against the self-centeredness, we are not exaggerating the harm of self-centeredness.

*[Audience:] So anger at others always disturbs us?*

Right! One of the reasons it disturbs is because it is exaggerating and not seeing things realistically and beneficially, so it is out of control and results in harm. Whereas this anger we are directing towards the self-centeredness, when you turn that energy against the self-centeredness, it is of a slightly changed character because it is not exaggerating the harm and is not out of control.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

But if we understand things exactly clear, we usually are not angry. When we understand things real clear there is no distortion. You might still have an impetus to act in the situation, but there is not an out-of-control anger energy that wants to destroy.

*[Audience:] Please explain further how the anger*

*toward the self-cherishing is beneficial when anger at others is harmful.*

Because it is not uncontrolled and is not the same anger, it is the anger energy transformed. It is not something like, “I am angry at you and now I am angry at the self-cherishing.” It is not an out-of-control complete berserk thing. When we are angry, there is the distortion and there is the energy that is fueling the distortion. When we are angry, there is a lot of energy and there is a whole distorted conception of the situation, and that is what makes anger so harmful. What we are doing when we turn that forcefulness against the self-grasping and self-cherishing is using the force of that energy but without the distortion.

*[Audience:] Is it better to direct anger at the self-cherishing before or after the anger has arisen?*

It can be done either way. Sometimes after the anger has arisen and you are starting to get angry at another person you realize, “Hold on, this whole situation is coming about because of my negative karma, so I am going to switch it to the selfish attitude.” But in the case where you are doing deity practices with the wrathful deities, then you are tapping into the same strength of that energy, but you are using it to be real clear in your own mind about self-grasping and self-cherishing being the enemy. So it can be done both ways.

To develop the motivation of altruism, we think about

the benefits of bodhicitta. It is very important to spend time doing this so that we develop some enthusiasm for it. If we don't see the benefits of bodhicitta, then we'll just say, "Oh, well, bodhicitta, yes, it sounds great. Love and compassion, altruism—sound great. I guess I *should* be more loving and compassionate. It sounds really good. I *should* be kinder." The development of bodhicitta, then, becomes another 'should' for us.

This is why in all these teachings they so often talk about the advantages of a particular practice beforehand, so that it doesn't become a 'should', it becomes an 'I want to'. That's why it's important to consider the advantages and the benefits of bodhicitta in our meditation session, so that we really know it and then the mind becomes naturally enthusiastic.

To develop bodhicitta, there are two methods: there is the seven points of cause and effect, which I described previously, and then there is the second method of equalizing and exchanging self and others.

I personally like this method of equalizing and exchanging self and others because to me, it takes democracy into the Dharma. The real meaning of democracy, the real meaning of equality is, we all equally want happiness and we all equally want freedom from pain and affliction. Our own personal traumas are no more severe, no more important than anybody else's. Our own personal wish for happiness is also no more important than that of anybody else's.

To me, this strikes very much at what we cultivate a lot in this country—our individualism, our egoism and our thinking of *me, me, me*, "Me first! Me first! Got to stick out for myself! Got to go out and get

what I want!” We’re all the children of people who immigrated to this country because they didn’t fit in where they used to belong and they came here to get what they wanted. [Laughter.] In a way, we have inherited this “me first” attitude. This attitude is part of our culture, I think, as well as it being just a general distinction of sentient beings, that we cherish ourselves first and everybody else comes afterwards.

This meditation on equalizing and exchanging self and others really hits at the point that we cherish ourselves first only out of habit, that that is the only reason why we do so: out of habit. In other words, when we look for any kind of logical reason why we are more important, why our happiness is more essential, why our pain is more harmful than anybody else’s, we can’t find any particular reason except that “It’s *mine!*” Besides saying, “It’s mine,” there is no other reason. But then when we say, “It’s mine,” what does ‘mine’ mean? For me, ‘mine’ means *here*, and for you, ‘mine’ means *there*. So ‘mine’ for each of us is a very relative thing. There is no objective thing which is ‘mine’ or ‘me’ or ‘I.’ What we call ‘I’ is something that we have merely labeled on top of our body and mind. Then because of so much habituation of identifying ‘I’, ‘I’, ‘I’, and because of the mind solidifying this ‘I’ and cherishing this ‘I’, we’ve convinced ourselves very well that somehow we’re more important than anybody else.

But when we come to see just how relative the label ‘I’ is, that it is as relative as *this* side of the room and *that* side of the room (because it could easily change, and *this* side of the room becomes *that* side of the room), we come to see that ‘self’ and ‘others’ can

very easily change. It just depends on where you're looking at it from, how you habituate yourself. And to me, this is really jarring. When I stop and think about the fact that the whole reason that everything that happens in my life seems so incredibly important, is simply because I'm in the habit of thinking that way, it's like things start to shake a little bit. It's like an earthquake on a sandy beach—everything's shaking, because the whole foundation of all my reasons why I'm so important begins to crumble.

Especially because we associate so strongly with this body; we identify this body either as 'I', or sometimes we grasp onto it as 'mine,' with this incredible attachment. But then we begin to see that there is no inherent 'I' or 'mine' affiliated with this body; we see it this way completely due to habit. It is completely due to that concept that our concentration is so entrenched on what happens to this body. If we look at it, this body actually came from our parents; the genetic makeup came from our parents. Aside from the genetic makeup, it's an accumulation of broccoli, cauliflower, bananas, and whatever else we happen to eat since we were born. Besides that, there is nothing about this body that I can own. What's 'mine' in this body? It's an accumulation of food that was grown by other beings, or maybe even the bodies of other beings, and my parents' genes. Is there anything about it that is 'me'? How come everything that happens to this body is so incredibly important? It's just habit.

What we're trying to do in this meditation of equalizing and exchanging self and others is not to say "I become 'you' and you become 'me'." But rather,

the object that we cherish so much gets equalized and then exchanged. Right now, the object that we cherish is *here* and everything else is *there* . When we equalize self and others, we begin to see that others, just as much as we, want happiness and don't want pain. Then we even begin to exchange it. We see we could actually label 'I' on everything else and call this one here [Ven. Chodron indicates herself], 'other'.

In Shantideva's text, "Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life", there is a whole meditation in which you practice labeling 'I' on all the other sentient beings, and labeling 'other' on this one [i.e., oneself]. It's quite interesting. You could see that it's really quite arbitrary. This gives us the possibility of exchanging self and others in terms of developing a very deep-seated concern for others' welfare that isn't put on, but rather, it is something that can come with as much intensity as we now cherish this one here.

### **Disadvantages of self-centeredness**

Then as we go on and think more and more of the disadvantages of just simply cherishing ourselves and the advantages of cherishing others, this bolsters the meditation. When we begin to examine this idea on a much deeper level, we see that this cherishing of the self—which we usually associate with bringing happiness—actually brings much more suffering.

### ***Self-cherishing exaggerates our problems and causes hyper-sensitivity***

It's just so interesting. When your friends come and

tell you all their problems, you can just look at it and see how they're exaggerating. You can see that it's really not that serious and, actually, they could let it go or they could look at it in a different way. It seems real obvious when we hear our friends' problems. Or when you talk to your family, everything that's bothering your parents and your siblings, you can look at it and say, "What's everybody getting so uptight about, making all this fuss about?" But on the other hand, when it happens to us, *we're* not making a fuss. We're not exaggerating. We're not getting stuck in our ego. We think we're really seeing things absolutely as they exist and it's really a major thing that's happening!

So you see, just by how we're looking at something, somehow when it's related to the 'I' it becomes a much bigger deal than when it's related to anybody else. Automatically through that process, then, we begin to exaggerate the importance of a lot of things that happen. We make a lot more problems for ourselves. The more we cherish ourselves, the more we become so exceedingly sensitive that almost any little thing is apt to offend us. Because we're so constantly vigilant about protecting the 'I'—protecting our body, protecting our reputation, protecting the part of us that likes to be praised and approved of—that it's like we have this incredible, sensitive radar device scanning for anything that could possibly get in the way of this 'I'. We become so easily offended, so touchy, so sensitive, and that in itself just makes more and more problems for us. Because then people who very often didn't mean to offend us, we interpret what they say as offensive.

Then we come back with, “Why did you say this?” And we start attacking each other, and we really get into it.

Sometimes, then, this super-sensitivity picks up things that are there; sometimes it picks up things that aren't there. But in any case, it makes everything very, very important. Now, I'm not saying when there is conflict, you should just gloss over it, like if somebody is mad at you, you might just pretend they aren't. If somebody is mad at you, it's something to address. Somebody is in pain. They're miserable if they're mad at us. It's good if we go and talk to them, and figure out what's happening. Because maybe we did do something unintentionally. So it's not a sense of just whitewashing everything. Rather, it's getting over this thing of, “How's everybody looking at me? What are they saying to *me* and what are they thinking about *me*? How am *I* doing?” Because it just creates so much pain inside of us.

### ***Self-cherishing causes jealousy, competitiveness and arrogance***

Then the self-cherishing mind gets us into this trilogy of jealousy for the people who do better than us, competitiveness with the people who are equal to us, and arrogance over the people whom we consider inferior. Again, by this strong emphasis on the self, we're always ranking ourselves. Whenever we meet somebody, we always have to rank, “Am I above, equal or less?” As soon as we do that, we get jealous, proud or competitive. And none of those three emotions or tactics seems to bring us much happiness.



Again, that all comes from the self-cherishing mind, the whole reason why we aren't yet Buddhas!

Some people say, "Shakyamuni Buddha attained enlightenment. How come I'm still here? I keep practicing but my mind is still stuck in this rut!" Well, the basic reason why we aren't Buddhas yet is because there is the self-centered mind. It has kind of run the show up until now. It's one of the main things that makes difficulty in our spiritual practice. Why weren't we born Rinpoches and Tulkus? Why weren't we born on the path of seeing having spontaneous bodhicitta? Well, basically because we didn't cultivate it in the past! Why didn't we cultivate it in the past? For the same reason we have so much difficulty cultivating it now! Because our mind thinks of ten million other things to do. And what is that mind that is making us perpetually distracted, that thinks of the ten million other things to do? It's the self-centered mind. It's the self-centered mind that's always looking for some little bit of pleasure somewhere and distracting ourselves from the basic opportunity to tap into the Buddha potential that we have.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Well, I think self-cherishing has been very constant, but in some ways, it seems like we've really developed it. Like gourmet chefs. It's like tsampa compared to chocolate cake. [Laughter.]

I think that part of it (I speak about this often) is due to the way kids are raised. Kids are asked from the time they are two years old, "What do you like? Orange juice or apple juice?" "Do you want to ride

your bicycle or do you want to go swimming?” “Do you want to watch this TV program or that TV program?” In our effort to make children happy, we give them so much choice that they get confused. They then have to turn so much attention to figuring out “What is going to give me the most pleasure at this time? Orange juice or apple juice?”

That perpetuates as adults, so that we have incredible difficulty making decisions, because we’re trying to eke out every single little bit of pleasure that we can possibly get out of every circumstance. We think happiness means having as many choices as we can have, and we get totally confused because we can’t figure out what’s going to make us the happiest. We are always wondering, all this mulling over in our mind, “What do I really want?” Somehow, we get real, real stuck on ourselves.

*[Audience:] What you just said is really confusing for me, because my parents made choices for me all the time and when it came time for me to make decisions myself, I was lost. So now, with my own kids, I allow them to make choices so that they will be more self-confident.*

I think it’s what kind of choices we’re teaching kids to make, because I agree with you that it’s important to teach kids how to make choices. But it’s important to make them sensitive to what are important choices and what are not-so-important choices. Because we often get stuck on the unimportant choices. When kids get stuck about, “Do I want to play with the pink ball or the green ball?” I think we could teach them to

make other kinds of choices that are more important, instead of focusing on real small things that cause them to constantly turn inwards, “What’s going to make me the happiest—pink or green?” But rather, other kinds of decisions that are more important, like “It’s cold outside today. What clothes do you think you could put on so that you will be comfortable?” So they learn to think like that, rather than orange juice and apple juice.

So often in our life, when we look at a lot of the difficulties that are going on at any particular moment—the difficulties we have in this life, the difficulties in our spiritual life, and the difficulties that are getting created for future lives—so much of it traces back to this over-emphasis on self. It’s always “me, me, me”. And sometimes it even comes into our spiritual practice, like, “*My* meditation session!” “*My* altar! I have such a nice altar.” “It’s *my* turn to drive the Dalai Lama somewhere.” [Laughter.] The self-cherishing moves right in along with everything else.

It is very interesting to reflect on and recognize where, in our attempt to be happy, we actually create the cause for our own unhappiness. When we can see that very clearly in our own life—that we really want to be happy, but because of our own ignorance, because of our own self-cherishing, we often basically just create the cause for more confusion now and in the future—then we can begin to have compassion for ourselves. When we can see that in our own life and make clear examples of it, then we can begin to develop this compassion for ourselves. We realize that we do wish ourselves well, but because of this mind that is so habituated with the self-grasping and the

self-cherishing, we keep on doing counter-productive things. We begin to develop some genuine compassion and patience for ourselves. From that, then we can spread that compassion to others. We can realize that other beings, too, want happiness, but they are stuck with the same ignorance and the same self-cherishing that we are. They, too, are making more and more difficulties for themselves in spite of their wish to be happy. That kind of evokes a feeling of tolerance and compassion for others. Then that becomes a much deeper kind of compassion and acceptance of what we are and what others are. It's not just painting on some kind of plastic acceptance, plastic compassion.

### **Advantages of cherishing others**

*[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]*

... We remember the disadvantages of cherishing ourselves, we remember the benefits of cherishing others, and the benefits that accrue both to others and to ourselves. And the fact that when we cherish others, they feel good. Just as we feel good when other people take care of us, other people feel good when we take care of them. This attitude of cherishing others becomes the real source for happiness in the world.

When you see how much delight His Holiness can bring to a room full of people even though he doesn't greet each of them individually, you can see that there is some value to just this mind that cherishes others. If we can develop that mind, that automatically, quite directly brings happiness to others. Plus, if we then

act based on this mind of cherishing others then we can make a real positive contribution to others, both in a societal way and social issues, and especially to others' spiritual practice so that they can learn the methods to free themselves.

Also, when we take care of others, when our concern turns towards others, we cease making mountains out of molehills regarding our own problems. Again, this doesn't mean denying or negating whatever our problems are, but it just means seeing them in a balanced way, without this exaggerated viewpoint. By seeing our problems in a balanced way, we can then see them more realistically and deal with them. We can also recognize that our own problems occur within this whole panorama of everything else that's going on in the world today, and generate the feeling of being inter-related to and cherishing others.

Then, of course, the more we cherish others, the more we create positive potential and the more we purify our own negative karma, so the quicker we'll be able to gain spiritual realizations. The less hindrances we have on the path, the better able we are to die and have a good rebirth, the quicker we can actually understand reality, and so on.

Since so many benefits accrue from cherishing others—things that help us, things that help others—it really makes a lot of sense to do that.

## **Exchanging Self and Others**

*[Original teachings lost due to change of tape. This*

*section is taken from teachings that Venerable Thubten Chodron gave in 2003 on the Three Principal Aspects of the Path.]*

So, based on some sort of understanding of the disadvantages of self-centeredness and the benefits of cherishing others, we then did a practice called Exchanging Self and Others; though exchanging self and others doesn't mean I become you and you become me. Okay, it doesn't mean that my bank account becomes yours and your bank account becomes mine, and that your house becomes mine and that my house becomes yours, because then you'd be living on the street. Exchanging self and others doesn't mean that we take each other's stuff. What it means is that previously the one we cherished the most was this one "me," so we're exchanging that and now the one we cherish most is going to be others. Previously we used to look at others and go, "Yes, we're okay but they're next best, first is me." Now, when we exchange self and others we look at our own happiness and we say, "Oh, yeah that's nice, but it's second best, first is others." We're exchanging who it is that we focus on and care the most about. This doesn't mean that we negate ourselves. It does not mean we become martyrs because of all of those things. If we negate ourselves and don't take care of ourselves we become a big burden for other people. That's not very compassionate. And if we become martyrs, there is tons of ego involved in martyrdom. Giving one's life with a real altruistic intention is very different than becoming a martyr, especially with the present connotation of martyrdom. So, it simply

means that we're opening the scope of who we consider important and really cherishing others.

His Holiness had us do this very little nice exercise because the ego is very resistant to exchanging self and others, you know. "What do you mean care about others the way I care about myself, no way!" he said. Especially for those of us from democratic countries who believe in majority rule. If you think how many there are of me, there's one person who's me. How many others? Countless. So, if we're going to have a vote over whose happiness is more important, one person, "me," or countless minus one, it is the others who are the democratically elected recipients of who we cherish the most. It's very clear. If you look at it that way it really makes some sense. I'm only one person and there are all these countless other beings out there. It actually does make more sense to really cherish them and be aware of their happiness and suffering. Of course our mind puts up a big battle for doing this. We don't like that and we come up with all sorts of doubts about the practice.

## **Overcoming our doubts**

Shantideva in chapter eight of Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life teaches this practice and he voices, in the verses that he writes, the various doubts that our self-centered mind makes up about why it is impossible to exchange self and others. I just want to abbreviate these a little bit for you. Take your self-centered mind and imagine it as an external person. Give it a face. You need to think of it in whatever form you like: a person, a monster, a blob.

Imagine that our self-centered mind is saying “Others suffering doesn’t affect me so why should I work to dispel it.” It feels good, doesn’t it? I mean, other people’s suffering doesn’t affect me, what should I care? They should pick themselves up by their own boot straps. I read Ayn Rand and I firmly believe that. You just work for yourself and that way the world turns out better. So, why should we work to dispel others’ suffering? Well, one reason is that we’re interrelated and that others’ suffering affects us, and I think this is why His Holiness says that if you want to be selfish, be wisely selfish and care for others. Because if we only work for ourselves and forget about others, we’re going to be living in a society with a lot of other unhappy people, and what do people do when they are unhappy? They crash jetliners into the World Trade Center, they break into our homes, they do whatever it is, they write graffiti on the walls. I remember years ago living in Seattle and there was a bill up for property taxes that would go to the schools, and people without children didn’t want to pay more property taxes to have more schools and increase the after-school recreational activities and educational things. And these people were just thinking me and my money, and the people who have kids they should pay for this but when kids don’t have education and they don’t have recreational activities, what do they do? They get into mischief. Whose houses are they going to break into? The houses of the people who didn’t vote for the bond to give more money to the schools. So, it becomes totally self-defeating when we only work for ourselves. Why do we want to put more money into building prisons but we don’t want to put



money into prevention? We have to think about this as a society if our approach is correct to really creating happiness for ourselves and others. Our interdependence is one reason why we should take care of others and we should work to dispel others' suffering.

Another reason is that the difference between self and others is something that exists by being merely labeled. Remember, we did these things before on the basis of these aggregates, this body and mind here on this cushion. We say "I" or I say "I." And on the basis of that body and mind on another cushion I say "other." But of course, each person in this room thinks of their own aggregates and says "I," and looks to me and everybody else and says "other." So, who's the inherently existent "I" and who's the inherently existing "other?" There isn't any, because it depends completely on what you happen to be labeling. It's like the example of this side of the mountain and that side of the mountain. That side of the valley and the other side of the valley depend upon where you are. We've just become very familiar with labeling "I" in dependence upon these aggregates but we could become equally as familiar by labeling "I" on the basis of other people's aggregates. So when we see somebody else experiencing physical and mental suffering, just start to think "I'm unhappy" or "I'm in pain" because from the viewpoint of the person who's experiencing it, she or he is saying, "I'm unhappy" or "I'm in pain." If we familiarize ourselves with a new way of labeling and get very familiar with it, we can actually train our mind to care as much about others as we now care about ourselves. Those of you who

have kids know that when your child is unhappy, when your child is sick, you wish you could exchange their suffering with your happiness, it just comes naturally. It's because you're labeling "I" on the other aggregates and cherishing them, the aggregates of the child. So, it's possible to so closely identify with others in this way that we can really cherish them without having some kind of ulterior motivation, without painting on something, or having mental gymnastics, or doing manipulation, but genuinely, honestly, cherishing others.

So, let's go back to the question of why should I dispel their suffering if it doesn't harm me? Well, it's only because we cherish this body that we can't bear to see it harmed, and that cherishing that we have for our own body exists under the influence of ignorance which is the grasping at an inherently existing "I" and an inherently existing body. That grasping is the source of cyclic existence, so when we fall prey to it and are so attached to our body in that way, we're just creating more and more suffering for ourselves because we're acting out of that misconception that thinks there is a real "I," there is a real solid body. When we look at it that way we see that, yes, it does make sense to care about others' suffering even though it doesn't directly affect us.

In Shantideva's dialogue, the mind makes up another reason, it's more petulant. Our ego is this petulant thing that says, "But others suffering doesn't harm me! Why should I care about them?" We've probably said this. If you watch a three year old, it comes out of their mouth. We're more sophisticated and pretend we don't think like this. Well, if that's

true that others' suffering doesn't harm me then why do we work for the happiness of the old person that we're going to become because the old person we're going to become isn't us? You're getting what I mean? We're just saying, "I want to be happy, why should I care about anything else other than me?" Well, the old person that we're going to become isn't the "me" who we are right now, it's somebody else. Isn't it? Is it you or is somebody else? Yes, are you feeling the suffering you'd feel when you're an 80 year old right now?

### **Is this really "my body?"**

Now if the mind says but, "It's still my body and I have to take care of my body," well, what's mine about the body? If you cut it open do you find a big "me?" If you laid out all your organs, a couple of kidneys and an intestine, and a big and small intestine, the eye balls, and some spleen, you know, you laid them all out. Would you look at that and say, "That's mine, that's me?" You'd say "yuck," wouldn't you? So, what's mine about this body? And if we look at the fact that, genetically, half of the genes came from our mother and half of the genes came from our father, then it's actually our parent's body isn't it, it's not our body? What are we doing labeling "I" and "mine" on this body? We should be labeling "Mom's and Dad's body" because it came from them, didn't it? The genes are theirs. Or maybe we should label it the farmer's body because all the broccoli and tofu and everything else we ate came from the farmers. If you eat meat you should call it the cow's body because your body is a transformation of the cow's

body or the chicken's body or the fish's body. So, how can we label it my body? There's nothing "my" about this thing. It all came from other people and yet we see by the power of just familiarization and the power of self-grasping, our idea of this being "my" body becomes so strong. It becomes harder than a diamond doesn't it? Yet, that's something completely invented by our mind because there's nothing "my," "mine," about this body. This body actually belongs to others. But, it's still mine? Well, you know really it's not, there's nothing about it that's ours.

It's like thinking that money belongs to me. Were you born with any money? Did you come out of your mother's womb with a fist full of dollars, you know? We didn't, we came out of our mother's womb totally broke. Any money we have now is because other people gave it to us. Don't we? So, the money actually belongs to other people. It's not my money. Everything we have, your clothes, your house, your car, anything you have, you have because somebody else gave it to you. You didn't come out of the womb with all these things. So, in the same way, yet with all these things we label them "mine". So, the same with our body, we only have it because other people gave it to us. The farmers gave us the food to eat, mom gave half the genes, dad gave the other half of the genes, so why are we making such a big deal about this is "mine" and making it so solid and holding on to it as my identity? It doesn't make much sense.

When you think about this you can get this feeling that it becomes a little bit easier to make the exchange of self with others because there is no real me here to start with. So, this is why this technique of Equalizing

and Exchanging Self with Others is said to be for the bodhisattva, for somebody of higher faculties. The Seven-Point Instruction of Cause and Effect is for somebody of more modest faculties because exchanging self and others is getting us into a whole understanding about emptiness, isn't it? And how the body, the mind, the "I," the "mine" are all empty, so that's why it is for those of higher faculties. So, when we dispel this difference between "I" and "others," by realizing that they aren't inherently existent, we come to see that suffering is suffering no matter who's it is and is something to be dispelled no matter who's it is, and happiness is happiness no matter who's it is and is something to be worked for. So on the basis of that, changing who we care about the most, "I" and "others," becomes much easier to do.

### **Why should I take on more suffering?**

Now, the mind keeps making up more excuses about why we can't exchange self and others and it says, "Look it's just too much of a burden to cherish others like I cherish myself. Why should I take on more suffering than I already have?" Makes sense doesn't it? I mean, I'm already overwhelmed by suffering, don't give me more!" Well, why, why should we do it? Because caring only about our own suffering creates the cause of more suffering and generating compassion and caring about others creates the cause of happiness. So, actually when we care about others' suffering we're creating the cause for happiness and not the cause of suffering. Then, somebody is going to say, "But when my child or my dog or my friend is

sick and I see them suffering, or if I watch TV and I see what's happening in Afghanistan and I see somebody suffering, that causes me pain, so why should I care about others' suffering? Caring about it, just seeing it causes me pain so why shouldn't I just block it out, not care, not look at others' suffering, not caring about others' suffering because it just creates more pain in my own heart?" The answer to this at this point is that we've misunderstood a little bit about compassion and we've gone from compassion to a sense of personal distress. I remember being at one of the conferences of His Holiness with the western scientists and one of the psychologists was explaining about this because compassion is focused on the other, personal distress is focused on our self. So if I see you suffering and I get unhappy because I can't bear to see you suffering, what's my mind focused more on, you or me? Me. So, we've fallen into personal distress at that point. If we stay focused on the other, it means that we can still have empathy but we don't let ourselves get bummed out by the suffering of the world. Why? Because we see that suffering only exists because the cause of suffering exists and that isn't a given, that suffering can be eliminated. So a bodhisattva, even when they see others suffering, which can be distressing to see, doesn't go into personal distress because they see that the suffering can be stopped. It may not be able to be stopped today or tomorrow or even this lifetime, but a bodhisattva knows that suffering isn't pre-programmed and a done deal that's going to exist forever.

When we look in these kinds of ways, it's good to

let these doubts surface in our mind and I think that's really Shantideva's skill when he wrote that section of the book. You know, letting all the doubt surface in our mind about, "Why should I care about others?" and, "Why should I exchange myself and others? What kind of stupid ridiculous thing is this?" Let those doubts surface and then use our analytical wisdom to investigate the doubts and see if they have some kind of reasoning behind them or if they're basically self-centered constructions or conniving of our own mind that doesn't want to really own up. This meditation of Exchanging Self and Others is very nice and it can bring up a lot of stuff but, like I said, that's good because then we really can look very, very deeply and understand how our mind works and bring to the surface a lot of preconceptions that we have and didn't even recognize that we had. And that's good because that's when we start investigating them.

## **Giving Your Own Happiness and Taking the Suffering of Others**

Then to enhance that feeling of really wishing others well and wishing them to be free of pain, we do the taking and giving meditation, the *tonglen* meditation. This is the meditation where we imagine others around us and we imagine taking their suffering and the cause of their suffering in the form of smoke that we inhale. The smoke then becomes a thunderbolt which strikes at the lump of the anger, selfishness and contortion at our own heart, destroys that, and we dwell in this open space without any concepts of our

self, the space of emptiness. Then from that space, there is a light that appears, and we emanate that light and we imagine multiplying and transforming our body, our possessions and our positive potential, it becomes whatever others need and others are being satisfied by that.

When we do this meditation, we can start out with ourselves, thinking of ourselves in the future and taking on our own future problems and sending happiness to ourselves. Then we gradually extend it to friends, to strangers, to people we don't like. We can think of specific groups of people. It's an excellent meditation to do when you are watching the news. It's an excellent meditation to do when you are in the middle of an argument. Or you are at a family dinner and everybody is yelling at each other. Or you are in a movie and you are feeling afraid because of what you are seeing on the screen. Or you are in the middle of childbirth. Really, it's a good meditation. [Laughter.]

This meditation develops our love and it develops our compassion. It also gives us a way to relate to every situation, because there is something we can do in every situation. Of course, if we can say or do something directly in a situation to alleviate harm, we should do that. In the situations where we can't, then at least we do this meditation so that somehow, there is still some inter-relatedness between others and us. We are developing at least the wish to be able to actually do something in the future.

This meditation is also very good to do when you are unhappy, when you are sick, when you are in pain. Of course, we can see so clearly: when we are unhappy, we are sick and we are in pain, what is the



first thing that we think about? *Me!* “I’m so miserable!” What’s the last thing we think about? Others. Isn’t it? Except to think about others and how nasty they were and what they did to us. [Laughter.] But we’re usually just really stuck in ourselves.

This meditation is so valuable to do when you are unhappy or when you are sick. Because you just say, “Okay, as long as I’m unhappy for whatever reason, may it suffice for all the unhappiness of all other beings.” “I’m being criticized. The pain that comes from that, may it suffice for all the other people who are getting criticized.” “My stomach hurts. May it suffice for all the people who have stomach aches today.” You imagine taking on the suffering and cause of suffering of others, and then sending out your body, possessions and positive potential, giving to others all the things that are going to make them happy. When you do this, it totally transforms your own experience.

This is one of the ways of transforming adverse conditions into the path. Since we live in a world that is full of conditions that are counter-productive to developing the spiritual path, this is an excellent meditation to transform all of those conditions so that instead of taking us further away from enlightenment, they become the actual path. I think this is one of the real beauties of the Dharma and the real beauty of the thought training techniques, that any situation we find ourselves in can be transformed into a practice that makes us closer to enlightenment. It doesn’t matter where you are. It doesn’t matter who you’re with, what’s going on around you. This practice gives us the ability to completely transform anything. So it’s quite powerful.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

The important thing is to transform how we *think* about the stomachache. The stomachache may not go away. But if we transform how we think about the stomachache, then the stomachache is going to be a totally different experience for us. We're not trying to get rid of the suffering here. Rather, we are trying to get rid of the mind that *dislikes* the suffering, because it's the mind that dislikes the suffering that creates more suffering.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Exactly. It's the fear of the suffering, and the mind that just completely tightens around it. The more we meditate and look at our own experience, the more we see how the fear of the suffering is sometimes so much more painful than the suffering itself.

Just take as an example remembering when you were a little kid going to the dentist office. The whole trip was traumatic. Even before the dentist touched you. And it's all our own mind. You can see so many examples of times where the raw, actual experience may not be so bad, but it's all the fear leading up to it, and it's all the projections and interpretations that occur after it.

I remember one situation that was real clear for me. One time, I got a letter from somebody saying that there were all these people who were talking about me. And it was all people I cared a great deal about. At first when I read the letter, I thought it was really funny. It was like, "What a silly kind of thing!

It's really funny, what people are saying." So at the very moment of reading the letter, it was like there was no problem here. Then about a day later, after I had spent time thinking, it was, "They're saying this. And then they're saying that. After all I've done! Oh!" One day. Two days. The more time passed, the more miserable I was. Whereas the actual thing of learning the news didn't give me much problem at all.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I think this is a real good point, your saying that this technique only works when you're not angry. Because I think you're right. When we're still angry at our own suffering and we try and do this technique, the anger is so prominent that the technique just becomes like raindrops falling off. Nothing sticks on it. Then I think what is helpful to do is to say, "May I take on the anger of all other beings," and work with the anger instead of the suffering. "All the other beings who are angry, may I take on their anger and all the pain from their anger."

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I think what happens is, when you're completely accepting of the pain, and you are doing this technique not with the wish that the pain goes away but you're just doing it, then the pain probably goes away. But when you do this meditation because you want the pain to go away, it doesn't work.

*[Audience:] When I see a movie and somebody is*

*taking another's heart out or something like that, I have to tell myself, "This isn't happening." I don't know how to make the transition to saying, "This pain is not the pain. It's my fear."*

You can see that it's very clearly not the pain, because everything is happening on the movie screen and there is no real heart that is getting taken out. There is not even a violent situation really taking place. It's a movie screen.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

But this is the thing. We have to keep going over and over these techniques because we do forget. That's why I think it's very effective to practice even in situations where we're watching movies, because then we can be really convinced there actually is no pain out there. This really is my mind.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I know. I've sat through movies where I trembled. I just sit there and shake. Very clearly, there is nothing happening. So then it's like, "Okay. I'm going to do the *tonglen* meditation."

*[Audience: inaudible]*

A good situation where I find this technique very useful is when I'm in a room and there is a real negative energy in the room. For some reason or another, the energy is just negative. A distracted

energy. Something just isn't right. Then I'll do this meditation, and it really helps. Especially if I have to go give a Dharma talk and I'm in a place where it feels really weird, and it's real hard to give a Dharma talk, I do this meditation beforehand. [Laughter.]

*[Audience:] What exactly do you imagine?*

I say, "Okay. If there is negative energy in this room, instead of feeling I want to get away from it, I take it. I'm not rejecting this negative energy. May I take it all upon myself. May it just be used to smash this own self-cherishing and this own ignorance." And then I just imagine taking it all up. I just inhale it all, and then use it to smash the lump at the heart.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **The Bodhisattva Vows**

#### **Taking the Bodhisattva Vows**

We're talking about the bodhisattva vows and the bodhisattva trainings. On the major outline, the heading is "How to take the bodhisattva vows." The subheadings are "Taking the bodhisattva vows if you haven't taken them before" and "Having taken vows, how to keep them pure and prevent degeneration." Contained within the second subheading, are topics describing the commitments of the aspiring bodhisattva and the engaged bodhisattva.

Having done some meditation on the bodhicitta, having engaged in the two techniques for generating bodhicitta, and having had some experience of it doesn't mean you will have that experience one hundred percent every time you turn your mind toward it. It doesn't mean that your mind goes, zap! "Yes, I'm going to become a Buddha for the benefit of sentient beings!" But you have some experience, some feeling, something in your heart from it. This is when it's very helpful to take the aspiring bodhicitta.

#### **TWO TYPES OF BODHICITTA**

Now, we can have two types of bodhicitta: aspiring bodhicitta (sometimes called wishing bodhicitta) and

engaged bodhicitta. Shantideva gave the analogy that aspiring bodhicitta is like aspiring to go to Delhi or Dharamsala. You have the wish, you aspire to go, but you're still sitting here in Seattle and you don't even know what airlines go to Delhi, how much it costs, or what you need to take, but you really aspire to go. That's like aspiring bodhicitta—you want to become a Buddha for the benefit of others. On the other hand, engaged bodhicitta is not only learning which airlines go to Delhi and the prices, but actually buying a ticket, packing your bags, and getting on a plane. You're taking active steps to get there. Engaged bodhicitta is affirming to yourself, "I want to become a Buddha for the benefit of others, and I'm actually going to do something about it."

Engaged bodhicitta involves taking the bodhisattva vows, which are a very good framework for actually helping us to practice the six far-reaching attitudes, which are like the airplane that takes us to Delhi.

So first, one generates the aspiring bodhicitta, then later on one undertakes engaged bodhicitta and takes the bodhisattva vows.

To take the aspiring bodhicitta, it is sufficient just to have respect and admiration for bodhicitta and some kind of feeling about it. It doesn't mean one has the actual bodhicitta one hundred percent, all the time. However, to take the bodhisattva vows, one needs a stronger experience and a much deeper aspiration to actually do the trainings and practices. It's like the difference between sitting here saying, "Yeah, I want to go to Dharamsala," and having the energy and the strength to really start investigating and getting yourself on the plane.

Aspiring and engaged bodhicitta both have the same motivation. They are both bodhicitta. They both involve the desire to become a Buddha for the benefit of others. The difference is in the action a person takes. Although aspiring bodhicitta is very wonderful, someone is not going to become a Buddha with it alone. We must go beyond the aspiring bodhicitta. But the aspiring bodhicitta is something that's quite good and we should rejoice at it.

## **TWO TYPES OF ASPIRING BODHICITTA**

When Gen Lamrimpa was here last time he was explaining that when His Holiness gives the bodhicitta, he gives it in different ways. He gives aspiring bodhicitta and then engaged bodhicitta. There are two different types of aspiring bodhicitta. There's aspiring bodhicitta without precepts, which is "mere aspiring bodhicitta," and there's aspiring bodhicitta with a precept, which is "special aspiring bodhicitta." Following the two types of aspiring bodhicitta, one undertakes the engaged bodhicitta.

The mere aspiring bodhicitta is having the thought, "I want to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of others." The special aspiring bodhicitta with the precept is thinking, "I want to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of others, and I'm not going to give my bodhicitta up even if it costs me my life." So the special bodhicitta is seeing this altruistic intention as something very, very precious and very essential. It is something very deep in your own heart, something you love, and you're not going to give it up no matter what happens in your life.



Special bodhicitta also involves practicing the four white actions and abandoning the four black actions. I want to find different terms for that because that sounds like racist terminology to me. Here it's a direct translation, but I don't think we should carry on that kind of terminology.

There are ceremonies for generating the aspiring bodhicitta and the engaged bodhicitta. You can generate them on your own as well, but the ceremony, when you do it in front of your guru, in front of the Triple Gem, adds much more force to what you're doing, especially if you take the pledges, or you take the vows. The first time you take the pledges or vows you have to take it in front of a teacher. Following that first time, to renew your bodhisattva vows, you can do it simply with the visualization of the merit field, and take it.

## **Commitments of the Aspiring Bodhisattva Vows**

There are two practices that are recommended:

1. To protect bodhicitta, the altruistic intention, from degenerating in this lifetime.
2. To prevent the altruistic intention from degenerating in future lifetimes.

These are very, very practical guidelines. I think it pays for us to listen and try to practice as much as possible.

## **HOW TO PROTECT OUR ALTRUISM FROM**

## **DEGENERATING IN THIS LIFE**

Once a person has generated the bodhicitta and wants to lead sentient beings to enlightenment, that's a pretty strong feeling. It's a worthwhile alteration in anyone's life. Doing this, a person can really put his or her energy, and life's purpose, in a totally different direction. It's like finally succeeding, making life very deeply meaningful. But it's not sufficient just to do that. One must protect it because our minds are so wishy-washy and so easily lose energy—just pooping out, wanting to sit in front of the TV and eat chocolate ice-cream.

We really have to keep the mind going and nurture the bodhicitta. That's why in our dedication prayer, we always say, "May the precious bodhi mind not yet born arise and grow; May that born have no decline, but increase forever more." This acknowledges that it's not sufficient just to have that feeling. We really need to nurture it and take care of it. It's not sufficient just to have your baby, you've got to take care of it so it grows into an adult.

### **1. Remember the advantages of bodhicitta again and again**

Remember at the beginning of this whole section, when we talked about bodhicitta, we went through the advantages of it? Remember, it helps you to purify your negative karma very quickly. It helps you to gain a vast collection of positive potential quickly. It protects you from spirit harms. You get the title "The Child of the Buddha." Even the Buddhas themselves

show you honor and respect. You gain all the realizations quickly. You quickly become a Buddha. It's a good antidote to depression, despair, and hopelessness. We talked about it at quite some length at the beginning. We need to remember these advantages again and again and again. The purpose of doing this is if you think about the advantages of bodhicitta, you will become enthusiastic about it. If you're enthusiastic about it, it's not going to degenerate during this lifetime.

Think about getting married to somebody. If you think about your spouse's good qualities again and again and again, you stay happy and want to stay married. But if you think, "Oh, it's sufficient I get married and that's it," then after a while, the mind gets fickle and changes and pretty soon, everything is falling apart. So it's really important with bodhicitta to think of its advantages and good qualities, so that you remain enthusiastic. Doing this will keep bodhicitta fresh, vibrant, and meaningful for you.

## **2. To strengthen one's bodhicitta, generate the thought to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings three times in the morning and three times in the evening**

The following recitation is meant to strengthen one's bodhicitta, and make it strong and vibrant, so it's highly recommended. When we get up in the morning, the first thing we should do is to generate the bodhicitta. When you get up in the morning, think, "I'm not going to harm others, I'm going to benefit them as much as possible. I'm going to do everything

today with the intention to become a Buddha for the benefit of others.” In a more technical way, in a fuller way, you then do the prayer of refuge and bodhicitta: “I take refuge until I am enlightened in the Buddhas, the Dharma and the Sangha. By the positive potential I create ...” You do that three times in the morning and three times in the evening. That helps remind you of the altruistic intention. It makes it stronger and increases it in your mind.

Thinking about the bodhicitta is like planting seeds in the ground. The more seeds you plant, the more flowers will grow, and the fuller the field is going to be. Just repeating the prayer over and over leaves that imprint in your mind. So it’s very important. Sometimes in our Dharma practice, we feel like, “I’m doing these prayers. It’s all just words. I’m not getting anything out of it.” Ever felt like that? No, I’m sure you haven’t! You people are all just very vibrant and dedicated! It’s only *me* that feels that! [Laughter.] So I’m the worst one! [Laughter.]

Recognizing that even if you’re stuck in your practice in some way, at least you can still know something is going in at some level. Because you can see what’s happening like when you watch TV. Have you ever dreamt about a program or some minor thing that happens during the day? This happens because those events put a powerful seed in your mind. Similarly, repeating the above prayer, like a TV program, plants a seed in your mind even though we don’t think it does very much. Doing this, the bodhicitta is nurtured, and grows. So, you keep doing the prayers, keep on doing what you’re doing, and something will happen.

### **3. Do not give up working for sentient beings even when they are harmful**

Working for sentient beings, even when they are harmful, is very difficult. It's so easy, when somebody is harmful, to not work for that person. I think sometimes, what's even more difficult, is when we're very close to somebody or we have a lot of hopes in somebody, and they betray our trust or they don't appreciate our kindness. I sometimes think this is one of the most difficult situations, rather than somebody who you meet from the very beginning, whom you like very much. Being patient with that person is often easier than being patient with somebody whom you really counted on, but harmed you afterwards.

We have to be very patient in all these situations, because it's so tempting when we receive harm, to say "Chuck it! There're all these other sentient beings out there, I don't need to break my neck over this guy. Forget him!" But in reality when we generate bodhicitta, it's for all the sentient beings, so the moment we exclude one, we've lost our bodhicitta.

That's why when I teach the Four Immeasurables, I always say the important word is "all." It's the same case with bodhicitta. It's really important to try and keep a handle on our temper. This demarcation of actually abandoning the bodhicitta can be seen when either we say "Forget it!" with all the sentient beings, because bodhicitta is too difficult, or we say, in regards to one sentient being, "This guy is just too much of a jerk! I'm never going to lead this one to enlightenment! I don't want to."

In order not to fall into that pitfall of abandoning

the bodhicitta, it's really important not to give up working for others even when they harm us. It's for this reason that in Shantideva's text, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, chapter six, a nice thick chapter, is the chapter on patience.

*[Audience:] What can we do about doubting our ability to develop bodhicitta?*

A doubt is different from a clear conclusion. Waffling can definitely lead you to losing your bodhicitta. If you waffle too much, you can start to have the deluded doubt that takes you over the edge. But I think it is natural sometimes to think, "Wow! I'm supposed to lead *all* sentient beings to enlightenment; that sounds daunting!" And you can feel sometimes like, "How am I ever going to do this?" and have some doubt. So I think it's really good to be mindful when you have that doubt, and not to nurture the doubt. But be aware that the Buddha said even flies can become Buddhas, can become enlightened. So if it's possible for a fly to become a bodhisattva, and to work for the benefit of all sentient beings, then it is possible for us to do it as well. So we should regain our self-confidence when this happens. Instead of nurturing the doubt, try to apply an antidote.

It can also be helpful, when we have doubt, to remember that the Buddha wasn't always a Buddha. The Buddha was once screwed up (excuse me! [Laughter.]) and confused like us. The Buddha was actually able to transform his mind, do the practice, and get the results. So it is possible to do that the way the Buddha did. That should reinvigorate us, giving us

more confidence. Abandoning bodhicitta, however, is when you have not just doubt, but a clear conclusion: “I’m not working for sentient beings. This is it!”

*[Audience:] If we’re working for bodhicitta, can we still be angry at someone?*

Just being angry at somebody is different from giving up the bodhicitta. Recognize the difference between, “I’m really ticked off at somebody, but I know I’m going to get over it eventually and I really am, underneath it all, working to become enlightened because I want to lead him or her to enlightenment,” and, “I’m giving up on this guy.”

*[Audience: inaudible]*

It’s good just to recognize “I’m angry. I’m upset. And I’m really feeling this. But it’s also impermanent and I don’t need to make any lasting decisions while I’m angry. I can wait until I’ve calmed down. I can apply the techniques and transform the anger. So I’m not going to make any big decisions while I’m angry.” Then you take refuge. “HELP Tara!!” All the prayers, they’re written so nicely and politely, but I think sometimes we can just go, “HELP!!!”

#### **4. To enhance one’s bodhicitta, accumulate both merit and wisdom continuously**

Remember I was talking about the two collections or the two accumulations? We have to accumulate positive potential. We have to accumulate wisdom.

They're sometimes said to be the two sides of the path. The method side is composed of accumulating positive potential and cultivating bodhicitta, compassion, and the determination to be free. The wisdom side is meditating on emptiness and so on. They often say those are like the two wings of a bird that it needs to fly. In order to keep our bodhicitta going, we must try to accumulate positive potential and wisdom. In addition, we must also purify.

Just within these four points on how to keep our altruism from degenerating in this lifetime, there's a whole practice isn't there? It describes how to do a whole, full Dharma practice.

## **HOW TO PREVENT LOSING THE BODHICITTA IN FUTURE LIVES**

When we've taken the commitment of special aspiring bodhicitta, and we've said, "I aspire to become a Buddha for the benefit of all sentient beings and I'm not going to give it up even at the cost of my life," in order to keep that from degenerating in our future lives, we practice four constructive actions and we abandon four destructive actions. It's not sufficient to keep the altruism from degenerating in this lifetime; we have to protect it for future lifetimes. If we do okay in this lifetime but abandon it in the next lifetime, then we're back where we started. It's good to keep on going continuously, because bodhicitta is something we have to develop and practice continuously, over many, many lifetimes.

### **1. Deceiving the Guru, abbot or other holy beings**



## **with lies**

We've already decided much earlier on the path not to lie. But why is this one being pointed out specifically here at this point? If we want to develop bodhicitta and develop our bodhisattva practices, we have to have a really honest relationship with our spiritual teacher and with other holy beings and the bodhisattvas and abbots. If we try to deceive them with lies, if we're dishonest, it's very difficult for them to guide us. And if they don't guide us, then our practice falls apart.

Also, because we're trying to become like them, if we lie to them, then again it defeats our whole purpose. Lying sets up an obstacle in our own practice. So that's why it's pointed out here specifically to abandon deceiving our spiritual teacher, the abbot (if you live in a monastery), and other holy beings with lies.

### ***Antidote***

The antidote to this is the first of the four constructive actions, namely: to *abandon deliberately deceiving and lying to spiritual teachers, abbots and so forth*. So just tell the truth. Very simple! Very difficult!

## **2. Causing others to regret virtuous actions that they have done**

This is a case where somebody has done something virtuous, maybe the person has made an offering, or begun to practice some of the bodhisattva's actions,

and you discourage the person and make the person regret it and turn away from it.

This is very harmful, because if we ourselves are trying to lead other beings to enlightenment, then we should be encouraging them to act constructively and encouraging them in the Mahayana Path. By discouraging them, we're acting completely opposite to the bodhicitta because we're saying, "I want to become a Buddha for the benefit of others, to lead them to enlightenment," but what we're doing is leading other beings further away from enlightenment by making them regret their positive actions. When somebody regrets their positive actions, the positive karma they accumulated is lost. So somebody might have accumulated a whole lot of really good karma, making offerings or doing some kind of practice, generating bodhicitta, and then if they lose that, all that good karma is destroyed. What we've done is turn people away, made them further from enlightenment rather than bringing them closer to it.

Again this is something to be really sensitive to, because sometimes out of our own selfish interest, we do discourage people from doing virtuous things. For example, if somebody wants to go on a meditation retreat, and we say, "Oh, don't go on a retreat. I really need you around the house. We haven't spent enough time together, let's have a good time. Let's go to the movies. Don't go to that retreat. You can do that later."

It's really easy to discourage people from doing virtuous things. Another example might be when somebody makes an offering to a charity, or to a temple, or something, and you say, "What? You

offered \$500? You offered \$1,000 to this charity? What's happened? How are we going to live? The family needs the money. What are you doing, giving this money away to other people?" Making somebody really regret an offering.

*[Audience:] What if someone is using the Dharma to avoid looking at his or her own issues?*

We have to ask ourselves, "Is that person doing something out of a good motivation and in a responsible way, or are they just being reckless and careless and inconsiderate and insensitive?" We have to feel our way through what's going on there. Maybe we could even ask the person some questions and get them to look at what they're doing.

But I agree with you because I've seen it happen sometimes. People run from one Dharma thing to the other Dharma thing, and sometimes I get the feeling they're not taking the Dharma and looking at their own mind and working out their problems and purifying. They're just keeping busy in order to not look at their confusion, and that happens.

You can bring somebody back to balance without making them regret the positive things they have done. The thing here is to not make people regret something positive. Even if somebody is behaving irresponsibly, you don't want to make them regret that they went to the retreat. You don't want to say, "Look, all that Buddhism stuff is junk, you're just running away from your issues. You shouldn't be talking about Buddhism. You should be in therapy. You're just so irresponsible and blah, blah, blah. And

don't give your money away..." You don't want to do that. But if you say, "It's very good what you're doing. Buddhism is great. Making offerings is great. Going to retreats is great. And what will help you do it even better, is if you can help get other things in your life in balance, so that when you go to a retreat, you're going with a clear motivation and not to avoid other things in your life." So you're encouraging them in the Dharma. You're not juxtaposing their life in the Dharma. You're putting the two in the same direction, and saying that to do the Dharma better, you also have to look at this stuff and get your act together, not that to get your act together, you have to abandon the Dharma.

*[Audience:] What kind of virtuous actions should we encourage?*

Any kind of virtuous action should be encouraged. If somebody helps a little old lady cross the street, and you say, "Why in the world did you do that? You should be helping *me* to cross the street!" [Laughter.] Virtue doesn't just mean externally religious things. It's any kind of positive action.

### ***Antidote***

The antidote to discouraging virtuous actions is the fourth of the constructive actions, which is to *assume responsibility oneself to lead all sentient beings to enlightenment*. It's taking upon ourselves the responsibility to lead them to enlightenment and, therefore, to encourage them in the Dharma, to

encourage them in all the virtuous actions they can possibly do. That's the way to prevent and to heal this second destructive action of making others regret positive actions.

### **3. Abusing or criticizing bodhisattvas or the Mahayana**

Abusing or criticizing bodhisattvas or the Mahayana is so harmful. The bodhisattvas are working for the benefit of all sentient beings, so if we interfere with a bodhisattva's good deeds, we're really interfering with what's for the benefit of others. If we abuse and criticize a bodhisattva, we're disparaging the good he or she is doing for all the sentient beings; and our own bodhicitta and altruism will suffer as a result of it. That's not to say, "Don't criticize bodhisattvas because you're not supposed to." It's really saying that if we're trying to become a bodhisattva and do those kinds of deeds that we're criticizing, then it's only impairing us from getting there, because we're not respecting what we want to become. If we don't respect what we want to become, we're not going to become it.

The lamas often teach, when they teach this point, that since we don't know who is a bodhisattva and who isn't, we shouldn't criticize anybody. That is very good advice. The difficulty comes—and I'm saying this because it got brought up at the Teacher's Conference and it has been a sticky point for me for a long time—when the question arose for me: OK, you don't know who's a Buddha and who's a bodhisattva, so don't criticize anybody, and don't interfere with

people's actions. Well, does that mean if I see John cheating Harry, that I shouldn't criticize John for doing it? That I shouldn't open it up and say, "Harry, John's cheating you," because maybe John is a bodhisattva? And if I criticize, I'm going to create all this negative karma and impede my own bodhicitta? Or maybe if I see two people on the street, and they're having a fight, and one guy's beating up the other one, I shouldn't intervene, because maybe one is a Buddha and he's just using these fierce actions to subdue the mind of somebody else? So does that mean I shouldn't intervene in that kind of situation?

I'm taking what the lamas tell us and carrying it to an extreme, and posing that question. It came up in the Teachers' Conference, and His Holiness said this great thing. He said, "In the teachings, we talk about not criticizing anybody because we don't know who's a bodhisattva and who isn't. So from that point of view, Mao Tse Dong could be a bodhisattva and I shouldn't criticize. So from that point of view, you don't criticize Mao Tse Dong. But," he said, "from the point of view of Tibetan independence and Tibetan religion, I have to criticize Mao Tse Dong, because he destroyed the country and he's threatening the existence of the Dharma."

So what His Holiness did, is he made this incredible distinction between what you hold in your mind, and how you act in the world. So in your mind, you might hold Mao Tse Dong as a bodhisattva, and so you don't disrespect Mao Tse Dong from the depth of your mind, but from the point of view of the actions, and how those actions are manifesting in the world and the effect they're having, you point out

those actions and you criticize. So this whole thing has to be tempered.

*[Audience:] Can you clarify or give us another example of the distinction His Holiness made?*

You criticize the actions and not the person, but you don't have to be afraid to name the person doing the actions too, especially if you're doing it with a positive motivation. We heard these teachings—don't criticize anybody, because we don't know who's a bodhisattva—then maybe you go see Lama Yeshe (this is in the early days when I used to live in the East) and Lama says, “Oh, I'm thinking of sending so and so to do this job at a Dharma center. What do you think of this person? Do you think they'll do a good job?” Now what do you do? Do you tell Lama the truth? Or do you say, “Well, maybe this person is a bodhisattva, so I won't tell Lama their mistakes. But Lama is asking me, but if I say it, maybe I'm breaking this ...” It really comes down very much to your motivation, because if you have to avoid, “Oh, Lama asks me what I think of it, and now it's my turn, I can let out all my hostility and really get even.” That's a really horrible motivation that would definitely be breaking this. If, on the other hand, the guy really has made some mistakes, and you have some doubts about his effectiveness in doing a certain job, then with a kind attitude, wanting to protect everybody in a potentially harmful situation, then it's OK to say that you have observed this person doing this and that in the past, and so you don't know in the future how predictable his actions will be. It really hinges on your

motivation. But what I wanted to get clear, is that there has to be some commentary to this.

*[Audience:] So we have to make sure and check that we're not criticizing from self-cherishing?*

Right. That's a very good point. We have to see when we're criticizing an action, or something that happened, we have to check if it was really so bad, or if it's just that our pride was hurt because we wanted things done differently and they didn't agree with our opinion. That's a very good point.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

And you could always say, "It appears to me," or "It seems to me that what this person is doing is harmful," instead of "This person is doing something harmful."

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I can tell that too. Like whoever I'm with, I'm just looking for them to do something wrong. When this happens, I know I had better do retreat real quick. [Laughter.] It's like this is an emergency situation. Can I make it until retreat time? [Laughter.]

### ***Antidote***

And to counteract that is the third constructive action, which is to *generate the recognition of bodhisattvas as our teacher and to praise them*. That's really



helpful. When we recognize other people's good qualities, it doesn't mean that we have to say, "That guy is a bodhisattva and I recognize his good qualities and praises." It doesn't mean that. It means we should praise people when we see any kind of good qualities in them, or when they seem to be good models for us. We should praise their actions and take them as a guide for ourselves. Again, that doesn't mean idolizing them. It doesn't mean putting them up on a pedestal and thinking that they are going to do everything perfectly. After all what does 'perfect' mean? It means they do what we want them to do when we want them to do it.

So we're not saying to idolize anybody. We're saying to really recognize people's good qualities, respect them, and praise them. If we can train our mind to do that, then instead of having this mind, like you were just saying, that's looking for the faults, it's training the mind that's looking for the good qualities. And the more we can see good qualities and respect them, the more we're opening ourselves to develop those same good qualities. That's why respect is a really important thing, and why giving praise to others is an important thing. Sometimes, people say, "Wait a minute. Why should I give praise? Isn't that increasing somebody else's ego?" That's not the point. The point is, that it's very helpful for us to learn to give praise. Because it is very easy to give criticism and it's a training to give praise.

To relate to this conference I just went to in Portland, one of the things we talked about was making "I" statements. These are ways of communicating information that aren't just assertive

and pointing out when something has gone wrong, but also when you give praise, to use nice statements. In other words, if somebody did something that you really admire, that really helped you, instead of saying, “Oh, you’re marvelous!” or “Thank you so much, you’re just terrific!” That doesn’t give anybody much information. This is especially so when you’re bringing up kids, to say “Oh, you’re good.” What does that mean to a kid? That doesn’t give us any information to tell us we’re good or that we’re marvelous. It doesn’t let a person know what he or she did and how it influenced you or how you feel about it. It’s just a vague statement of something positive. So the “I” statements are really good when you’re giving praise. For example: “When I was sick and you brought me vegetarian chicken soup, I felt happy because I felt cared for.” Something along that line is good. [Laughter.] You don’t like vegetarian chicken soup? [laughter] What I’m getting at is when you use that kind of statement, you’re telling people very specifically what the behavior was. You’re telling them specifically how you felt and why you felt that way instead of just saying, “Oh, you’re such a good friend!”

This is similar with children. “When Johnny slugged you and you didn’t slug him back, you backed off and let him cool down a little bit, I felt really happy because it showed me that you were very grown up.” You are telling the kid very specifically the kind of behavior that was beneficial, how it affected you, and why you liked it. “I felt very happy because then I knew I could trust you not to get into fights and hurt yourself and others.”

So when you praise others, really take time to do it well. This applies not only to praising others to their face, but talking about them in a good way. And this again, sometimes, is really a training to do, to get yourself to talk nicely about other people. Sometimes, even when they are people that you don't particularly like who have done something that is really good, to overcome that part of us that doesn't want to acknowledge that there's anything good about this guy, it's really beneficial to use praise in order to train the mind. Even though a person may have done 10,000 things we don't like, to really point out the one thing that has been helpful, and not only to point it out to that person, but point it out to other people as well. This is very important.

*[Audience:] Why does it feel so good to thrash somebody we don't like?*

I think one hypothesis is that we feel if we can make everybody else look bad, it must mean that we're good. It's this illogical logic that we use. I remember Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey saying to us (he was talking about idle talk), "You get together with your friend, and you thrash this one, thrash this one, thrash this one ... and at the end of your conversation, your conclusion is that you're the two best people in the world!" [Laughter.] I think it's because sometimes we're trying to get to that conclusion, but it's the wrong way to do it.

#### **4. Not acting with a pure selfless wish but with pretension and deceit**

Acting with pretension and deceit is like doing the right thing for the wrong reason. Not acting out of a pure wish means doing something not because you care about somebody, but because you want them to like you, because you want other people to look up to you, because you want to have a good reputation, because you want other people to think you're generous, because you want people to think you're wise, because you want approval. This is a big one for us. Instead of acting out of a genuine wish to benefit somebody, we do something kind basically because we want approval, because we're attached to approval and praise. This can often lead us to acting very hypocritically—acting one way and thinking another way.

When we go through the mental factors, we talk about pretension and deceit. Pretension is pretending that you don't have the negative qualities that you do have—really covering them up. And deceit is pretending you have positive qualities you don't have. It's putting on acts, isn't it? The problem is that we've been taught a lot in our society that doing this is what you're supposed to do to be polite; even if you don't like that person, you do something nice for them. I'm not saying that if you don't like that person, go beat them up. What I'm saying is, try and change your motivation so that you can actually be nice from a kind heart.

*[Audience:] Does contravening these precepts have the same effect as breaking a vow?*

These are trainings and advice for precepts. It's not

like breaking vows. They're definite guidelines, advice and precepts. When you do counteract them, they have negative results. But it's different from the bodhisattva vows.

### *Antidote*

The antidote to this is the second of the four constructive ones, which is to *be straightforward without pretension or deceit* . This means being honest and clear with people, and if we don't have a good motivation, then we must try and cultivate one. Being straightforward, without pretension and deceit doesn't mean blowing up when somebody ticks you off and thinking, "I'm being straightforward with you. I'm not going to cover my anger and pretend that I'm not angry! You're a jerk!" It's not that. You can say to somebody, "Look, I'm having a big problem with my anger now and I need to cool off a bit." That's fine. But try to cultivate a good motivation when we're acting towards people so that we act sincerely.

These are really important and they can really put a whole framework on our whole practice. This is the whole framework of aspiring bodhicitta and how to protect and generate it. It's good to train in these things before we take the bodhisattva vows. Like I said, you can generate it in your practice and start following these guidelines, and then sometime, you can do the aspiring bodhicitta ceremony, e.g. when His Holiness comes, when he gives the Chenrezig initiation, he'll definitely be doing the aspiring bodhicitta during that time. So you can take it in the

form of a ceremony at that time, and then practicing your aspiring bodhicitta, getting it really strong, and then generating the engaged bodhicitta and really wishing to engage in the practices of the bodhisattva. At that point, you start seriously practicing the six perfections, the six far-reaching attitudes, and you also take the bodhisattva vows, because the bodhisattva vows provide the framework for practicing the six far-reaching attitudes.

In contrast to pratimoksha vows like the monks' and nuns' vows, and the tantric vows, where you're not supposed to know what the vows are before you take them, you can know and study the bodhisattva vows before you take them. We'll start the bodhisattva vows next session. There are 18 root and 46 auxiliary bodhisattva vows. It's really interesting to study these because it gives you a much clearer concept of how to train your mind as a bodhisattva trains his or her own mind.

## **The Eighteen Root Bodhisattva Vows**

Whether or not you've taken the bodhisattva vows, it's very helpful to know the teachings. They provide very good guidelines for how to live our life. If you have taken the bodhisattva vows, then it's very important that you take the teachings, otherwise it will be difficult to keep them. If we don't keep them, we're defeating our whole purpose of taking them. If you have taken any tantric empowerment—not the *jenang*, but the actual empowerment where you enter the mandala—then you do have the bodhisattva vows,

and therefore it is important to know them.

Often in the West, people want the empowerment but they don't want the vows. [Laughter.] That happens because people often don't understand the purpose of the empowerment or the purpose of the vows. A tantric empowerment isn't just a blessing. We take a tantric empowerment so that we can do the related practice. What helps us do the practice and make our mind receptive to the practice is abandoning certain harmful actions and putting our mind into doing certain constructive actions. If we're truly intent on this process of self-improvement and becoming Buddhas, then the vows or the precepts aren't burdens. They are ornaments. They're things that we value and treasure. They help make our life very clear.

You can see that for yourself. If we look in our life, there are times when we were confused, "I don't know what to do. Is this good? Is this not good? I can't tell if I have a good motivation or bad motivation. I don't know what I'm doing in my life anyway!" Often we feel that way. We can live years and years with that kind of confusion in our minds, even lifetimes. When you know these guidelines well, it serves as a tool to help us clarify many things in our life. It helps us develop an acute sense of intelligence that can discriminate what to practice and what to abandon, what's a positive action and what's a negative one, what's a good motivation and what's an incorrect motivation. We need to spend some time hearing the teachings about these guidelines, reflecting on them and applying them to our life to better know ourselves.

Otherwise we have the common American thing of, “I’m so out of touch with myself. I don’t know who I am.” That’s basically because we don’t spend enough time alone with ourselves, to make friends with ourselves. Spend time learning these guidelines and then use them as a way to get to know ourselves.

Some people, when they hear the word ‘vow’, like when you say ‘bodhisattva vow’, they just get completely tight. I think that comes very much from our Christian upbringing where we associate vows with repressed passion, punishment and guilt. We have to snitch behind the vow and what happens if we get caught? And God knows anyway, so then you’re really screwed. [Laughter.] When we hear the word ‘vow’, all these other ideas often come into the mind. It’s interesting.

When that happens, it’s very good to use it as an opportunity to learn about ourselves. When all the preconceptions come in the mind, notice, “Oh! This is a preconception and it is not helpful to think this way. This is not what the Buddha taught.” Then it becomes useful. We get to see a lot of our past conditioning, how we react to certain words and certain concepts. We get to see how the religion we grew up with affected us. It may also affect us in other ways in our life which we are totally unaware of. If we take these opportunities to look at what is going on instead of getting tight and running away, we can grow a lot.

In Buddhism, a vow or a precept is something that liberates you. It’s not something that tells you what you can’t do. It’s something that tells you what you don’t have to do anymore. It is based on the idea that in us, there is a pure motivation that doesn’t want to



screw around anymore, that wants to get our life together and make our life meaningful, that doesn't want to get into one jam after another or one dysfunctional relationship after another. If we can touch base with that part of us, then we can see how taking a vow or a precept is a relief. It's like, "Oh, I don't have to get involved in that kind of behavior anymore even if there are tons of peer pressure, even if everybody else is going, 'How come you're not doing that anymore?'" I know in my own heart of hearts that I don't want to. The vow is really what protects me and what liberates me."

A vow isn't telling what you can't do anymore and thinking, "Oh boy! I have to give up all that fun stuff!" Rather, it's touching base with that purity of the motivation that we do have. This is important to remember. Don't see vows as imprisoning, but as liberating.

They do liberate, because they make us look at ourselves. We all come to the Dharma because somehow we want to change. We want to get to know ourselves. But then as soon as Dharma makes us look at ourselves, we say, "Sorry, I'm real busy on Monday and Wednesday nights [when Dharma classes are held]." [Laughter.] We get real stuck in this. Our mind is like, "Oh I want to change and I want to get to know myself, but don't ask me to change. I really can't do that." We get stuck in this strange mental space sometimes. It's interesting to watch. We don't have to take it too seriously. It's quite amusing to watch the ego coming up with all this variety of things to keep us from getting down to business. Or ego will make a fuss about something else. We have lots of

creative potential, untapped. [Laughter.]

You can trace the bodhisattva vows back to the sutras. They are not in nice neat little lists in the sutras, but they are all there. The root bodhisattva vows are called “root” because these ones are the basis of the practice and if you transgress any one of them completely (that is, with all four factors complete), you lose the bodhisattva ordination; whereas if you transgress the secondary vows, you don’t lose the bodhisattva ordination. If you transgress the root vows completely, that is, with all the factors intact, not only do you create the negative karma of doing that, but also you lose the whole bodhisattva ordination. So these are the ones to be really aware of.

I should explain why all the vows are in the negative, that is, to avoid doing this and that action. This is because to know what you should practice, you also have to know what to abandon. For example, the first vow is to abandon praising oneself and belittling others. What we’re really supposed to do is be modest about our own attainments and recognize the good qualities of others. To do that, we have to stop praising ourselves and belittling them. The second vow is about not giving material aid or the Dharma to those in need. What we’re really supposed to practice is to be generous. We’re supposed to practice being generous materially and to be generous with the Dharma. To be generous, we have to know clearly what not being generous is. So in all of these, although it’s described in the negative, we should also remember that what we’re supposed to practice is the exact opposite of that.

## **ROOT VOW 1**

**(To abandon) Praising oneself or belittling others because of attachment to receiving material offerings, praise and respect**

The first vow has two parts. If you do either of these, you transgress the vow. The first part is praising oneself and the second part, belittling others. It is a transgression if they are done out of attachment to receiving material offerings, praise, fame and respect.

I should also say that the first time I heard some of the bodhisattva vows, they didn't make any sense to me. But let me tell you, as you get more and more involved in the Dharma, you watch yourself come real, real close to doing all these things, and then you realize why Buddha made the precept.

This first vow is referring specifically to people in the position of teaching Dharma, although it certainly can apply to other situations where we're trying to build ourselves up. "I am such a great teacher. I know this text. I know that text, blah blah blah blah blah." Praising one's ability. Why? Because you want to have more disciples, have more offerings, have everybody talk about you, have everybody think that you're wonderful and have a big reputation. So you praise yourself in that way and also belittle, put down other Dharma teachers, "That one doesn't know what he is talking about." "That one's not really teaching because he's attached to praise and reputation and money."

This vow is really in the context of being a teacher, but we can also think of it in the context of our own life. There were times when we put ourselves up on a

pedestal because we want more money, recognition and praise. We belittle the other people we work with in order to make ourselves seem better. As somebody brought up the last time: “Why do we get such a kick out of putting other people down?” Is it because if we put other people down, we are going to look good, then we will get all this good stuff? This is what it’s coming to here.

Motivation is a critical factor in determining whether we transgress this vow. Here it’s the motivation of attachment to material things, praise and respect. There might be situations where we praise ourselves and belittle others out of anger. That happens to be the transgression of a secondary bodhisattva vow. Or there might be situations where with a very good motivation, we let our own qualities be known and criticize somebody else. Let’s say somebody is doing something very harmful and unethical, and with a good heart you criticize that behavior. You point it out. You say either to the person or to the other people around him, “This is bad behavior and this should not be done.” You’re doing it out of an attempt to help that person correct his or her own actions. Just pretending somebody isn’t doing something negative doesn’t help him or her. So sometimes we actually have to speak out and say something. If we do it out of a good motivation, it is not transgressing this precept.

Similarly, if you go for a job application interview and you try to make yourself look good simply for your own personal gain, that could be praising oneself out of attachment to material things. It’s different if you’re just trying to give clear information about your

talents and abilities. It is very helpful to let other people know what these talents and abilities are because they may need somebody who can do that kind of work. So if you tell people what you are able to do, your qualifications and your good points for that reason, then that is a very different ball game. These two motivations are very different—praising yourself and belittling others out of attachment verses letting your qualities be known so that other people know what you can offer in a job situation. It is also not a transgression if you criticize somebody who is acting negatively in an attempt to help that person correct their behavior, or if you criticize in order to prevent other people from being harmed by that person.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Well, I think rolling your eyes is definitely different from saying something. Rolling your eyes when nobody else is around is very different from saying something when lots of people are around. It's a matter of degree, but we should also recognize that one could definitely lead to the other.

*[Audience:] What if our motivation for going to the job interview is out of attachment?*

Well the thing is, I think, to try and change your motivation before you go for the job interview.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

When I finish going through the eighteen vows, I will talk about the four criteria that determine if a complete transgression is committed, such as not recognizing what you are doing as something negative, not wishing to refrain from doing it again, thinking what you did is super fantastic and not feeling any sense of self-respect or consideration for others in terms of what you did. There are different levels of infraction and to break it completely, you have to have all of them.

With the job interviews, if you know that you are going to be tempted to sing your own praises, then before you go, really try to generate this artificial bodhicitta, effortful bodhicitta; effortfully change your motivation for going to the interview and think of how you are going to approach it. Even if you can get your mind to the point where your motivation is mixed—“I really want this job, but yeah, I do want to offer service to other people too. I don’t want to live my whole life doing a job just for the money. I do want to offer some service.”—that already is some progress.

*[Audience:] Why is it that the motivation of attachment makes it a root transgression?*

I think the reason is because this motivation can be so dangerous if you’re teaching the Dharma. Really selling yourself and doing things in an insincere way out of attachment to worldly things is such a corrupt motivation and potentially very harmful to the students.

## **ROOT VOW 2**

**(To abandon) Not giving material aid or not teaching the Dharma to those who are suffering and without a protector, because of miserliness**

The second one is also made up of two parts. Here, this is referring specifically to the motivation of miserliness.

This is a tricky one for me. Especially if you live in India, people are coming door to door for money. Even before the class tonight, somebody came asking for money. These situations make you look very, very closely at your motivation.

If somebody asks you for material help, money or donation, and you don't give out of miserliness—"I want to keep it for myself; I want to have this"—then you break this vow. If for example, some guy sitting on the street asks you for some money and you don't give because you are afraid that he is going to buy booze with it, that's not out of miserliness and you don't break this vow.

If there is some other motivation involved—if you have something more important to do, and you don't have the time to stop and give at that particular moment, or you don't have the right things to give, or you haven't checked up the situation completely yet to see if it is a good situation to give—then it's not a transgression. It's a transgression only if it is done out of miserliness.

Similarly, with the second part of not teaching the Dharma; somebody comes and asks you to teach or answer a question or explain something related to the Dharma. They are asking with a sincere motivation,

but out of miserliness, you refuse. Then you break this vow. You might say, “Well, how can somebody be miserly about the Dharma?” Well, sometimes the mind can get very competitive, “I don’t want to tell you about this teaching because then you might know as much as I do.” The competitive mind that doesn’t want to share Dharma information, that wants to keep it to yourself out of miserliness—this is what this vow is talking about.

If somebody comes and asks you a question, and you are not sure if their question is sincere, or they are asking something that is far too difficult for them to understand, or you are not confident with your own understanding, or you have something really crucial that needs to be done at that moment—if for any of these reasons, you don’t answer their question, that is a different ball game. You can see how, at times, it is quite valid to have reservations about giving material things or giving Dharma. You have to understand the situation. It becomes a transgression only if it’s done with miserliness.

## **Checking up how much we really need**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Yes, there can be times when you really don’t have the extra money, so you can’t give. But we have to check, “Is this something I really need and so therefore I can’t give? Or is it something that actually I could give, and it’s just that my mind is clinging on.” So we have to look at the situation.



*[Audience: inaudible]*

I think it's good because it makes us ask what we need. Like if you have a job in the city, you might need certain kinds of clothes and you might need transportation, but do you need five kinds of clothes or do you need seven kinds of clothes? Settling for five might be perfectly okay, but the mind says, "Well no. If I give, then I can't have my tenth dress." [Laughter.] So we have to see if miserliness is at work in these kinds of situations.

### **Being solicited for funds**

In terms of being on the mailing list, and being constantly solicited, yes, that happens to me too. Every time I get something or somebody comes to the door, it brings up this whole issue and it makes me think about it. Sometimes I feel, "Well, let's just give a little bit, even one or two dollars, I am giving something. One or two dollars isn't going to break me." Or, some groups send out letters four times a year, and so with those, what I feel is I will send something in once a year, instead of four little checks. Then some things may not seem so important compared to other charities, they don't seem so worthwhile, so maybe I won't give to these in an attempt to steer the limited resources towards something that I consider more worthwhile. So it's kind of weighing all these different alternatives.

*[Audience:] What's the difference between attachment and miserliness ?*

Attachment is that mind that wants, wants, wants, wants, and miserliness is the mind where once you have something, you don't want to give it away. Miserliness is a type of attachment. Attachment is "I want many more glasses"; miserliness is: "This one, I am not going to give to you."

*[Audience: inaudible]*

What you brought up about the miserly mind or the mind of attachment is a very good point because this does permeate so much of our existence—that mind that clings to things. There is a difference between liking something and wanting it. There's a difference between wanting something and clinging with attachment to it. This is the mind that is never satisfied, that always wants more. To counteract this, I think it's not just a thing of saying, "I shouldn't have that because that is a negative mind," but to really look and recognize that when that attitude is present, it causes me problems. So it is not a question of saying, "I shouldn't be miserly," but to look at our mind when we are miserly and recognize how that mental state makes us unhappy and how it keeps us in the cycle of samsara with all of its attendant problems.

### **Feeling guilty is not useful**

Our Western psychology makes us feel, "If I feel guilty for it, it is not quite so bad, because I am making myself suffer. I atone somehow through my suffering." From the Buddhist perspective, that

doesn't work. A mind of regret is something else, if you look at your own miserliness and say, "I really regret I am so miserly." But guilt as a way of atoning doesn't work.

It's not just a thing of guilt saying, "I am bad because I have this", but taking the time to see the disadvantages of that attitude. What we tend to do mostly, is just feel guilty without looking at the disadvantages. But the guilt doesn't make us change. The guilt makes us get stuck. If we look at the disadvantages of that mental state, we can see the disadvantages very clearly. Since we want to be happy and we see how that mental state makes us unhappy, that gives us some impetus to change it. So then it's acting not based on guilt but on care for ourselves and others.

### **ROOT VOW 3**

**(To abandon) Not listening although another declares his/her offence or with anger blaming him/her and retaliating**

The bodhisattva vows definitely push buttons. You ready for the third one? [Laughter.] The third one again has two parts. Maybe you've been kind to somebody, you've done something for somebody, and then they just act really nasty towards you. They're harmful and obnoxious. They drive you completely nuts. After a while they begin to see what they have done and feel some regret and they come and apologize to you. What do we do? Either we do the first part; we don't accept the apology. We refuse to forgive them. We don't even listen. The minute

somebody starts apologizing, we say “Get out of here, I don’t want to hear it!” Or we may not be doing anything but in our heart, we’re really angry. We are not forgiving at all. This will be fulfilling the first part of “not listening although another declares his/her offence”.

And then fulfilling the second part is, not only do we not forgive and hold on to the grudge and the anger, we retaliate. We blame them. We criticize them. When somebody comes to apologize, we say, “Oh, it is good you are apologizing. You’ve been a real idiot. You’ve done this, and you’ve done that, you should really feel sorry for yourself!” We are so angry and our anger is so pent up. We want revenge. Now that they are here to apologize, we can make them feel really bad. We can retaliate. We really dish it out. [Laughter.]

#### **ROOT VOW 4**

**(To abandon) Abandoning the Mahayana by (a) saying that Mahayana texts are not the words of Buddha or (b) teaching what appears to be the Dharma but is not**

The fourth one again has two parts. The Mahayana teachings are the teachings of the Buddha that emphasize the development of altruism and the cultivation of the six perfections. It emphasizes the attainment of enlightenment rather than nirvana and freedom from cyclic existence.

*[Audience:] What’s the difference between liberation from cyclic existence (nirvana) and enlightenment?*

When you are liberated from cyclic existence, you've removed your own afflictions and the karma that causes cyclic existence, but you still have these subtle stains on the mind, and your mind may not be completely compassionate and loving and altruistic. You're satisfied with liberating yourself. Whereas when you want to attain enlightenment, you develop the altruism in which you want to liberate others as well, so you want to develop your mind fully to do that.

## **Historical background**

I want to give you a little bit of historical background on this vow. The appearance of the Theravada tradition and the Mahayana tradition happened at different times historically in a very public way. The earlier scriptures that were written down became the Pali canon and that is what is practiced in the Theravada tradition. That tradition was really strong and still thrives to this date.

Around the first century B.C., you have the beginning of the arising of the Mahayana tradition, where the Mahayana sutras became more publicly known. What has happened is that some people say the Mahayana sutras aren't the real teachings of the Buddha. They say that the Mahayana sutras were written afterwards by other people and passed off as Buddha's sutras. The position of the Mahayana is that the Buddha actually taught these scriptures, but because people's minds were not ready for them, they were not passed on in a big way publicly. They were passed from a few teachers to disciples in a very

quiet, private way. It was only around the first century B.C. and after that, that they began to be written down, expanded on and distributed more publicly.

Another explanation is that those scriptures were taken to the Land of the Nagas. A naga is a kind of animal that lives in the water. The nagas protected the scriptures until a time when the people in our world had the openness and the good karma to be able to appreciate them. Then Nagarjuna, the very famous Indian sage (that's how he got his name) went to the land of the nagas and brought these Prajnaparamita sutras back to this world.

That's how the Mahayana explains it.

## **Interpreting historical evidence**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

The scholars may have done this historical analysis on the linguistic style, etc and they may say, "Well, these (Mahayana) sutras are in a different language or style and blah, blah, blah. It indicates that they were written in the second century A.D." Well, that's okay. We don't have any proof that the Mahayana sutras were present in the world in the early century of the Buddha's doctrine. You could say that historically it looks like that was what happened. But that's quite different from saying that the sutras were made up, that they are not the Buddha's words. The scholars could say, "I don't know, maybe they came from another way." Or we could say, "Well, they were protected in the Land of the Nagas", although I don't think you'd write that in the Western ...

*[Teachings lost due to change of tape]*

### **Why this vow is so important**

... This is my interpretation of why this vow is so important. I think for many people, they want to know what the Buddha's word is, and if something was not said by Buddha Shakyamuni, they are not going to practice that. They think, "Well, it might be completely wonderful advice anyway, but if I can't prove that the Buddha said it, I am not going to practice it." So it is to prevent against that kind of throwing-the-Buddha-out-with-the-bath-water mentality.

*[Audience:] How can we be sure that the scriptures as they are today are exactly the words that came out of the Buddha's mouth?*

Right, I understand what you are saying. I remember I asked one lama about this. I said, "Is it possible that maybe somebody didn't remember them correctly, because for 500 years they were being passed down orally. Is it possible that maybe somebody, when they were being passed down orally, made a mistake or added something in? Is it possible that when they were being translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan, somebody didn't do a completely accurate translation? Isn't it possible that somebody added a few extra words because he thought it would be helpful to explain what the Buddha said? This lama's reply was, yes, that is completely possible. But the thing is, we are not exactly sure which sutra that

pertains to.

Also when you look at the sutras, you'll see that there's so much repetition in them. They'll have a list of something, and the list will get repeated over and over again in the course of the sutra. Now, whether the Buddha repeated this list over and over again when he was actually speaking, I don't know. It might have been that in the early years, repeating a thing over and over again was a way to ensure that the people who recited the sutras remembered them very well. This is my personal opinion. So I don't think that the repetitions we see in the sutras necessarily mean that when the Buddha spoke, he did the repetitions. Or maybe he did, as his way of helping people to remember, reciting it again and again.

The point here is, or the reason why it is harmful for us if we denigrate the Mahayana is as follows. For example we say, "The Buddha didn't teach the altruistic intention (or the far-reaching attitude of wisdom, or the far-reaching attitude of patience), therefore I am not going to practice it." If people get that kind of idea, that's harmful to their own practice. This is the point. It's not a thing of, "Let's hold on to the Mahayana so that nobody attacks it." It is that if we start criticizing the different practices in these texts, we're throwing out the basis for our spiritual practice.

## **Tengyur: the commentaries on the Buddha's teachings**

*[Audience: inaudible]*



People definitely did amplify the Buddha's word, and a lot of that can be found in what we call the Tengyur or the commentaries. From the beginning, people were definitely expanding on and amplifying the Buddha's word. They wrote commentaries, and we're studying many of them. Even though the Buddha didn't write "Bodhicharyavatara" (Shantideva did), everything Shantideva said is taken from the Buddha's teachings. He just took out different things, arranged them in a different way, and amplified and explained them. It's definitely something that we should practice.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

My own personal take on this vow (and I haven't checked this with any of my teachers) is that this is reflective of earlier historical arguments between different schools of Buddhism. Some of the schools said the Mahayana sutras are "state-certified". Some said "No, they aren't". This vow was perhaps indicative of some of the debates that were going on in ancient India. That's one way to look at it. But what I am getting to is, whether that is true or not, the whole point of the vow is to not throw out virtuous practices.

*[Audience:] Why is it so important to trace the source of a teaching to the Buddha?*

I think one of the reasons why we're always saying, "The Buddha said", and tracing things back to the Buddha, is because sometimes we might believe

something is very wise when it isn't. We can look back on our life and many, many times, there were things that we vigorously believed in and defended, that we were sure were completely true, at which we look back now and say, "How could I have ever believed that?" This is the reason why we are always trying to make sure that what we are doing has the source in the Buddha's teachings. There is some reason for wanting it "state certified".

*[Audience:] Because we have faith in the name?*

Yes. And in his attainments and in his realizations.

*[Audience:] But we still have to apply it and see if it's true, don't we?*

Definitely. We definitely have to apply it and see if it is true, and not get hung up on state certification. But when we are trying to decide what to apply and what not to apply, then we do look at what's been certified, and what hasn't been.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Yes, on those kinds of things, you could say, "Well, this might be one of those scriptures that that lama was talking about, where somebody added something else afterwards. Or we can also look at it and say the Buddha taught according to the culture of that time and according to his audience, and if you understand ancient Indian culture, it was very sexist. It is still very sexist now. Most societies are very sexist.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

One way to look at it is you can say, “Well, Buddha said this because he rocked the boat a lot, but if he turned it completely over, nobody would believe anything he said at all. So he had to say a few things that are ...[Audience speaks] Right. Exactly.

*[Audience:] Are we buying into a dogma by this vow?*

What you are saying is, you don't want to buy into a dogma and feel that you have to believe in this dogma because somebody else said so, and that you are not a good Buddhist if you don't believe it. And that you are going to hell because you are breaking your vows.

### **The rationalizing mind**

I don't think that that is really what is meant by this vow. I don't think we are committing ourselves to buy into a dogma, come hell or high water. The Buddha's whole approach was question, research—try it out. What I think we are doing is saying, “I am going to keep an open mind about these Buddhist scriptures.

If I read something in the Mahayana that doesn't suit my temperament, I'm not going to say ‘Pooh! I'm going to shove it out simply because it doesn't agree with what I want to believe in today.’ I think what it is saying is we are going to question it, debate it, research it, and we are going to try it out and see if it works.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Let me read you what Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche said: "... that is, after a practitioner without the right capacity has come into contact with the Mahayana teachings and has taken the bodhisattva vow, they might think that the bodhisattva teachings and the paths are unsuitable and not realistic. The bodhisattva practices being very vast, that person might think that that practice is not realistic, that the six far-reaching attitudes cannot really be practiced and that therefore they cannot have been taught by the Buddha." They think, "The bodhisattva practice is just too vast. It's too complicated. How can I ever do that? It's impossible for me to do it, therefore the Buddha didn't really teach it."

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Yeah, right! You're rationalizing it. When something doesn't jive with your own ego, you say it is not "state-certified", that the Buddha didn't really say it.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Yes, if you have complete and accurate historical evidence that the Buddha didn't say certain things, then it's a totally different ball game from just this mind that's rationalizing and excusing. It's like "I have been trying to practice bodhicitta for so long, and it is so difficult. My mind is so out of control and there's so much self-cherishing. The Buddha really couldn't have meant that we're supposed to cherish others more than ourselves. He really didn't mean that, because I have been trying to do that and it is

impossible. I am not even going to try anymore because he really didn't say that." It sounds good, doesn't it? [Laughter.] This is exactly how the mind works.

*[Audience:] Is there anything in the two sets of sutras that are contradictory?*

Here, we get into the whole subject of the definitive sutras and the interpretable sutras. What we are getting at is, if you only look at the sutras literally, you might find some things that are contradictory. For example, at one time the Buddha said, "There is a self", and at other time, he said, "There isn't a self." If you take a fundamentalist, literal interpretation, then you will say he is contradicting himself. But he is not contradicting himself. The Buddha taught people according to their mentality, and the teaching needs to be interpreted further. To the people who had a higher capacity to understand, he said it the way it actually is. So with all the Buddha's scriptures, there is a whole lot of interpretation that can go on to get at what the Buddha really meant.

As you study the different philosophical traditions that arose out of the Buddha's teachings, you will see that the teachings have been interpreted in different ways. Some schools will say, "Buddha said this and it is literal." Other schools say "No, it is not, it has to be interpreted." So interpretation is allowed. It is good that there is interpretation. If you have a vast mind and you really understand the Buddha's intent very well, then you will be able to recognize what needs to be interpreted and what doesn't need to be

interpreted.

## **Reason for having debates**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Well, the reason for debating isn't just to settle on what the public doctrine is going to be. The reason for debating is to increase our own wisdom and intelligence and our own clarity of mind. The purpose of the debate is not so much to arrive at the correct answer, as it is to really sharpen your mind and help you to see an issue from many different angles and perspectives.

## **Teaching what appears to be the Dharma but is not**

Let me finish the second part of that, which is teaching what you're passing off as the Mahayana and as the Dharma, but really isn't. With Buddhism coming to the West, this one is so easy to do. You mix a little psychology in, you mix a little this in, and a little that in, and you call it Buddhism. But it is not. It's like you have a hard time with what the Buddha really meant, so you say, "Well, he didn't really mean that. He really meant this, and this happens to be what I believe." [Laughter.] Yeah? "What he meant just happens to be what I believe and that is what I am teaching you." So you're passing off your own beliefs in the mistaken notion that they are what the Buddha taught. You're passing them off to other people as the Dharma, and that's really harmful.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Depends on who you ask this question to. [Laughter.] So if you're sexist yourself, and you pass it off like the Buddha is sexist, and you validate it by saying, "But look, he said this." [Audience speaks] If you ask somebody who is sexist that question, they'll tell you, "Well, that's okay". If you ask me that question, I am going to tell you that that person doesn't have a deep understanding of the Dharma. That person doesn't understand how harmful that language is and how defeating it is of the real purpose of the Buddha, which was for everybody to practice the Dharma and attain enlightenment. That's how I would answer that question.

### **Keeping the link with our Asian teachers**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

That's why we always have to think ourselves. This is one of the reasons why I like to go back to India every year and see my teachers, to let them know what I am doing, because I am bringing the Dharma from an Asian culture to an American culture, so the language I give the teachings in and the examples that I use are very different from the way I was taught. So I want to go back and check with my teachers and see if everything I am saying is okay.

I think what is really important as we bring Buddhism from the East, is that we keep the link with the Asian teachers very strong, and not have this real proud, American attitude of, "Well, now that we

understand Buddhism, we are going to make that all ours. Those Asian teachers don't understand anything." You see some people having that attitude, maybe not as grossly as that, but there is that attitude. That's why I think it's important that we keep thinking and questioning our own understandings, and never assume that we have understood things exactly or think we can never refine our understanding. What I'm finding over the years is that I think I understand things, and I even know the words and I can repeat them, but a few years later, I realize that I really didn't understand it at all.

### **Always refining our understanding**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Yes. I think that's why it's good that you teach according to a text, and that you keep coming back to the text. That's why you find some lamas, when they teach, they keep quoting the scripture, or they keep quoting the Indian pundits. (I am not very good at memorizing quotations, so I don't do that.) We may think we understand a teaching when we listen to it, but we should also realize there is a lot more to understand than just the superficial meaning of the words. The whole idea is to always recognize we need to keep growing in our understanding. When you hear teachings from teachers, think about them. That's the whole thing. Think about them, get other sources, ask questions, and get other opinions, so that our own understanding can keep getting refined.

I was just thinking also that we should remember



that there are different levels of interpretation of things. When we first hear the teachings, we might understand one level of the interpretation and then, as we understand more and more, the level of interpretation gets deeper and deeper. In terms of abandoning the Mahayana, it's saying, "I don't even want to deal with this issue. I want to just toss it aside because I don't like it and it doesn't make sense to me." We want to cultivate the attitude of, "I am going to sit here and wrestle with this. Right now, I am interpreting it this way. What did the Buddha really mean? Is my present interpretation correct? Am I understanding things right?" Really wrestle with things and dig in. That's completely all right because you are engaging, debating, and questioning. People might have different interpretations and you argue with them. You look at your own interpretation from one year to the next and you see it can be very different. To me none of these would be abandoning the Mahayana. To me, it would be abandoning the Mahayana if we say, "I don't want to engage in that whole thing to start with. The whole thing just looks too difficult. I don't understand it, so I am going to say Buddha didn't say it."

*[Audience: inaudible]*

If you take Dharma principles and apply them to your secular work, great. But when you're teaching a secular view point and saying they are the Dharma ... See, the difficulty here is teaching things which aren't the Dharma but saying that the Buddha taught it.

At the teacher's conference with His Holiness, we

had a discussion about psychology. We talked about how visualization techniques can be useful for people in therapy. Another idea that came up was, if people have some affinity for Christianity, for example, you could teach them to do a visualization with Jesus. Or they could do the four opponent powers and then Jesus sends light to them and to others. His Holiness said doing this kind of thing is great. It is good. It helps people. But we should not call it a Buddhist practice. It is a thing of keeping clear what is a Buddhist practice and what is taking things from Buddhism that are beneficial for people and teaching them in other circumstances, where they become mixed up with other faiths and practices.

You are right. Basic Buddhist ethics and many things in Buddhism are helpful for people. You don't need to be a Buddhist to practice many of the thought training techniques or thought transformation. They're very helpful and I think therapists could use a lot of this. It is completely all right to do that.

Let's say you go down to Cloud Mountain [Retreat Center] to lead a Buddhist retreat. You are portrayed as a Buddhist teacher. But besides teaching Buddhism, you are also teaching Shamanism and Sufi dancing. If you tell the retreat participants, "I'm teaching Shamanism, Sufi dancing and Buddhism," this is fine. Completely clear. But if you don't do that and you say, "These are all Buddha's teachings. I'm a Buddhist teacher. Yes, we can do the Shamanistic practices. Yes, we can do the Sufi dancing. It's all Buddhism anyway. It's all one! (That famous statement that drives me nuts!)" [laughter]—then it becomes real dangerous.

Or if you go in as a Buddhist teacher and say, “Oh, the Buddha said that we have 84,000 defilements, so everybody who is a meditator needs to have therapy.” [Laughter.] Passing things over as Dharma that aren’t Dharma. I’m making extreme examples but there are interesting things going on out there. This is our challenge: What’s the true essence of the Dharma?

## **Review**

We’ve been going through the bodhisattva vows, so just to review the four that we did in the last session.

The first one is to abandon praising ourselves or belittling others out of attachment to receiving material offerings, praise, respect.

The second one—not giving material aid, or not sharing the Dharma with people who ask sincerely and who really need it, because of miserliness.

The third one—when others come and apologize to us for harms they have done, mistakes they have made, either not accepting their apology and not forgiving them, or retaliating instead, really dumping on them.

And then the fourth one—abandoning the Mahayana by saying the Mahayana texts are not the word of the Buddha or teaching what appears to be the Dharma but isn’t. The first part of this is arrived at by, maybe hearing the Mahayana teachings and thinking, “Oh! The bodhisattva path is too hard! The six perfections are too much and I can’t do that. It makes me shake too much to even contemplate having to change that much. The Buddha must not have really meant that. The Buddha didn’t really

mean to cherish others more than themselves. The Buddha really didn't mean to be that generous. All that stuff that they say the Buddha said, he didn't really say." You reject or abandon the Mahayana teachings, and then this leads to the second part, which is then making up your own teaching and passing it off as the Dharma. When what the Buddha said doesn't correspond with what our ego likes, we reject it, and we start teaching and believing what our ego likes.

The whole thing about the Dharma is that it definitely pushes our buttons. Sometimes we really don't like this, and so rather than look at our buttons and have the courage to work through the things that hearing the teachings bring up, we just reject it. This is quite different from having a good debate questioning and enquiring. That's a whole different ballgame. Don't confuse them.

## **ROOT VOW 5**

**(To abandon) Taking things belonging to (a) Buddha, (b) Dharma or (c) Sangha**

In this case, when we talk about the Buddha, we're talking about the fully enlightened being, or the different images that represent him, or her. When we talk about the Dharma, we're talking about the realizations of the path or the scriptures that represent them. When we're talking about the Sangha, we're talking about any single being who has full direct realization of emptiness on the path of seeing or alternatively, a group of four fully ordained monks and nuns. This vow is referring to stealing from any of

those.

You might think “How can anybody possibly do that?” Well again, it’s very easy, there are all these nice offerings on the altar and don’t you just feel like having a banana now? [Laughter.] I mean the Buddha won’t miss it. The greedy mind that takes things off the altar because it wants it. Or things that have been offered in good faith to the monastic community or to a shrine, we take it for our own personal use, our own personal welfare.

Now, somebody may offer cloth to make covers for the sutras and we say, “Well actually, that cloth, I could make a shirt out of it. Much more practical. I need a shirt. The scriptures, they don’t need a shirt.” We misappropriate things. We steal from the Triple Gem. We need to be careful of not taking the property of the monastic community. You go and stay in a temple or monastery, and they loan you a blanket or a pillow or something when you stay there, and then when you leave, you think, “Well, they have so many blankets and pillows and I really need these,” and take it. We should not take as our own, things that have been offered to the monastic community, to the temple.

*[Audience:] What about clearing the Buddha’s shrine?*

With the attitude that we’re the caretaker for the Buddha’s shrine, we take the offerings away simply because we’re trying to keep it neat and clean and tidy. I find it also helpful, almost saying to the Buddha, “I’m taking these things off now, is that

okay?” Just to make sure about our motivation for it.

## **ROOT VOW 6**

**(To abandon) Abandoning the holy Dharma by saying that texts which teach the three vehicles are not the Buddha’s word**

The three vehicles are the Hearer’s vehicle, the Solitary Realizer’s vehicle—these both lead to nirvana—and the bodhisattva vehicle. These are three paths of training. Our mind doesn’t like any of the sutras that explain these paths of training leading to nirvana, leading to full enlightenment, and we say it’s not the Buddha’s word. We don’t like what it says as it pushes our buttons, so we abandon it and we say the Buddha didn’t teach it.

*[Audience:] Did you say “Hearers”?*

Yes. They’re called Hearers because they listen to the teachings and then teach them to others.

Things that the Buddha did talk about which are for our benefit to practice, we just say, “Well, actually the Buddha didn’t teach those, and I don’t need to practice them.” You can see this happening. We hear people saying, “Well actually ethics isn’t so important. We don’t really need to do that. Right livelihood isn’t so important, this is another culture.” It is quite easy to do these things. That doesn’t mean that what right livelihood meant 2500 years ago, we can practice in a literal way right now. We can develop our own Western livelihood. But just saying, “Right livelihood doesn’t matter, ciao, goodbye,” then

it's abandoning the Dharma.

The fourth vow refers specifically to the Mahayana, saying, "Oh, the Buddha didn't teach the Mahayana teachings." This sixth vow is much more general. It's any of the Buddha's teachings, whether it's the teachings of the Hearer vehicle, the Solitary Realizer vehicle or the Bodhisattva vehicle. We say that because the teachings don't feel comfortable to us. The teachings don't make our ego feel good. They seem too difficult. We throw them out the window by saying that the Buddha didn't teach them, that there is no need to practice them.

Sometimes it is difficult to hear teachings. They press every button that we have. When this happens, instead of just throwing it out, it is helpful to do some research, "Am I listening to it through my Christian ears and projecting another meaning onto it that isn't there?" We may want to ask questions to figure out what this teaching is about. To ask ourselves, "Is this teaching culturally influenced?" If it is something that is culturally influenced, then it might be something that is interpretable for our situation. In this case, it's not a question of throwing the teaching out, but a question of interpreting it to apply to our situation more effectively.

Or does the teaching make us feel overwhelmed because we can't do it now? "Well, that's okay. I don't have to do everything perfect right now. The path is going to take me a few lifetimes and even a few eons. It is okay. There is some time to habituate with this and train like that. Some day or another, I will be able to do this."

What I am saying is that instead of fighting the

teachings, getting into defensive mode and wanting to attack, we should do some exploration to see what is going on in our mind.

## **ROOT VOW 7**

**(To abandon) With anger (a) depriving ordained ones of their robes, beating and imprisoning them, or (b) causing them to lose their ordination even if they have impure morality, for example, by saying that being ordained is useless**

The seventh one refers to disrobing ordained people. This depends a lot on your motivation. With anger, with a nasty, evil, bad motivation, you beat somebody who's ordained or you rob something from them or you put them in prison, or you kick them out of the monastery, even if they've broken their vows, with a nasty motivation and a harmful intention. You deprive them of their robes. These kinds of things.

One example that one teacher used was, let's say, somebody breaks one of their four root monastic vows. Due to that, they're no longer a monastic. If you just forcefully kick, fling them out of the monastery, then that would be transgressing this vow. What you have to do is gently encourage them to change their clothes and go back to lay life, rather than just having an angry, harmful intention towards somebody. That's one way of breaking this one.

The second way is causing somebody to lose their ordination, making situations such that people break their ordination. For example, when the communists invaded Tibet, they went into the monasteries and nunneries and they made the monks and nuns have



sex together in public. Or they made the monastic people go out and kill animals. These kinds of things, forcing people to break their monastic vows, is harmful. Or making somebody give up their monastic vows by saying it is useless being ordained, better be a lay person. That kind of thing.

*[Audience:] What are the four root monastic vows?*

They are the same as four of the first five (lay) precepts: not killing—so here to break it completely for the monastic, is killing a human being; not stealing something that you would be imprisoned for in the society; for the monastic, instead of unwise sexual behavior, it's a celibacy vow, avoiding intercourse; and then lying about one's spiritual attainments.

## **ROOT VOW 8**

**(To abandon) Committing any of the five extremely negative actions**

The five extremely negative actions are:

1. Killing one's mother
2. Killing one's father
3. Killing an arhat
4. Intentionally drawing blood from a Buddha
5. Causing schism in the Sangha community by supporting and spreading sectarian views

These are sometimes called the five heinous crimes or another translation is the five acts of immediate retribution. This was mentioned when we went over

the qualities of a precious human life previously. One of the reasons we have a precious human life is that we haven't done any of these heinous actions. The bodhisattva vows are again emphasizing not to do these because they're really negative and opposing the bodhisattva practice.

The five are killing one's mother; killing one's father; killing an arhat, a liberated being; intentionally drawing blood from the Buddha—Buddha's cousin, Devadatta did that; causing schism within the Sangha community, in other words, within the monastic community, making them fight and split into two groups, so that the monastic community gets hostile. That's really negative for the Dharma, for everybody practicing it.

## **ROOT VOW 9**

**(To abandon) Holding distorted views (which are contrary to the teachings of Buddha, such as denying the existence of the Three Jewels or the law of cause and effect, etc)**

The ninth one refers to holding wrong views, or holding distorted views. This is very similar to the last one of the ten negative or destructive actions—wrong or distorted views. It doesn't mean wrong political views like liking George Bush [laughter]. It doesn't mean those kinds of views. It's talking about different philosophical views, that if you, with a tenacious, stubborn mind, full of misconceptions that doesn't want to listen to anything else, hold on to a wrong view such as saying, "Absolutely positively, there's no past or future lives, forget it!" Or "There is no such

thing as a Buddha. It is impossible to become a Buddha. Human beings are innately evil. They are innately sinful and selfish, impossible to become a Buddha.” It is denying the existence of enlightenment, denying the existence of the Triple Gem, “There is no such thing as the Buddha. There is no path to enlightenment. There are no beings who’ve seen reality. Emptiness is just a fraud.” Stubborn wrong views where one just gets entrenched in them and doesn’t want to listen to anything else.

### **Having doubts**

This is very different from having doubts because when we come into the Dharma, we have lots of doubts. We doubt rebirth. We doubt Buddhahood. We doubt enlightenment. One way of looking at it is, doubt is a step in the right direction. Maybe before we came into the Dharma, we have definite wrong views. When we come into Dharma, we begin to have some doubts and though they’re still inclined towards the negative things, it is something better. And then, if we work on the doubts, maybe we get to an equal doubt, a balanced doubt, and then maybe a kind of doubt that is inclined towards believing in reincarnation, the existence of the Triple Gem. We’re still not sure. We’re questioning, we’re searching, we’re asking people questions, we’re debating about it. And then through that we get some understanding, we get a correct assumption and then we get some inferential understanding. In this way, our belief becomes clear. Instead of just following the negative doubt and making it into a wrong conclusion, we ask, we debate,

we discuss, and then our own understanding increases.

Having doubts is very different from having wrong views. But at the same time we have to be careful that our doubts don't degenerate into wrong views. The reason that having wrong views is harmful is not because then you're a bad Buddhist, "You don't believe in your Buddha's catechism, you don't believe in rebirth, that's a sin, tsk, tsk, tsk." It's not like that. It is more because, for example, if we don't believe in the existence of past and future lives, then we're not going to take care of karma. If we don't take care of karma, who does it harm? If we deny the existence of the Triple Gem, that doesn't bother the Buddha. Buddha doesn't care from his side or her side, but if we deny the existence of the Triple Gem, the existence of enlightenment, then we are putting ourselves in chains because we are condemning ourselves to some hopeless cynical attitude of life without any kind of openness to progression and change and transformation. Again, who does that view harm? It is not a question of being a good Buddhist or a bad Buddhist. It is that having these views turns us away from the path to happiness, when happiness is what we want.

## **ROOT VOW 10**

**(To abandon) Destroying a (a) town, (b) village, (c) city or (d) large area by means such as fire, bombs, pollution or black magic**

The tenth one refers to destroying any of these—a town, a village, a city or large area like a forest or a

meadow, by means such as fire, bombs, pollution or black magic. This is something that is actually covered under the first precept of not killing, isn't it? But, here in the bodhisattva vows, it emphasizes the harmfulness of these things in the context of the bodhisattva practice because the whole idea of the bodhisattva practice is to make our lives beneficial to others. When we destroy towns or living places, or meadows or forests by arson, or bombs or things like this, then so many other beings get hurt. How can one do that kind of action and at the same time have a bodhisattva motivation? It becomes really contradictory. This is something to look at: how many times do we burn yard waste and things where there might be a lot of sentient beings? Or chopping down trees, especially in the Northwest by burning the branches and the leaves and stuff. Many beings die in there.

## **ROOT VOW 11**

### **(To abandon) Teaching emptiness to those whose minds are unprepared**

The eleventh one refers to teaching emptiness to those who aren't qualified, those whose minds are unprepared. Somebody who doesn't know much about Dharma comes in and hears about emptiness. They are unable to understand the difference between emptiness and non-existence, the difference between emptiness and the emptiness of inherent existence. They think emptiness means non-existence. You see people in the West say, "Nothing exists. It's all illusion. Nothing exists. There is no good, there is no

bad.” How many times do you hear these kinds of things? If people misunderstand emptiness, then they tend to negate cause and effect. If they negate cause and effect, then they get harmed themselves. When we say, “Oh, emptiness means non-existence. There is no good. There is no bad. Therefore I can do anything I want.” Then who gets harmed? Oneself.

If we teach emptiness to people who aren’t prepared, who don’t have a good foundation in understanding cause and effect, if we teach them emptiness and due to their own misconceptions, they misinterpret it and fall into a nihilistic view, we end up transgressing our bodhisattva vow. This kind of thing is harmful to others. That is why they always say before you teach emptiness, you’re supposed to teach them about impermanence first, and loving kindness, karma, and the four noble truths.

One time one of my teachers was teaching us emptiness. He mentioned this vow and he said, “But I don’t have to worry about you people falling into the wrong view, because I don’t think you even approach understanding what we’re talking about. [Laughter.]

Actually, I remember one of the first times I was in Seattle, some of the people arranged talks for me. The first talk they arranged in the series of talks, was a talk on emptiness. They made the program and I went, “Err, what am I supposed to do here because the first talk to all these people who are new to the Dharma, I’m talking about emptiness.” Being stuck in that kind of situation, what I did was, I tried to speak about it, not in a really technical way but in a very basic way, like talking about money just being paper and ink, that the value of money is something that we give it. I was

talking in a general way, emphasizing, “But things do exist, folks.”

It is very important, if people who are new to the Dharma ask you what emptiness means, that you give them an answer that’s very suited to their level, their present level. In other words, don’t go into all the technical details about this and that. But talk about basic interdependence, and dependent arising. And if you explain emptiness to new people in the context of, “Look. The glass exists depending upon the person who made it, the silica, or whatever it is, and the mold. The glass comes into existence depending on all these things, therefore it doesn’t exist independently. Therefore it is empty. If new people ask you questions about emptiness, try and explain it in this context of dependent arising. This minimizes the possibility of their misunderstanding things, and it really engrains in people the idea that things do exist but they don’t exist in a rigid, inherent, concrete way.

*[Audience:] What if one were teaching in a university to students who are learning it merely as a scholarly pursuit?*

In that context of teaching at a university, people still have to be careful. It’s true that maybe the students aren’t really taking it to heart. The possibility of them misunderstanding it is less because they are not really taking it to heart as something to believe in themselves. But still, nonetheless, I think teaching emptiness at the university level through teaching dependent arising would minimize the danger of people misunderstanding. And also, in terms of

teaching Buddhism at the university level, thank heavens now, it's getting much better. There're some incredibly good teachers. But sometimes, you read some of the books that Buddhist scholars have written about Buddhism, and you see that they don't understand emptiness. If you read Betsy Napper's book on dependent arising and emptiness, she spends quite a bit of time showing how a lot of modern scholars have misunderstood it. One has to be really careful. Jeffrey Hopkins is really top notch, and teaches it very well. Sometimes I've been invited as a guest speaker to comparative religious courses and the teacher who is teaching it, they don't really understand Buddhism at all. They're usually very grateful to have a guest speaker come in, because they're teaching Buddhism just from what they've read in some book, and who knows if the person who wrote it understood Buddhism. This is something to be aware of. That's why I think it is really important when we study, to try and study with practitioners, rather than just scholars who don't put it into practice.

*[Audience:] What about using the term 'voidness' to mean emptiness?*

Alex Berzin uses the term "voidness". I don't especially like "voidness". The translation term "voidness" is fine but the translation term doesn't do much for me, and "emptiness", too is not a real good English translation and that's why in using the term, it's so important to explain the meaning instead of just saying things are empty.



*[Audience:] What about 'suchness'?*

“Suchness” in a way doesn’t tell people much, and when I try and do my spell check on my computer, it always stops on that word. Nobody knows what that word means. Or “thusness”—sometimes it is translated as thusness. We are dealing with a lot of things here, where one word doesn’t really convey the concept well and so it’s very important that we take time to explain the concept instead of just using the word.

Let me just say one more thing about the eleventh one, about not teaching emptiness to unqualified people. If somebody comes and asks you a question about emptiness, if you say, “I’m not supposed to teach that to you, because I’m going to break my bodhisattva vows,” that doesn’t go over real well with other people. They then feel that you are not sharing the Dharma or you are being stingy or something like that. Again, just explain it in terms of dependent arising and give real simple examples like money. Money from its side doesn’t have inherent value, just paper and ink. By the force of our society conceiving it in a certain way and giving it that label, therefore it has the value. But in and of itself, money doesn’t have value. Or talk about things like manners. How good manners and bad manners don’t have independent existence. They arise dependent upon the society and the group of people. Things like that. You’re explaining emptiness, but in a real simple way in talking always about dependent arising, labeling, causes and conditions. So then people can get it.

## **ROOT VOW 12**

**(To abandon) Causing those who have entered the Mahayana to turn away from working for the full enlightenment of Buddhahood and encouraging them to work merely for their own liberation from suffering**

Let's say there is somebody who is on the Mahayana path, who has a lot of regard for the bodhicitta, and who wants to become a fully enlightenment Buddha for others. You say something like, "Buddhahood is so high! It's so hard! It takes three countless great eons to attain full enlightenment. Do you know how long that is?" [Laughter.] "Why do you want to attain full enlightenment? It is just too long. It takes too much energy. Better just liberate yourself from cyclic existence and be satisfied with that. Don't develop a Messiah complex and want to liberate everybody. Just take care of yourself. Get yourself out of samsara and leave it at that." In this way, if somebody already had some feeling for the Mahayana path and bodhicitta and you convince them that working for others is not very beneficial, that achieving enlightenment is not very practical and instead it's just better to liberate themselves, then that's transgressing the vow. What's happening is you're indirectly denying all the people whom that one person could benefit when they become a Buddha. You are denying others access to that person as a fully enlightened being. It is not just the harm that is done to one person from turning them away from full enlightenment, but all the other people that this person could potentially benefit aren't benefited, because the person has switched paths and

decided just to work for Nirvana.

*[Audience:] What is the difference between becoming liberated and attaining full enlightenment?*

Liberation or nirvana is when you are free from the afflictions of ignorance, anger and attachment, and the karma that causes rebirth in cyclic existence. But one hasn't necessarily eliminated the stains of those things from one's mindstream. Full enlightenment is when those stains have been eliminated. They say that these stains are like the onions in the pot. You can take the onions out, but you still have the smell. This is what needs to be removed—the smell, in order to become fully enlightened.

Causing others to abandon the Mahayana, telling them it's too hard and difficult, is breaking the bodhisattva vow. Saying it takes too long; better to concentrate on their own thing. I will give you an example. I've heard this story a few times. Somebody in Thailand or some place was doing a lot of Vipassana meditation. They were doing quite well, but they got stuck at some point in their practice and could not get any further. They could not realize emptiness. Their teacher had clairvoyant powers and saw that this person had previously taken the bodhisattva vows and vowed not to go into nirvana without leading others there. Because of this the person was impeded in realizing emptiness. The conclusion of the story was, don't take bodhisattva vows because it could impede your realization of emptiness and keep you from attaining liberation. If you say that kind of story to somebody who is involved in the bodhisattva practice, who had much regard for Buddhahood, and turn them away from that path, even though you mean well (that person who told that story definitely meant well), from a Mahayana viewpoint, that would be something that is

harmful. Even though attaining nirvana's quite good, if somebody's aspiring for full enlightenment, don't turn them away from that.

### **ROOT VOW 13**

**(To abandon) Causing others to abandon completely their vows of self-liberation and embrace the Mahayana**

The thirteenth one—causing others to completely abandon their vows of self liberation or individual liberation (the Sanskrit word is “pratimoksha”), and embrace the Mahayana. Pratimoksha vows or individual liberation vows are the vows of fully ordained monks and nuns. The vows of the novice monks and nuns, the lay precepts that you people take, the five lay precepts or the eight precepts that you take for one day (but not in the Mahayana ceremony)—all these are considered the pratimoksha vows. Anyone who is abiding in those vows and practicing them, should you come to them and say, “Why are you keeping those vows? Those vows are so simple. Those vows are so basic. You should be a bodhisattva. If you practice the Mahayana, you don't need to worry about keeping those pratimoksha vows because you are working for the benefit of all sentient beings.” Do you see how it is possible that people misinterpret the Dharma and say these kinds of things? Demeaning the value of holding the vows of individual liberation by the reason of “Practice something that is much better, like the bodhisattva vows. And then you develop a good motivation, then you don't need to worry about stealing and lying and

unwise sexual contact because you have a good motivation—these are just simple basic practices. The bodhisattva path is a much more advanced practice. You should do that.”

You will hear things like this. Listening to what people say in the West, they will say the same thing about tantra. “Tantra is the highest practice. If you know about tantra, you don’t need to worry about the five precepts. This is crazy wisdom. If you practice tantra, you transform everything. You don’t need to take those precepts.” This is a rationalizing, twisting mind at work, because actually, if you’re really seriously engaged in the bodhisattva practice and the tantric practice, you will appreciate the pratimoksha vows even more. There may be certain times and certain instances where adhering strictly to a pratimoksha vow is actually something that can be harmful, where you have to go against the literal meaning of the pratimoksha vow, but you do so for the benefit of others. This will come later on in the bodhisattva vows. It is a completely different ball game. But many people don’t understand that and they just say, “Bodhisattva practice is higher. Tantric practice is higher. Don’t worry about the five lay precepts—that is baby practice. We are advanced practitioners, so we don’t need that.” People say it in the West. This attitude is something to be quite aware of. The reason why this is harmful is because when people negate basic ethical conduct with a twisted motivation, that harms them. They, in turn, harm other people by making people abandon their pratimoksha vows.

It can also be a harmful attitude of saying to

somebody who is a monk or a nun, “Why are you ordained? This is really stupid. This is an archaic institution. It’s hierarchical. It’s sexist. It doesn’t fit with our Western society.” “Why are you a monk or a nun? You are not dealing with your sexuality. You are avoiding intimate relationships.” I’m telling you this because people have said it. I’m not making things up. I hear it with my ears. [Laughter.]

Or telling people “Why are you keeping the five lay precepts? How stupid!” These kinds of comments are damaging to people. Truly harmful.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

You obviously have some good understanding. [Laughter.] But there are some people who want samsara and nirvana at the same time. [Laughter.] And we all do to our own extent, maybe not to the extent of breaking the five precepts. But some people actually want samsara and nirvana at the same time—they want to be high glorious practitioners but they don’t really want to change their day-to-day behavior. They don’t want to stop drinking or they want to screw around all they want. After all, you see all these books on tantric sex in the bookstore. I tell you, I stayed in somebody’s house and they said, “Oh, did you see these new books? Do they really teach those in Buddhism?” And they pulled out a book on tantric sex. [Laughter.]

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Somebody called me last year and said, “Where did

you get those special Tibetan bells?” I said, “Tibetan bells?” “Yeah, I was reading about special Tibetan bells that you use when you make love to enhance sexual pleasure.” [Laughter.] I’m going “Ai-yai-yai, what do I say to this person on the telephone?” They were really sincere. They were very disappointed when I said, “I can’t help you.” [Laughter.] It is quite amazing sometimes. People pulling out these books on tantric sex and saying, “Do you practice that? You are a Tibetan Buddhist, aren’t you?”

I know I am going out of track. I went to Hong Kong to teach and not too long after I arrived, one man called and asked me out to lunch. He said he was interested in Buddhism. He took me some place to lunch and then in the middle of it, he started talking about all of his partners, and tantric sex, and do I do this kind of practice? I’m sitting there going, “I’m going to get out of here, fast!” I was glad I was in a public restaurant! [Laughter.]

*[Audience:] What are the tantric vows? Don't they include the five precepts?*

The vows are progressive. The pratimoksha vows are the easiest ones to keep. They are specifically designed to pacify our verbal and physical actions, dealing specifically with things we say and do, not so much with the mind. The next level is the bodhisattva vows. The purpose of these is to purify our self-cherishing attitude. Then a step above this are the tantric vows, and the purpose of these is to help us purify the subtle dualistic attitude and to purify the impure vision of seeing everything as very ordinary,

polluted and contaminated.

You take each set of vows based on the previous set. It doesn't mean you have to have all five precepts to take the bodhisattva vows. It's nice if you do, but you don't have to. The tantric vows deal a lot with trying to eliminate the ordinary view and the different misunderstandings that apply to tantric practice. For example, people who are on a high level of tantric practice need to eat meat to keep the body healthy in order to do very technical meditations with the winds and the energy system. For that purpose, they eat meat, not because they enjoy the meat, not because they don't care about the animals, but because they are doing it as part of their practice, to keep the body healthy to attain enlightenment. They also say prayers and do blessings and things like that for the animals. This will override one of the earlier prohibitions about trying to be vegetarian.

*[Audience:] Wouldn't it be problematic if beginners take tantric vows without a proper foundation in the Dharma?*

Yes. Actually, to take the tantric vows, you have to have taken refuge first. If you take refuge, you automatically have the precept not to kill. Some people, at their first Dharma teaching, they take an initiation with tantric vows. That creates tremendous confusion. That is why His Holiness, at one conference, was saying that the highest class tantric initiations shouldn't be given to new people. This is not, by the way, the level of initiation that His Holiness is giving here [Note: His Holiness was going



to give the Chenrezig Initiation in Seattle]. That is a lower class tantra and you don't take the tantric vows with that. But the highest class of tantra is a much more complicated practice and you have the vows. It is not real wise for new people to take that because they don't understand the four noble truths. They become confused. That's why it's better to go slowly.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

From the side of the monk or the nun or Mahayana practitioner or whoever it is, their responsibility is to strengthen their own mind. Our responsibility is not to interfere with their process of strengthening their own mind. These vows here are talking about our responsibility towards others.

When we are somebody who holds the five lay precepts or any kind of pratimoksha vows, then our own responsibility is to strengthen our own mind. You are right. There're lots of people who are going to tell us we're nuts. If you believe everything everybody tells you, you are going to be real confused. This is not in any way shifting the responsibility to somebody else. It's each person's own responsibility to be very sure about their own ethical standards and know why they are keeping them and develop a strong mind wanting to keep them, so that they are not dissuaded by these kinds of comments. But it is also our responsibility not to get in the way of other people who are doing well in their practice.

*[Audience:] What if we transgress the bodhisattva vows?*

If you've taken the bodhisattva vows and you transgressed them, your karma becomes much heavier. If you take them and you keep them, the karma is also much heavier. A lot of these actions, for example praising oneself and belittling others, are going to be negative whether you have a vow or not. The five heinous actions would be negative whether you have the vow or not. But the whole karma involved becomes much heavier when you have the vow. The advantage of having the vows is that every moment when you are not transgressing the vows, you're accumulating good karma. You get this build-up in wealth of positive potential in your mindstream that serves as a real good foundation for your meditation. The whole purpose of the vows is to benefit us.

Let's sit quietly for five minutes.

We are going through the bodhisattva vows, specifically the eighteen root vows. Remember that bodhisattva vows are guidelines on how to practice, what to practice and what to avoid when we have the wish to become Buddhas for the benefit of others.

## **ROOT VOW 14**

**(To abandon) Holding and causing others to hold the view that the learners' vehicle (you can call it the Theravada) does not abandon attachment and other delusions**

It is a form of sectarianism when we put down other traditions, here in specific, the tradition where the followers aim to attain nirvana rather than full

enlightenment. When we say that it is not effective for doing what it is actually capable of doing—liberating somebody from samsara—then that’s transgressing this vow. It is causing others to hold wrong views that we might have about a more modest path, saying that by practicing it, you can’t abandon attachment, you can’t attain liberation and things like that.

In a previous vow, we want to abandon criticizing the Mahayana and throwing it out. Here, it is criticizing the Theravada and saying, “Oh, we don’t need to practice any of those teachings. We’re great Mahayana practitioners! The Theravada tradition doesn’t help you abandon attachment. It won’t get you liberated. We don’t have to practice those teachings.” That’s completely incorrect. The Mahayana is built upon the foundation of the Theravada. Everything that you find in the Theravada is found in the Mahayana. It is like the building blocks. Some people think that if you practice this tradition, you don’t practice the other one. It is not like this.

If you practice Mahayana, you have to practice what’s taught in the Theravada vehicle. And if you practice Vajrayana, then you have to practice what’s taught in the Theravada and the Mahayana. They are steps that we take.

## **ROOT VOW 15**

**(To abandon) Falsely saying that oneself has realized profound emptiness and that if others meditate as one has, they will realize emptiness and become as high or greatly realized as oneself**

This one is a form of lying, where you go around falsely proclaiming your own realization of emptiness. Without having actually realized the ultimate truth, one is going around saying, “I understand emptiness.” “I have the correct view.” “I am on the path of seeing.” Or “I am liberated from samsara.” Or “I’m a non-returner.” One proclaims that oneself has realized emptiness when one hasn’t, and then say, “If you practice exactly like me, you’ll become as highly realized as I am.” This kind of putting on airs and deception is very harmful. When others are seeking accurate teachings on emptiness, if we deceive them by making them think we have the correct view when we do not, and teach them something that is not the correct view, then it is very, very harmful to them, because they will not meditate correctly.

## **ROOT VOW 16**

**(To abandon) (a) Taking gifts from others who were encouraged to give you things originally intended as offerings to the Three Jewels, (b) Not giving things to the Three Jewels that others have given you to give to them, or (c) Accepting property stolen from the Three Jewels**

There is a whole variety of ways to transgress this vow. One way is when, for example, a high government official makes a law that a monastery, or temple, or Dharma center shouldn’t have very expensive things and that all these things should be given to the government. Although no one comes and steals the property, the monasteries or temples are forced to give it up. That is breaking the vow.

Another way of breaking the vow: Somebody steals things from the temples and monasteries and gives them to you. You know about it but accept them anyway. Even if you did not steal the things yourself, you break this vow.

Another example would be when the Communists invaded Tibet; they desecrated the monasteries, took the statues and other precious things, gave them to other people or sold them on the free market in Hong Kong. If you accept them or buy them knowing that they were stolen from the Three Jewels, it is an infraction of this vow.

Or say, somebody at a Dharma center is doing funny things with the books, or taking food from the kitchen that actually belongs to everybody at the center, and you know that, and yet you accept it as your own; you accept things that other people have robbed or embezzled. It doesn't have to be huge, enormous things like statues. It can be just things belonging to the Three Jewels that others give to you, things that have been forcibly taken in some way.

Another example is somebody gives you something in good faith and says, "When you get to such and such a temple, or such and such a place, please offer this." You accept it but then you don't offer it. Or let's say you are going to India and somebody gives you money and says, "Please buy candles at Bodhgaya." You take the money but you never buy the candles. Or somebody gives you candles and says, "Please offer these at the stupa in Bodhgaya." You take them but you don't offer them. Or you're going on a trip to Tibet and somebody says, "Oh here, please take these books and donate them to one of the temples." You

take them but you sell them and use the money for yourself. Or somebody gives you a whole lot of fruit and says, “Oh, when you get to the temple, please put these on the altar of the temple.” On the way there, you get hungry, you decide to eat it, thinking, “Well, the Buddha won’t miss this extra banana.”

Or even situations where, for example, somebody gives you cookies to offer on the altar at the center, you take the cookies and then you get hungry and you think, “Well, I will eat this package of cookies and buy another one to offer.” The mind is thinking, “I’ll eat these first and get another one to replace it later.” But that isn’t the point. The point is that somebody gave you that box of cookies to offer at the altar and once they have given it, it no longer belongs to them or to you. It belongs to the Three Jewels. Any kind of these dealings, things that were intended for the Three Jewels that you don’t deliver, or things that were embezzled or stolen from them that you accept, and you know that it does not belong to you, that’s breaking the vow.

## **Vows showing us what to practice**

All of these vows are saying different things about how we should practice. In the fourteenth vow, it is really stressing that we should respect other traditions. We should know about the Theravada tradition, respect it and honor those people who practice it. The fifteenth vow is encouraging us to tell the truth and not deceive others. The sixteenth is encouraging us to be honest in all of our dealings and not snitch and rationalize. It’s telling us not to be careless about

people's property, that we should be really vigilant about others' property. So in all these vows, it's really showing us what to practice, not just what to avoid.

## **ROOT VOW 17** **(To abandon) Making bad rules**

This has two parts. First part: *causing those engaged in meditation on meditative quiescence to give it up by giving their belongings to those who are merely reciting texts.* Let's say you live in a monastery or a temple, and somebody gives an offering for the people who are doing samatha meditation, or for the people in retreat. Then you think, "Oh well! They're in retreat. They are supposed to have renounced, so I'm going to give it to all my friends at the center instead." Making people give up their retreat or their practice of samatha or meditative quiescence because they have insufficient provisions to do it, after you rechanneled the provisions—this is one kind of bad rule or one way of harming.

Second part: *making, in general, bad disciplinary rules which cause a spiritual community not to be harmonious.* For example, making business rather than spiritual practice the focus of the Dharma center, monastery or retreat center. Business, making money and having a good name become much more important and occupy everybody's time instead of the actual spiritual practice. Or it could be making some kind of bad rules or rules that are unfair, that make people quarrel. It could be making it difficult for people to practice by, for instance saying that everybody needs to go out and work ten hours a day,

when they came to live there in the first place because they wanted to practice.

The above are the ways which make it difficult for other people to practice. We make it difficult for the people in retreat to continue practicing because we don't give them the necessities that they need. Or we make it difficult for the other people in the spiritual community to practice because we make different priorities and rules that are confusing and cause disharmony, hence making living conditions difficult for them. This vow is showing us the importance of helping people who want to practice the Dharma. When people want to practice and do retreat, we should do whatever we can to help them do that.

I do think it is important because I think in America, sometimes we get so individualistic and think, "I have to work to earn my living and I can't take all this time off to do retreat, so why should I support somebody else who just wants to sit and meditate all day for a year?" Many people feel this. "I have to work so hard before I can do what they do, why shouldn't these people work just as hard? Why should I give money to them and support them in their practice? They should go out and get a job!" It's very easy for people in the West to have this attitude, because we want everything fair and right. We do not realize that by supporting other people who do intense practice, whether they be lay people or ordained people, we benefit from it. Instead of really honoring that, we say, with our Western sense of justice and fairness, "No! No! That's not fair because if I can't do it, nobody should be able to do it." We should be careful of that because having those mental states and



not allowing other people to do intense practice is really not to our benefit. Like I said, if other people do it, when they get out of retreat, they can really help us.

## **ROOT VOW 18**

### **(To abandon) Abandoning the two bodhicittas, the aspiring and engaging bodhicitta**

This can happen in a variety of ways. One way is by saying it is just too difficult, “The bodhisattva path is too difficult. I don’t want to work for the benefit of all sentient beings, I am just going to work for myself.” We feel discouraged by the enormity of the practice—trying to transform the object that we care for most from being ourselves to being others. We feel, “I can’t do that,” and we give it up, out of discouragement.

Another way of giving up bodhicitta is when you get fed up with sentient beings—maybe not all of them, maybe just one—“I tried so hard to help these people but they’re completely uncooperative. I give up! If they want to attain enlightenment, they can just go do it themselves. I’m not going to help them at all. I am just exhausted!” This is another way to lose one’s bodhicitta because bodhicitta is the wish to become enlightened for the benefit of *all* sentient beings. As soon as we exclude somebody whom we’re fed up with, then we’re no longer working for all sentient beings, so the power of the altruistic intention disappears. The disadvantage for us of giving up the altruism is that we can’t become enlightened, and the disadvantage for other sentient beings is that our capacity to be of service to them becomes very

severely limited.

## **The Four Binding Factors**

Those are the eighteen vows. I think previously you asked about different factors that need to be present for it to be a complete transgression, so now we come to that. These eighteen root downfalls are very intricately related to the state of the mind we are in. It is not just doing the action. Having a certain motivation or certain mental factors present or not present when we are doing the action determines whether the action is a complete transgression of a vow or just an impingement of it or something less severe.

There are four binding factors or entangling factors. If we have all these four factors complete, the action becomes a complete transgression of the vow. Then the karma becomes especially heavy. Whereas if we don't have all four factors, like if we have three, then the karma is lighter. Or if we have two, then it is lighter. If we have only one, then it is even lighter. If we have none, we have not broken the vow.

These four factors apply to all of the bodhisattva vows except the ninth (holding distorted views) and the eighteenth (abandoning the aspiring or engaging bodhicitta). With those two, you don't need all four factors, because they are so heavy that the action in itself becomes a transgression. Not only is the karma heavy, but also your whole bodhisattva ordination kind of fizzles out.

For a complete transgression of the other sixteen

vows, you need to have all four of these factors. These factors are quite interesting to think about; I find all these vows very interesting to think about. I've been hearing about them for years. Every time I study them, I see something new in what's going on. I see something new in my own behavior. Like I said to you before, some of these vows may seem impossible to transgress—"How can somebody do that?" or "That vow doesn't apply to me." I used to think that way too, and then all of a sudden, I'd see some situation that I was close to being involved in or somebody I knew was being involved in—"Oh, that's that bodhisattva vow!"

### **1. Not regarding one's action as negative, or not caring that it is even though one recognizes that the action is transgressing a vow**

Let's take the example of the first vow—(to abandon) praising oneself or belittling others out of attachment to offerings, fame, reputation. Let's say I'm sitting there praising myself and I don't even see it as something wrong. I am telling you about my good qualities. I'm telling you why I'm such a great person, that you should come and hear teachings from me. I don't even see that there is anything wrong with this very conceited way of talking about myself with the motivation to directly benefit materially or enjoy more prestige.

Or, I recognize that behaving this way is breaking the first vow, "Yes, I do have a vow not to praise myself, but I don't really care; there's no problem with doing this." It is like a mind that disregards

karma, “Yes, I am not supposed to do that, but I don’t really care, I am going to do it anyway.” That kind of flippant, rationalizing mind.

Or we belittle somebody, again out of attachment to our own benefit. We either don’t even recognize that we’re belittling somebody, or we don’t even recognize that there is something wrong with it. We don’t see any fault in it. Or we know we have a vow relating to this, but we don’t care. It doesn’t matter.

You can apply this to any of the sixteen vows, except the ninth and the eighteenth.

## **2. Not abandoning the thought to do it again**

You have done the negative action, and afterwards there is no thought at all to abandon doing it again. In fact, you’re thinking (in terms of the first vow), “It’s a real good thing that I put myself up. I got myself a good reputation. This is really good, people should know how good I am. After all I am being truthful, and I have a vow not to lie.” There is no desire to abandon or refrain from the negative action.

## **3. Being happy and rejoicing in the action**

Not only is there no wish to abandon doing it in the future, but you are really glad you did it. “This is good, I am really glad I did this. This is good stuff!”

## **4. Not having self-respect or consideration about what one has done**

Remember when we went through the auxiliary

mental factors, among those twenty harmful ones, there were two: non-self-respect and non-consideration for others or lack of consideration for others. Self-respect is abandoning actions out of respect for your own moral integrity, out of respect for your own welfare, not wanting to create negative karma because you are going to have to suffer for it. Self-respect is also abandoning actions out of respect for your own feeling that “I am trying hard on the path to enlightenment, I don’t want to damage that.”

Self-respect for one’s own ethical principles and the willingness to live by them—this kind of self-respect is very, very good because then we abandon doing negative actions. We respect our own ethical integrity, our own principles, our own beliefs, our own ability to be an ethical person. When we don’t have that mental factor, our mind will do whatever it wants, because there is no wish whatsoever to live by our ethical principles, no respect for our own future lives, no respect for our own integrity as a human being. Didn’t they talk about people who are sociopaths who don’t have the awareness of their actions on others? I think also they seem to lack a kind of self-respect for their own ethical integrity.

Consideration for others is abandoning negative actions because we care about what effect our negative actions will have on other people. They will harm people or people will lose faith in us or the Dharma because to them, in some way, we are representing the Dharma. So “non-consideration” is lack of care about how or what we do, affects other people. It’s really important for us to have self-respect and consideration for others, because these are two

mental factors that help us abandon negative actions.

When we have all these four factors complete, then it becomes a complete transgression of the vow.

### **Summary of the four binding factors**

The first of the binding factors would be we don't even see anything wrong with it. We're not even aware that we are doing anything negative. Or even if we are aware that this has something to do with the vow, we don't care about the karma created. The second one would be having no wish to refrain from doing that in the future. For example, even though somebody came and apologized to us, we get self-righteous and say, "Well, I'm glad you finally apologize and come to your senses because you were really being a jerk ..." and we really laid into them afterwards. And in fact being quite delighted and pleased with ourselves for having done that. This is the third one. The fourth one would be having no self-respect, no consideration for others about what we've done. So we don't care at all what effect our unforgiving and retaliating attitude has on the other person, and we have no consideration at all for the effect this has on ourselves, our own karma and our own integrity as human beings.

### **Questions and answers**

*[Audience:] What happens if we regret/recognize we behaved badly about something but we still get angry/upset? Is it a complete transgression?*

Now if you have one of these binding factors missing, then it doesn't become a complete transgression. Let's say, somebody comes and apologizes to you. You've been really mad at this person, and they finally come to apologize. You just can't wait to lay into them and you start to tell them off, and really rub it in, even though they've come to seek reconciliation. But part of your mind is saying, "What in the world am I doing? This person has come to apologize and I really want to be reconciled, but I am just too angry and I'm just like dumping all over this person right now but I really don't want to do this." It is like, "I'm out of control, folks!"

At that time, you don't have this first factor. In other words, you recognize the disadvantages of what you're doing. You recognize it is something negative. You recognize that you really don't want to be doing it. So there is some kind of regret, even though you are out of control and you're doing it. There will still be some negative karma involved in it because there was definitely anger generated and harm delivered, but it wouldn't be a complete break of this vow.

*[Audience:] Following that question, what if we feel glad that it was something worthwhile to do?*

Well, then you definitely have one of the binding factors, don't you? You feel pleased with what you've done. You don't have a wish to refrain from it. Maybe you have some feeling that what you did isn't so good. Maybe you have a little bit of care for the other person but you don't have much integrity yourself. So it could be a situation where, maybe we have one of the binding factors but not the other three, or we may

have two but not the other two, or we may have three and not the other one. It is interesting to discuss and think of situations where you may have some of them.

Sometimes even while you are doing an action, you switch motivations. So, using the example above, I think at one time, there probably is the wish of, “Oh! This is a real good thing and I am going to really dig in!” But even though you might start off with that wish, the predominant thing during most of the action may be, “Wow, I wish I wasn’t doing this.”

Or while you were doing it, you could be thinking, “This is really good I’m doing it. There is no fault or problem with this.” But then afterwards you thought, “I don’t feel good about doing that. I’m not going to do that again.” In the latter case, you would have the first factor, because at the time you were doing it, you didn’t see anything wrong with it, but then you wouldn’t have the second or third one, which is not wishing to refrain from it and feeling pleased.

So we have completed the eighteen root bodhisattva vows and we’ve looked at the four binding factors. It is interesting. Go home and think about it. Think about things that you have done, and see when do you have the first binding factor, when do you have the second one, when do you have the third one, when do you have the fourth? See the different combinations of these. Thinking like this gives you a whole lot of insight into your own behavior. Why I do what I do and what is really going on in my mind when I’m doing that? How do I feel about myself while I am doing it and after I have done it?



## **Purification practices**

Now with the bodhisattva vows, it is very good to do purification on a regular basis. Actually even if we don't have the bodhisattva vows, just trying to be regular human beings, it's very good to do purification. But it's especially good to do if you have lay precepts or bodhisattva vows. Prostrations to the Thirty Five Buddhas is a very good way of purifying the bodhisattva vows. In fact another term for it is the Bodhisattva's Confession of Ethical Downfalls. That's why it is recommended that we do that on a daily basis. It can be quite good. Or we can do Vajrasattva meditation.

## **Restoring the vows**

And then, it is possible, even though there's been a complete break of the vows, to again take them and renew them. In actual fact, there is a way of taking the bodhisattva vows yourself and taking them every day. In that way, you reestablish the vows every day. When you first take the bodhisattva vows, you have to take them from a teacher. After that, you can take them on your own by visualizing the assembly of teachers and Three Jewels. There is one practice called the Six Session Guru Yoga that people often do where you actually take the bodhisattva vows in the morning and in the evening as a way of reinforcing and strengthening them, and that can be quite useful.

Even if you haven't taken the vows, still, knowing what they are can give you a way of having more perspective on your actions and what you are doing.

So it is good to train in the vows. Then someday when the altruistic intention becomes so strong within oneself, one will want to take them. You can pray that you will have the external conditions where you can take the bodhisattva vows. It is not always so easy to take them, to find a teacher who is qualified to give them, so it is a really nice thing and something to feel quite happy about.

## **Daily practice**

It is good if people can try, during this time, to stabilize a daily practice. Even if you can't do a long daily practice, at least in the morning, take refuge, think about bodhicitta and the Four Immeasurables, maybe even do the prayers—it certainly doesn't take long. If you can get into the habit of doing some kind of practice in the morning, it's very, very good. As much time as you can set out for your practice, that much more benefit you receive.

Listening to teachings is very good but the whole purpose of listening is to put them into practice. It's like going to take a cooking class. It's great to take the cooking class but if you do not practice what you learn and cook something, you are not going to get the real benefit. If you just get into the habit of doing some practice each day, then it becomes very normal and natural and it doesn't take much energy to do. Starting it and getting yourself into a good habit might take some energy but once you get in that habit, then it's very, very easy.

## The Forty-Six Auxiliary Bodhisattva Vows

### Death: the teacher of impermanence

I hadn't planned on talking about this but somehow it is coming out from my mouth. I was going to talk about it later. On Friday, I went to visit a person who is a Buddhist and has AIDS. He has become a hospice patient and is very much requesting help from the Buddhist communities in terms of meditating with him and, especially, reading to him; also some practical things around the house and maybe taking him out for a walk. So if people are interested, please talk to me afterwards. I have a little list and I think Lee will gather everybody together and describe the situation. Going to meet him made me think very much about the whole transience of life. He is 45 and he knows he is going to die soon. Of course it's always *mañana*, *mañana*, ... even if one has a terminal illness. We never feel like we are going to die now, it's always going to be later somehow.

And I just got news today, too, that another person from the Buddhist community has AIDS-related lymphoma. The doctor told him he has three months unless he does chemotherapy and then maybe he has nine. And it hit me, listening to that, "How would that feel, if that were me?" For so long we meditate on death and impermanence. "Oh yes, I am going to die. Oh, yes, my life is so useful and yes, I understand that," but always somewhere in the back of the mind, ego has its little thing that is always saying, "Yes, it's not really going to happen to me, or if it does, it's not for a long time. I'm never going to get the news that I

have three months to live. That just happens to other people.”

Somewhere at the back of the mind, ego's always playing that story. And it really hit me. That day when the doctor tells you and when you cannot get around that, when ego cannot do its usual denial trip, then how do you feel? “Oh, only three months left.” This whole life. This whole ego identity I've been building up. All my possessions that I have been accumulating. All my reputation, my popularity and everything that I have been working so hard at. I've got to give that up in three months. And then I think not only just this thing of giving: “Ok, I've got to give that up, okay, that'll manage.” But, then, only three months left to practice the Dharma. Panic! “Oh! Only three months left.” It's really making me think a lot.

This is precisely why the Buddha taught the meditation on death and why it was the first in the whole teaching on impermanence. Because, if we can somehow get it in the heart then we are not going to freak out and the ego isn't always back there saying, “No, this is not really going to happen.” It'll just be basically something that we've already known and accepted the whole time. To use that understanding, not to feel hopeless and depressed but, rather, to feel full of hope and to know that life really has some meaning and some purpose. And to use that understanding to clear away a lot of the things that usually drive us nuts, all the usual things we get so worried and anxious about.

So, I think, within the next few months, a little group, or whoever wants to get involved, will have that opportunity with at least two other people in the

Buddhist community to help with their dying processes and to use what they are going through as something we can learn from. Because sometimes that's the greatest gift that people give us.

### **Dropping the guilt trips and 'shoulds'**

I want to talk, too—because we have been talking so much about the bodhisattva practice of cherishing others more than ourselves—about the fact that it's very easy at this point for people to get into guilt-tripping themselves, “Oh, I am so selfish, I am so selfish. Look how awful I am,” and pushing and pushing, “I should do more, I should do more!” But, that's coming more from guilt and “should” and obligation than it is from genuine love and compassion. So we have to make sure we do the meditations on love and compassion and not just jump to the conclusion of the meditation. Because if we jump to the conclusion, we wind up with the “shoulds” of “I *should* take better care of everybody else than myself.” But we don't really feel that and then we develop this internal civil war. And that's because we're just going to the conclusion. If we really go through the steps of the meditation, and do this thing of equalizing self and others, consider the disadvantages of the self-centeredness and the advantages of taking care of others, then when we come to the conclusion, we are not going to have an internal civil war but, instead, it's going to be a very natural heart-felt conclusion. Having done it wrong a number of years, I am trying to help you benefit from my internal civil war. [Laughter.] So do the meditation

and don't get into obligation and guilt.

## **Letting go of self-denial**

And, also, at the same time we are talking about benefiting others, it's important that we don't fall into the extreme of neglecting ourselves. One thing that those of us who grew up in a Judeo-Christian culture commonly do is we feel we can only benefit others as long as we are miserable. In other words, I'm not really taking care of others if I get some pleasure and satisfaction out of it. If I feel good, that's not caring for others. I have to feel part of me is being denied. I have to sacrifice in order for it to be genuine caring for others. We very easily get into this thing. And, again, that isn't what the Buddha was saying. We want to train our mind to the point where taking care of others really gives us pleasure. It's not a thing of feeling that we have to deny ourselves and make ourselves miserable.

It's also important that we don't go into not only this thing of feeling we need to deny ourselves and stuff like that, but also feeling that anything we enjoy is bad. For example, despising our body or disregarding our own needs to have some peace in our own life. It's very important, for example, to take care of our body and to be healthy, because if we are not healthy, it's very difficult to practice and difficult to benefit others. Is taking care of our body necessarily selfish? It can be, but it doesn't have to be. We can take care of our body and keep ourselves healthy, but we do it for the benefit of other sentient beings, because that's the precondition to be able to take care

of them. In the same way, we try and be practical about things in our life and not completely give away all our money and be negligent about our own financial situation. We have to keep our financial situation together. Otherwise, it becomes difficult to practice, it becomes difficult to benefit others.

### **The integration of daily life with spiritual life**

It's just day to day practical things. It's important that we don't ignore these and say, "I am on the spiritual path." We in the West tend to make this big gap between practical, down-to-earth things and spirituality. If you are in one, you can't be in the other. But, again, that isn't what the Buddha is saying. Buddha has a really integrative thing, so we have our feet on the ground and we're spiritual at the same time. We keep our body healthy for the benefit of others. We keep our financial situation together for the benefit of others. We cook and we clean, and we keep our house nice and we maintain our friendships, but, again, for the benefit of others and not just out of some selfishness.

So we don't throw all those things out, thinking I am a holy person so I don't have to worry about paying the bills. Or, I am practicing the Dharma, so .... They always tell this great story (it confused me for so long) about one practitioner. He meditated so much on death that he felt very strongly the impermanence of his life. There was a thorn bush outside his cave, and every time he came out, he would scratch himself, but he wouldn't cut the bush because he always thought, "I can't take time out to

cut the bush, because I might die first and that will be time wasted.” So he never cut the bush because each time he went in and out he was so aware of the imminence of death that he didn’t want to waste his time doing that.

This story confused me for so long, because I interpreted it as, “Well, then I don’t need to take care of the practical things of my daily life because I might die first, and it’s better that I should push myself and meditate all the time.” That is a completely wrong interpretation of the story. In other words, what the story is getting at, is I think he could really have cut the thorn bush. I think it is possible to cut the thorn bush for the benefit of sentient beings. And this is the whole way the thought transformation practice comes in. You are cutting the thorns of the defilements of sentient beings and their negative karma. In other words, you are transforming that into something that’s the Dharma, and not just negating day to day occurrences in the name of practicing the spiritual path. Are people understanding? Those of you who have thorn bushes outside your caves? [Laughter.]

*[Audience:] Can you explain how “going for the root of the thorn bush” relates to the realization of emptiness?*

Yes, there are a few ways to see what going for the root of the thorn bush means. It does mean realizing emptiness and bodhicitta but it also means putting everything into practice in the moment. Because the thing is—and I was thinking about this—that sometimes we think being in the moment means that



we dissociate from everything else in our life. But, being in the moment doesn't mean you pretend the past didn't exist and pretend the future doesn't exist. Because the past did exist, and the future does exist. And we have to deal with them. So being in the moment doesn't mean we dissociate from our whole life and go into some state in which we block everything else out except what's happening. Being in the moment actually means experiencing what is happening now, which is also a global awareness of how it evolves into what is going to come afterwards. I think, often, we misinterpret "being in the moment" and use it, like I said, to dissociate instead of to actually examine our life and the whole dependent arising that we're a part of. OK? Making some sense?

### **The 46 auxiliary bodhisattva vows**

We've been reviewing the bodhisattva vows and we finished the review of the 18 root vows. So let's go on to the 46 auxiliary vows. Once again, remember that the guidelines set forth in these vows are not commandments. They are things we undertake voluntarily. And we undertake them with an awareness that we can't keep them perfectly, because if we could keep them perfectly, Buddha wouldn't have needed to set them out. It's good to have an awareness that these vows are pointing to very specific things that can act as a guideline in our daily life to make us more mindful—not mindful in the sense of being paranoid of doing something wrong, but just mindful of what our real heart-felt values are and how we want to live. This involves being mindful

of what is going on in a situation, including what we are thinking and feeling and saying and doing, so that we can make wise choices in our life instead of just being on automatic and not making the choices that present themselves to us in our life.

The whole thing with the vows is that in order to live ethically, we have to know what the unethical actions are so we can know to abandon them, and know to do the opposite. In hearing all these different things—to abandon this and abandon that—it's not saying, "Don't do that," or, "you're bad!" It's just saying, if we want to live an ethical life, to be aware of those things and how we get involved in them, and make a choice when those situations arise, not to do that. And then, look at what the opposite of those unethical actions are, and you can see some things you can choose to get involved and engaged in.

So that's the scope in which the bodhisattva vows are set up. And, like I said, the bodhisattva vows are really for focusing on helping us put into practice our wish to free ourselves from all the disadvantages of self-centeredness and our wish to reap all the advantages—for self and others—of cherishing others.

The 46 auxiliary bodhisattva precepts are broken down into seven major groups. Six of the groups are based on the six far-reaching attitudes and the seventh group specifically refers to the ethics of benefiting sentient beings and going into details of that. If you look in "Pearl or Wisdom Book II", you can see the different groups of bodhisattva vows. The first seven have to do with the far-reaching attitude of generosity, eight through 16 have to do with ethics, 17 through 20

with patience, 21 through 23 with joyous effort, 24 through 26 with meditative stabilization, 27 through 34 with wisdom and, finally, 35 through 46 with the ethics of benefiting others. Categorizing groups in this way makes it easier for us to practice them.

## **AUXILIARY VOWS 1–7: VOWS TO ELIMINATE OBSTACLES TO THE FAR-REACHING ATTITUDE OF GENEROSITY AND OBSTACLES TO THE ETHICAL DISCIPLINE OF GATHERING VIRTUOUS ACTIONS**

This first group is about generosity. Generosity is the wish to be able to give our body, possessions, and positive potential to others without any feeling of poverty, without any regret. It's just the wish to be able to give when it is appropriate, when the circumstance presents itself.

There are two chief obstacles to generosity: attachment and miserliness. Attachment involves clinging to things we want for ourselves or wanting to get more things for ourselves. Miserliness involves not wanting to share what we have.

It's interesting, there are two ways to look at it.

When we see generous people and, if we value that quality, we think about what it is like being generous and we develop some aspiration towards that because it seems like a wonderful thing to be able to be. If we have that regard for generosity, then we will see that attachment and miserliness are things that we want to counteract.

On the other hand, if we look at it from the other way, and we think, "When I'm attached, this and that

happens, and when I'm miserly, this and that happens," and we recognize all the faults of the miserliness and the attachment, and how much harm they cause to ourselves and others, then we'll wish to practice generosity because that's the antidote. So you see, you can go back and forth between these two. If I want generosity then, of course, I have to give up the miserliness and the attachment. And if I want to give up the miserliness and attachment because it makes me miserable then, of course, I have to practice generosity. So you can approach it from both wings that way.

### **Auxiliary vow 1: (To abandon) Not making offerings to the Three Jewels**

The first guideline here is to avoid not making daily offerings to the Triple Gem with body, speech and mind. Now, our mind might say, "Oh, this sounds like I have to do all these nice things for the Triple Gem otherwise I'm going to get punished and sent to hell." That's what a person who grew up in a Christian environment thinks. Immediate thought: "I've got to do this because otherwise what happens." That's not what it's talking about. It's coming from the viewpoint that, if we admire generosity, and we want to develop it, and we see how miserliness and attachment make us miserable and we want to get rid of them, the easiest way to practice generosity is with the Triple Gem because they have so many good qualities that our heart gets very pleased and wants to make offerings.

Sometimes it's harder to practice generosity with

people that we don't like because we can always fudge our way out of it by saying, "They are so rude and nasty, why should I do anything for them?" But we can't do that with the Triple Gem because their kindness to us is there. So, somehow, it's easier for us to be generous that way. And, again, they don't need that at all so we can see that the offerings are done for our own cultivation.

Now, what does it mean to offer with the body, speech and mind? Offering with our body is, for example, doing prostrations. If you can't do long prostrations, just go like this. Even if you can't do short prostrations, maybe you're sick, you can't get out of bed, you just go like this. That's okay. Even if you can't do that, you're really sick, just go like this. Really, they say just lifting one finger can be a prostration. It's a way of physically showing our respect. And then, verbally to offer some praise to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. For example, it could be the request prayers that we do, or when we talk about the kindness of our teacher, the illuminators of the path and those who have the eyes of wisdom, and so on. This is the verbal praise. Or, doing the mantra *om namo manjushriye, namo sushriye, namo uttama shriye soha* while we are prostrating, that's also verbally praising Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. And then, mentally, is remembering their qualities. So again, just to mentally, inside of our heart, remember their qualities and even when we are bowing, or when we are offering or something like that, do the visualization remembering their kindness and their qualities. That's mentally offering prostrations.

If we do that, it really helps our own mind, because

the more we can remember the Triple Gem, the more we feel this underground support in all of our actions. We don't feel like we are alone in this polluted world, "I'm all alone, what's going to happen?" The more we remember the Triple Gem—and making offerings helps us remember them—the more the refuge becomes stronger and we feel this underlying support, so that whatever's going on in our life, we can fall back on that refuge, we can fall back on that relationship. That's why it's nice if you can have a shrine in your house and make offerings every day. You can offer water, or fruit, or whatever in the morning when you get up, bow three times, and in the evening before you go to bed, bow three times. It becomes very helpful.

### **Auxiliary vow 2: (To abandon) Acting out selfish thoughts of desire**

The second precept involves abandoning acting out selfish thoughts of desire to gain material possessions or reputation. Remember, I told you, I used to review these vows daily and there were some that I looked at every night. This is one of them. Every day, "Oops! Again, I transgress that one." This one is tricky because we see how easily the mind thinks of something, and then we act it out. Mind says, "I want this," and we go to the store and buy it. Mind says, "I want to do this," we go and do it. Mind says, "I want to eat this," we go to the refrigerator. Or, mind says, "I want praise," so I do something to put myself in a situation where I'm praised. Mind says, "I feel insecure, I want a good reputation," then I do stuff so

that I get a good reputation. So we follow this mind of desire that's seeking material possessions and reputation and praise.

Again, that doesn't mean we are bad people when we do that. REPEAT, it does NOT mean we are bad people when we do that. It just means that when we notice we are doing it, it's a signal to us, "Ah, I have to reconnect with what is important in my life. I've forgotten." So, instead of beating ourselves up and telling ourselves we are bad, go back and say, "Hold on, I need to reconnect with what is really important in my life. Is it running around and making a big name for myself, is it stuffing my house full of stuff, or stuffing my stomach full of stuff or ...? What is really important in my life?" Reconnect with that.

That doesn't mean we should never go out and buy stuff, because there are things we do need. It is a thing of balance. This is talking about when the mind is full of clinging desire, and doing things with this desiring mind. It's like we feel we have a hole inside, so let's go buy something to fill up the hole. Or let's go eat something to fill up the hole. Or let's go talk up the store to fill up the hole. It's that attitude that we want to counteract. But, we do need to go to the store and buy food. We do need to go to the store to buy the clothes we need to wear when it's hot or cold or whatever. This, again, isn't going to the extreme of saying that everything I like or everything I want is an object of attachment.

*[Audience:] Are you saying it's not necessarily a matter of giving up things we find pleasure in, but, rather, it's a matter of being aware of the*

*attachment?*

You are right. There are things we do that we take pleasure in. And there's nothing wrong with that pleasure. We don't want to get into this thing of, "Oh, everything I like, I have to deny myself." Because that is going into what I was talking about before. We dissociate, we go into extreme asceticism. But, it's more of an awareness of, "Why am I doing what I am doing?" So, you still like to go out to breakfast on weekends—that's great! It gives you pleasure and you do it, and you understand why you are doing it. And you want to share that pleasure. That is quite different from the mind that says, "Oh, I really want to go and have pancakes and blah blah blah," or, "I've got to go out to breakfast on Sunday morning or I am going to be totally miserable!" This is the whole mind just getting obsessed with something. There's nothing wrong with enjoying things, but take care to not get so stuck on them that we have to do them, and that we are going to be miserable if we can't.

*[Audience:] What's the reason for doing pleasurable things?*

We do things we enjoy because we know it keeps us balanced. We are all not Buddhas yet, so, it keeps us balanced. But, we do those things with an awareness of trying also to make it something more than just immediate gratification, with the awareness of, "Wouldn't it be nice if the people in Sarajevo could also go out to breakfast on Sunday mornings." And there is some charity in that feeling, hoping that others



can have that nice thing too.

### **Auxiliary vow 3: (To abandon) Not respecting one's elders**

The third precept is about abandoning not respecting one's elders. Elders are those who have taken the bodhisattva vows before us or who have more experience than us or, if you are an ordained monk or nun, those who ordained before you. The idea here is that, by respecting those who are more practiced in the path than we are, it helps open us to develop their qualities and it also helps us to abandon our pride and arrogance. Pride and arrogance are also big obstacles on the path and sometimes we have this fear that we're going to lose our position or we are going to lose our dignity if we show respect to somebody else. In American culture, especially, it's like, "If I show respect to somebody else, that means I am acknowledging that they are better than me and I am the underdog. Urgh! How can that happen?" Whereas, from a Buddhist viewpoint, seeing others' qualities and acknowledging them and showing them respect is coming from a point or feeling of valid self-confidence and a point of internal strength. Where we usually see it in the West as coming from weakness and lack of confidence, it's exactly the opposite.

Apologizing to people is a good example. Being able to apologize is coming from a point of having good self-confidence and internal strength, whereas, defending ourselves to the very end is really coming from a point of weakness. So this thing here of showing respect to elders is something that helps us

on the path. And by developing our good qualities—because we appreciate those qualities and those of others—it helps us to free ourselves from this incredible individualism that demands we have to be noticed all the time. “I don’t want to show respect to others, because then I won’t be noticed. And if I don’t make myself noticed, then, what is going to happen, who am I going to be?” Whereas, it’s actually quite nice to relax and feel, “I don’t have to make myself be noticed all the time. I can be in this group and I don’t have to be the big star in the group. I can be here and respect other people and learn from them, and I don’t have to go around selling myself like a product on the market, telling everybody I am so knowledgeable in this way and I know so much about that.”

So this is done very much to counteract the pride and arrogance.

*[Audience:] Does ‘elders’ not refer to all of those older than us?*

Well, the precept here is specifically about religious elders. But, I think, in a general way, it’s just helpful in our general relationships in society. If we are with our boss, we have a certain respect for their position. It doesn’t mean we think everything they do is right. Same way, just because someone is ordained before you doesn’t mean everything they do is right. But, it’s a matter of valuing that position, valuing what they might know because they are our boss, or what they might know because they are older than us.

Actually I think there is a lot of wisdom to be

gleaned from older people. I think it's a real tragedy in our society that we put so much emphasis on youth. Because when you sit down and talk to some old people, and you get them to tell you about their lives, it's so incredible hearing about people's lives and what they lived through, and what they have gone through and how they dealt with situations. It's incredible. There's one woman who is probably the oldest Buddhist in the whole community in Seattle. She's 80-plus. Incredible. She doesn't live very far away from here. Incredible person, so sharp and so bright and it's just nice to go over there and get her to tell you stories about when she was 18 years old and converted from being a Catholic to a Buddhist and what she went through. Even the elders in our families, learning some of the family history and the family legends, can help us a lot to understand things.

For me personally, even in the Tibetan community, I listened to some of the people's stories, and got some of the oldest to tell their stories and what it was like especially when they fled Tibet and everything like that. It gives me a feeling of confidence that, if for some reason I find myself in that horrible situation, if I can remember these people's stories, it will keep my own spirits up, because, when you meet some of these people and know they went through absolutely incredible things and you look at them, and they are well adjusted, happy people now. It's just so nice to know that can happen and if I ever get into that situation, with incredible trauma going on, if I can remember these people's stories, then it's going to help me. So I think having that respect, and wanting to listen to the elders and learn from them can really

enrich our own lives.

*[Audience:] Why is this vow under the “Generosity” category?*

Because I think it’s the generosity of positive feelings, generosity of respect, generosity of praise, or reputation, like that.

**Auxiliary vow 4: (To abandon) Not answering sincerely asked questions that one is capable of answering**

The fourth vow is abandoning not answering sincerely asked questions that one is capable of answering. For instance, people ask us sincere questions, they really want to know something, they really need to know something, but we don’t want to answer them. We don’t want to answer them because if they have that information, then our own status is going to go down. You find this in work situations and it can even happen in Dharma situations.

I have a friend who is a law student, and when they got certain assignments, the first person who got to the library would check out all the books concerning that topic even if they wouldn’t read all of them at the same time, because it prevented the other people from using them and learning that information. So that is a real miserliness and a clinging on to information.

Often, you can see this in work situations, too. People don’t want to share information, because if you show your colleague how to do something well,

they may get promoted instead of us. Or, if we share information, and people are going to know stuff, then the information doesn't belong to us, it's public, and then I can't use it just for my own self. So this precept is really about combating that miserliness in terms of information and knowledge and wanting to cling to it or keep it for ourselves.

Or, somebody may ask a question but it's not a sincere question. For example, somebody is not sincere and is just testing you, you can tell they are asking you a Dharma question because they want to punch holes and pick flaws and chop things down, and be argumentative. In such a case, there is no need to answer the question.

This vow is talking about sincerely asked questions where people really want to learn. It's not referring to people who are just being competitive and cynical. Also, when somebody is just being antagonistic, I won't engage because it's useless. Depending on the situation, I might try and say, "What are you really trying to say?" Or I might say, "That question makes me feel uncomfortable," or something along that line. Sometimes, people are asking one thing, but what they want to engage in is something else. Or, what the issue is, is something else. So if you can switch it to what the issue is, or, if they are asking a real cynical question, determine what they are really trying to say when they are asking that.

*[Audience:] If someone is asking a cynical question but they're asking sincerely would you answer them?*

Sure. Everything is fair game. When people are asking

sincerely, any question could be asked and discussed. When people aren't asking sincerely then it's fruitless, because that doesn't help them unless you can get into what the issue really is for them. So it's not a thing of, "You don't agree with my viewpoint, so we're not going to talk about that." You don't want to come across that way. You don't want to feel that way either.

*[Audience:] What about impatience in not wanting to answer people's questions? How does that tie in with irritation?*

It's probably an overlap. When you do not want to answer questions because of impatience, yes, that definitely has to do with irritation, the anger thing. But then, it's real helpful to remember this thing about answering questions. Because, often, it's a matter of being generous with our time. Sometimes the impatience is because we feel rushed: "I explained it already, why haven't you gotten it right?" Or, "You should know this, blah blah blah." And we don't want to spend the time or we don't want to spend the energy. Maybe we have the time, but we don't want to spend the energy. So in those times, it really helps me to remember again very much my teachers and how they have painstakingly repeated the same thing again and again and again to me. And, how they haven't gone in to the thing of, "Why don't you know this already, didn't I teach this before?" Again and again, taking that time and care to cultivate. And thinking, "Wow, other people cultivated me in that way. It is only my impatience that's getting in the way

here, that's becoming a block."

Also remembering the times when I haven't gotten it right after the first explanation, either. And when I've forgotten stuff, not just Dharma but day-to-day things, when people had to remind me and explain things again and again to me, because I didn't understand it the first time, or I forgot it or I spaced out.

Just to remember, "Oh yes, I am like that too. I am not always on top of every situation." So it's a matter of being generous with our time, being generous with our energy.

*[Audience:] I work with kids and notice in myself that when they try my patience it's really difficult to cultivate any generosity.*

They definitely go together. It's hard to be generous if you are impatient. I think it's real good that you mention being with kids, because that is so important. I saw when I was teaching in school that no two kids are the same. When you explain something once, one kid gets it, and another kid doesn't get it after ten times. But that's okay. Commitment is important. If we're committed to helping other people and training them, then we're committed to spending time with them.

*[Audience:] I have difficulty with people who disagree with me because I interpret them as being more interested in looking for an argument than in having a sincere conversation.*

The fact that somebody doesn't agree with what we've said doesn't mean that they are insincere. And I think, very often, people are quite sincere when they don't agree with us, and they sincerely want to debate this out. They're sincerely interested in finding out how we are thinking and what is going on here, thinking, "Maybe you know something that can enrich my viewpoint, maybe I know something that can enrich your viewpoint." So disagreement doesn't mean insincerity. Insincerity is more—the classic example just comes to me—I remember, there was one time, I was in Delhi, in a market place, being stopped by an evangelical Christian from Singapore. I was trying to buy some flowers in this marketplace to take back to the center. This guy stopped me. He just wanted to talk but he didn't want to listen. He didn't want to discuss. He would ask these questions but not wait for answers. Or I would start an answer, and he would interrupt and say, "No, no, no, this is not really true, blah, blah, blah. And the Bible says, blah blah blah." At the beginning, I thought he was sincere, but after one or two times of trying to discuss things, it became evident that he didn't want to listen, he didn't really want a discussion.

*[Audience:] Do you find that sometimes questions don't pinpoint what the questioner really wants to know?*

Yes, I find that oftentimes what people ask us is not really what they want to know. And sometimes, also, I see myself asking what isn't really what I'm trying to get at. I figured, especially, when you ask Tibetan



lamas questions, you have to know how to ask the question, otherwise, you're not going to get an answer to what you are asking. Learning how to ask the question is half of it.

*[Audience:] Why is that?*

Why is that? Because there is a big cultural difference and also there is a translator. Lots of times I find, when I am giving talks, people ask questions that are a few minutes long, and I'll just try and sum it up in one statement and say, "Oh, you are asking ..." to check out if that is what they are asking. And very often, the Tibetan translators aren't used to how we ask questions. So they will give the whole thing, and the whole sense of what the person's underlying question is doesn't come through, because the person didn't explicitly ask it.

Here is a good example: In the early days, we would ask something like, "Do Buddhists believe in God?" Now, there is no Tibetan word equivalent for God. So they translate it as "wangchuk" which is the Tibetan word for Ishvara, who is one of the Hindu gods. Because the whole idea of there being a supreme being is different, and, so this Hindu god who is a supreme being is kind of like the Christian God who is a supreme being. They're both supreme beings, they're both in-charge of the universe, so the Lama would give this whole answer about why "wangchuk," the Brahma, is one of the form realm gods who got born there because of his good karma. And it doesn't answer the person's question at all, because they are asking it from a completely different

cultural viewpoint.

*[Audience:] In that type of situation would you ask the question again until you got an appropriate answer?*

[Laughter.] Yes. One of the things that is required when you want to learn the Dharma is incredible patience and to try and figure out how to help your teachers teach you. As in this example, you ask a question and you get an answer that's a million miles away. So how can I ask this again, in such a way that it might be more aligned with the way they are thinking. And have the patience to do that, because sometimes it requires asking the question several times, and hoping they don't get impatient with you for asking that question again and again. [Laughter.] That's why these dialogues with His Holiness are very interesting. I've been present at these conferences and very often people would try and explain to him again and again what they really mean.

*[Audience:] What if someone asks a question you don't know the answer to?*

If somebody asks you a question, and you don't know the answer to it, tell them you don't know. Don't make up answers when you don't know the answers, especially in Dharma things. Just say, "I don't know." And it's OK not to know. Rather than feel embarrassed when you don't know the answer to the question, be appreciative to the person for asking it.

## **Auxiliary Vow 5: (To abandon) Not accepting invitations from others**

Auxiliary vow number five has to do with abandoning the practice of not accepting invitations from others out of anger, pride or other negative thoughts. So this is when people, out of a genuine and sincere wish to be with us, invite us to some place. It's good if we accept with the idea that by having contact with them we can benefit them. Or, if they invite us to a meal or something, they create good karma by their generosity.

This doesn't mean that you have to accept every invitation that's extended to you. It's perfectly okay to decline an invitation if you have something more important you need to do. If you're sick, you can decline invitations. If it is dangerous to get there, you can decline the invitation. There're many places people ask you to go that are dangerous to get to. So you can decline. If the person has a bad attitude toward you, or if going there would cause discord, or if going would put you in a situation of having to break your precepts, or if there is some other good reason for not going, then it is perfectly alright to decline invitations.

This vow particularly addresses attitudes of miserliness, anger, hostility or pride towards somebody with the thought of, "I'm too good to be with those people." Or, "Those people slighted me, so I'm not going to spend time with them now. This is my way of retaliating and getting even." Or, "I'd much rather sit and watch TV than go and be with these people because they are just going to sit there and ask

me all these Dharma questions, and it's such a drag. I'd much rather watch TV."

These kinds of motivation are the kinds of things that this precept is getting us to look at: when we turn down invitations out of pride or anger or laziness. But again, we shouldn't misuse this precept to say, "Oh, somebody invited me to this party. I had actually planned to meditate that evening but I have to keep my vows so I better go to the party." I think we do have to be quite discriminating about the invitations we accept and reject. If there is some benefit and meaning for us to go, then do that. But, if there are more important things or if going there would be dangerous and make discord, then we can turn down the invitation.

*[Audience:] What can you suggest about being invited somewhere that would be an extremely difficult situation? For instance, I know of a place where I become very agitated because the people there really push my buttons.*

I think it's okay to decline if you're pretty certain that you're not ready for it. But then, if you decline the invitation, use the time to do some meditation so you can cut down on your buttons. Instead of just saying, "Oh, those people drive me nuts and I'm not going," recognize that you are not ready to handle it. Perhaps it's too intense and you're likely to lose it and get into a fight, and that would make them unhappy. So, this time you could say no, but really try and pinpoint what the issues are for yourself and next time, hopefully, you can say yes.

## Conclusion

It's really interesting, maybe over the next few days, be real attentive to these first five vows. And really think about them. You can rethink a lot of situations that happened in the past: "Oh yes, that time somebody invited me some place and I turned them down. What really was my motivation there? Was I being angry and nasty or did I really have something more important to do?" Or, "I didn't answer that person's question, what was really going on there?" I think it can be very helpful, to help us get to know ourselves. Think of situations in the past and situations you might encounter and reflect on these guidelines.

We've been going through the bodhisattva vows. Remember that these are guidelines or suggestions from the Buddha about what to practice and what to avoid in our practice. Whether we have taken these vows or not, they can still be quite useful for us to gain an idea of productive ways to use our lives.

Studying the bodhisattva vows, too, gives an idea of the things that a bodhisattva does, and what a bodhisattva doesn't do. If we like the role model of a bodhisattva—if we think it's a pretty neat thing and we want to be like that—this shows us quite explicitly what things we can practice developing and what things to leave behind.

It's a very specific how-to thing or how to actually practice and live as a bodhisattva does. When we see that, it gives us some encouragement rather than feeling we are down here and the bodhisattvas are

way up there and never the twain shall meet. We can see that if we start practicing like this and work especially on the same motivation that the bodhisattva has, we can become official bodhisattvas: stamped, certified bodhisattvas ourselves.

Last time we talked about the first five bodhisattva vows that had to do with the far-reaching attitude of generosity. Once again, these are the first five vows:

1. Avoid not making offerings to the Three Jewels every day with our body, speech and mind. This vow involves showing respect physically by bowing, and making offerings with our speech by saying mantras and praises. We use the mind by remembering the qualities of the Three Jewels and visualizing them.

2. Avoid acting out selfish thoughts of desire to gain material possessions or reputation. Don't follow the mind that says, "I WANT, I WANT!" or, more deviously, "I NEED, I NEED!"

3. Avoid not respecting one's elders, i.e., those who have taken the bodhisattva vows before us or those who have taken monks' or nuns' vows before us, because if we consider their qualities it helps us develop these same qualities.

4. Avoid not answering sincerely asked questions one is capable of answering. In other words, if somebody asks sincerely and wants information, but we keep that information to ourselves or not respond to them due to laziness or anger or miserliness, then it's acting against this vow.

5. Avoid not accepting invitations out of anger, pride or other negative thoughts. When people invite us somewhere, if we have a good reason, we can refuse to go. But, if our refusal is out of conceit, for example, “Well, I am too good to be seen in those people’s company,” or “Those people treated me rotten so I’m going to refuse the invitation in order to get even,” or something like that, then it’s not a good idea to refuse an invitation.

So, all of these things in the far-reaching attitude of generosity precepts are specifically for counteracting miserliness and attachment or the desire to hold on to things for ourselves.

*[Audience:] Why are these vows expressed in a negative way?*

Why are they expressed in a negative way? Because in order to know what to practice as a bodhisattva, we have to be very clear in our mind what those things are that counteract what we are trying to achieve. So, by expressing the vows in the negative—to avoid this and this and this—we see very clearly the actions that counteract what we want to develop. And, by inference, we can see to avoid those and practice their opposites.

**Auxiliary Vow 6: (To abandon) Not accepting gifts of money, gold or other precious substances that others offer to oneself**

We say, what is this about? Who would ever refuse

money, gold or other precious things? [Laughter.] “Give to me! More, more, more!” Why is there a precept like this? Usually our mind, when we accept money, gold and precious things, isn’t really a mind of generosity or a mind of compassion for others. It’s more a mind that wants things for itself.

So, often, to counteract that greedy, grasping mind we very deliberately try and simplify our lives. We get rid of as much stuff we don’t use as we can. And we don’t accumulate more, especially money and gold and riches and very valuable things, because we know it is something that would just create a lot of negativity in our minds. This is one level of practice, i.e., where we begin: to simplify and not accept precious things, and to do them out of a good motivation.

This vow addresses the situation of when people offer us things with a sincere attitude and they are practicing generosity, we should give them the opportunity to be generous and accept their gifts. What this is really touching on is that often when we start to practice intensely—especially people who have monastic vows—we get rid of everything. So, this vow is stating that it is possible to accept things if we are doing it for the benefit of others. We don’t need to cling tenaciously to the idea of not having money and gold and things like that.

What it is getting at is that it’s okay to have those things and to accept them when they’re offered to us as long as we are using them only for the benefit of others. So, if somebody is offering you stuff that you could re-distribute for the benefit of others, or somebody is offering to you and they want to create



the good karma of being generous, then you should accept.

I'll share one example that pounded this home to me. It was many years ago when I was at one of my teacher's centers in southern California. Zong Rinpoche, one incredible master, was there giving teachings. Some people were going to take him to Disneyland and I thought, "Wow, how incredible to go to Disneyland with Zong Rinpoche," because this lama is, he is really a Buddha. And just what would he do in Disneyland? [Laughter.] And I thought, "Wow, I would really like to do that," but I was totally broke. I didn't have much money at all.

They were planning the excursion to Disneyland, and somebody asked me and I said, "I am sorry, I can't go." Inside of me, I was thinking, "I want to go, I want to go, I want to go," you know, this real baby mind. [Laughter.] But, I said, "No, I can't go." And then, one of the students came up and gave me twenty dollars and said, "This is so you can go to Disneyland with Rinpoche." And I said, "No, no, no. I can't accept it. I can't accept it," because I saw that I didn't have such a good attitude here. My teacher was sitting nearby and he came over to me afterwards and said, "You should take that." I said, "Geshela, I can't. My mind was not in such a good state." He said, "Change your mind! That person is trying to create some good karma by being generous and you should allow him to." So anyway, the person never offered again, and I wound up not going. [Laughter.] But I got a real good story to tell and it made a strong imprint. When people offer, we should accept.

## **Justifiably refusing or returning gifts**

Now, there are certain situations where we can justifiably refuse: if you know the person giving you something is very poor and they need the item, or if you think the thing might be stolen, then you shouldn't accept it. Or, for some reason the person who gives you something is going to get into trouble, because they've given it away; or, if you know that you have a really horrible motivation for accepting the item and you're just going to use it for yourself; or, it's going to increase your own clinging, then, it's okay to refuse to accept it.

Another thing that I've often seen my teachers do is they'll accept something and then offer it back. Because, sometimes, you know people don't have much money yet they very much want to give and they feel lousy when they offer something and you say, "No, I don't want it." I often see my teachers accept something and then offer it back. The idea is that both people get the good karma of making an offering. You first accept the offering, and then offer it back. I remember one time when I was living in Italy there was a woman who wanted to give me something when I was leaving. She didn't have very much money and she gave me her watch. I knew she needed her watch so I gave it back to her.

## **Our motivation in accepting and refusing**

This vow is challenging us to look at our motivation when we accept things from people and to really watch our minds. It's a challenge to watch the mind

that goes, “Goody, somebody is giving me something,” and also the mind that says, “Oh no, I can’t take it because then I’ll be obligated to the other person—I’ll owe them something.” It is a selfish mind that refuses an offering because of the wish to not be in debt to that person. Or, another reason we often refuse things is because we feel we’re undeserving: “Who am I? I am not worth very much, they shouldn’t give anything to me.”

These kinds of self-centered motivations which cause us to refuse other people’s gifts hurts their feelings and prevents them from creating good karma. So, this vow is a call to watch very closely that motivation. The one that’s attached: “Oh, good, I got something!” as well as the flip side: “No, I can’t accept it because I am worthless.”

It’s quite interesting because in the West, we often have as much difficulty in receiving as we do in giving. Don’t we? Sometimes it’s very difficult for us when someone, out of pure affection or generosity, gives us something. There’s a part of our mind that says, “I’m worthless, how can they give me something? If they only knew who I really was they wouldn’t give me this.” So, we want to refuse. Or, the mind says, “Oh, I’ll owe them something,” getting into some kind of screwy something or other or a suspicious mind.

It’s very difficult sometimes for us to accept gifts. It’s also difficult for us sometimes to accept people’s praise. When someone gives us the gift of praise, we often say, “Oh, no, no, no,” which is kind of like telling the person they are a liar. Isn’t it? They give us a compliment and we refuse it. It’s hard for us to just

accept it and say thank you, not with pride, but just to accept their gift of praise.

### **Feeling undeserving of receiving gifts**

This can extend to accepting people's affection or love. Sometimes we have incredibly hard problems with that. We all feel kind of lonely: 'Nobody loves me enough.' That's kind of what we feel in our heart. But, then, when somebody tries to love us, we run the other direction. Somebody tries to give us love and affection—and I am not talking about romantic stuff—and, we think, "Oh God, I can't accept this. I am worthless." And so we push that away too.

Although this vow is addressing, in particular, valuable things like money and gold and riches, I think in our culture it's interesting to extrapolate on that and think of all the different nice and kind things—love, praise, and things that people offer us—we so often have difficulty receiving and accepting. It's quite interesting to look at that. There's so often a self-centered mind that won't let us receive. Isn't that so?

The other day someone asked me about low self-esteem, about the relationship between low self-esteem & self-centeredness. It seems that with low self-esteem, there's not much sense of self. But, actually there's a big sense of self, and there is a lot of self-cherishing and a lot of self-centeredness with low self-esteem. We make everything revolve around this 'me' who is horrible. Quite self-centered, isn't it? "I've got to work hard to make myself more important than everyone else so I am going to believe

I am the worst person. That way I'm special from everyone else. I am more worthless than they are." [Laughter.] This view of ourselves also prevents us from accepting things people offer us.

### **Auxiliary Vow 7: (To abandon) Not giving the Dharma to those who desire it**

When people request the Dharma, they request us to give a teaching, to lead a meditation, or something like that, and if we refuse because we are lazy, or we feel we are too good to do it, or we are angry at the people or something like that, that would be counter to this vow. It doesn't mean that every time somebody asks you to give a teaching you have to give it, because if the teaching is not suitable for the person who is asking, for example, if an absolute beginner is asking for the highest yoga tantra teachings, then of course you can refuse. Or, better yet, what you can say is, "If you want that teaching, first I have to give you these." And then you prepare them.

You can also refuse if you don't have enough time or if you're doing something else that is quite important. Generally, it is okay to refuse if the subject is not suitable for them, if you're ill, if you don't have the time, or something like that. But, other than that, if somebody asks us, then we should try. Of course if we don't know the subject, then it's better to decline. In other words, we shouldn't accept to talk about something if we don't know what it is. But if we have some idea, then it's good to do.

I will tell you another story about this. You're hearing all my secrets. I have two memories of this

event so it might have happened more than once. Lama Yeshe asked me to lead a discussion group for one of the big Kopan courses. I was a new nun and I just felt there was no way I could do it. I said, “Lama, I can’t do anything. I don’t know anything.” He looked at me and said, “You are selfish!” [Laughter.]

*[Audience:] He said it in English?*

Oh yes, Lama Yeshe spoke English—quite clearly in English! [Laughter.] This story really points out that if there is something we can do or give in some way, we should give it. Of course, like I said, if we really, sincerely don’t know anything about the topic, for example, if someone asks you to teach a text you’ve never studied, then it’s clear you should refuse. But if there is something we can do, it’s good to do it.

*[Audience:] If a friend asks you how to meditate, what should you do?*

I think in those situations, it’s okay to teach them a very simple breathing meditation. You can teach them that and at the same time you can refer them also to books, teachers and retreats and explain, “What I’m teaching you is just a little bit, it’s a little taste. But if you really want to get the flavor, then consider going to this class or a retreat.” I think that’s fine with your friends. You are not going to teach them Vajrasattva meditation, you’re teaching them just breathing. That’s fine, they breathe anyway. [Laughter.]

Okay, so the above seven auxiliary vows have to do with the far-reaching attitude of generosity and

counteracting the miserliness and attachment that prevent us from developing that.

## **AUXILIARY VOWS 8–16: VOWS TO ELIMINATE OBSTACLES TO THE FAR-REACHING ATTITUDE OF ETHICAL DISCIPLINE**

Vows eight through sixteen have to do with eliminating the obstacles to the far-reaching attitude of ethics or ethical discipline and they deal very much with the bodhisattva practice of ethics. Remember, as a prelude to the bodhisattva practice of ethics, we practice the Pratimoksha level of ethics. These vows include the five precepts, the eight one-day precepts, and monks' and nuns' vows. These are all the precepts for attaining self-liberation, or Pratimoksha in Sanskrit. The Pratimoksha vows deal with very clear-cut situations and address verbal and physical actions: "Don't say this, don't say that, don't do this, don't do that." So, adding on to this basis of ethics, these vows show us how to practice ethics as a bodhisattva.

### **Auxiliary Vow 8: (To abandon) Forsaking those who have broken their ethical discipline by not giving them advice or not relieving their guilt**

This vow is in reference to someone who has broken their ethical discipline—let's say a monastic who has broken their vows or a layperson with the five precepts who has broken their vows. We should not respond with, "Woo! YOU ARE A HORRIBLE PERSON, AN EVIL PERSON! You broke your vows

and I don't want to be anywhere NEAR you! How could you have done such a horrible thing!" Having this type of uncompassionate attitude toward someone who's goofed is not recommended.

This vow is stating that when people have breached their ethics, it's our responsibility to have a compassionate attitude towards them and help them. In other words, help them by encouraging them to do purification or go to their teacher or abbot and admit their mistake. Or, go in front of the Sangha community and admit their mistake. So, instead of being disgusted with somebody and kicking them out with an angry or self-righteous mind, help them to purify and make amends.

This is very different than if someone has broken their vows and they are encouraging you to also break your vows. If that's the situation, you have to be very clear with the person that you don't want to hang around them. But, if this is a situation where there is potential for positively influencing the person and helping them make amends, we shouldn't exclude them from our compassion nor belittle or not forgive or not help them.

This vow is really reprovng the self-righteous mind. We have a hard time sometimes accepting when other people make mistakes because we want to put people up on pedestals—even our regular Dharma friends. And when they break their vows we get very angry at them. We might think, "I needed you to be on a pedestal. I needed you to be a good example. I needed you to be perfect. How can you let me down and not be perfect? Get out of here!" We can become very angry or self-righteous. We need to watch this,



because I find that, especially in America, we love to put people up and then rip them down. We do it in politics and we do it in virtually everything.

**Auxiliary Vow 9: (To abandon) Not acting according to one's vowed trainings as it would generate or sustain faith in others**

When we have taken the five precepts, or other kinds of precepts, it's not good to neglect them anyway, but especially if it's going to harm somebody else and make them lose faith, then it's a double whammy, because we hurt ourselves and we hurt them as well. This precept is pointing out to us that when it's important for the faith of others, we should be very careful about our actions and, also, make sure we keep our precepts well.

So, in general, what this vow is encouraging us to do is to act and speak and do things in ways that generate faith in others. An example of this is if somebody is asking you for a particular teaching or a particular instruction, even though it might not be your favorite practice and even though it may not be a particularly bodhisattva practice, if it is something that would benefit that person and generate faith in them, then we should give it. But, if we refuse and say, "That's not my favorite practice, so I am not going to teach you at all," or something like that, it would be counteracting this precept.

Another example involves very rude behavior: things that would make people lose faith in us. In situations, especially, where we are acting as representatives of the Buddhist community, if we go

around huffing, puffing, slamming doors and being bossy, it makes people lose their faith. So, we need to be aware of this and watch our behavior. This doesn't mean you have to get up-tight about it: "Oh gosh, I am representing the Buddhist community, am I doing it right?" We tend to get real up-tight about 'am I doing it right?' and get neurotic too. Buddha didn't need to instruct us how to do that. We are very good at doing that on our own. That is not what the vow is saying.

What the vow is saying is to be mindful of our behavior and how it influences others, and be aware that if we are acting bossy and like a big mouth it's going to give people a certain view of maybe what Buddhism is, or what we are as practitioners of Buddhism. And, so, since in our heart we really want to be of service and benefit to others, we have to be aware of our behavior and act appropriately. Another example of unskillful behavior would be getting drunk: going somewhere, getting drunk and acting really boisterous. Or, smoking, womanizing, 'man-izing'—all of these are things that would cause people to lose faith.

**Auxiliary vow 10: (To abandon) Doing only limited actions to benefit sentient beings, such as strictly keeping the Vinaya rules in situations when not doing so would be of greater benefit to others**

Whereas the ninth precept emphasizes the importance of keeping the Vinaya (the monks' and nuns' discipline) or Pratimoksha vows (which includes vows for lay people), this precept is saying that if you're in

an extreme situation and there is a very small Vinaya rule versus a big benefit to others that could be done, it's more skillful to do the thing that benefits others.

One of the classic examples involves the rule that monastics are not allowed to touch people of the opposite sex. So, if some man is drowning in the river, and I say, "I'm sorry, I can't save you, I am a nun," that is not very compassionate. It makes more sense for me to jump in and save him. (Hope he doesn't weigh too much!) Of course, the same thing would apply to a monk.

Another example of a Vinaya rule is to not ride in a vehicle. Now, if I kept that vow literally, it would be extremely difficult to benefit sentient beings. So, for this reason, I have to not follow it literally. The reason for the vow is because in ancient India, when you rode in a vehicle it was usually pulled by either a person or an animal. It was something that caused others duress. Also in ancient India, when you rode in a vehicle, it was very easy to become proud because not many people rode in vehicles. So in order to prevent monastics from becoming proud, this vow was adopted. But, nowadays if I were to keep it very strictly, it would definitely impinge on my ability to benefit others. So what this vow is saying is that in these kinds of circumstances, the thing that's for the greater benefit is what we should do.

## **Complications with the Vinaya rules**

*[Audience:] Why don't they change the vow?*

We Westerners look at things very differently from

people in Asian society. At the time the Buddha was dying, he said to Ananda, his attendant, “You can change the minor vows if the congregation and the assembly of elders get together.” Now, Ananda did not ask which were the minor vows and which were the major vows. So, because of that, all the future generations haven’t wanted to goof and change something that might be a major vow. They feel it’s better to keep it exactly the way the Buddha taught it. You will find in Thailand, there are certain vows that are kept very strictly, but in China and Tibet, they’re not. Even so, Thais don’t keep all of the vows in the Vinaya completely literally. Ajahn Amaro, a monk in the Thai tradition, and I were talking about it. He rides in vehicles too.

So it is quite interesting. I saw a video once of a conference of Western and Eastern monastics and this specific topic came up. The Asian monastics were saying, “If you change this vow about riding in vehicles, then you’re going to change this one, then you’re going to change that one, and pretty soon we’re not going to have anything left.” And a Western nun responded, “But the practicality of it is, if we keep the vows exactly the same and then people just interpret them differently amongst themselves and don’t keep them literally anyway, you’re developing in people’s minds an attitude of, ‘I don’t have to keep these,’ so then, you’re going to break this one and you’re going to break that one.” She kind of gave the same argument from the opposite viewpoint.

So, what’s basically happened is that everything has been kept as the Buddha laid it out, but then the various traditions interpret the Vinaya their own way.

Even within particular traditions, different monasteries and different teachers interpret the rules differently. I think it'll be hard to change the rules.

*[Audience:] Did the Dalai Lama say something about changing some of the rules in the Vinaya?*

He said we could call a conference of all the elders from all the traditions, which is what it would take to change the Vinaya. But, as that's kind of impossible, what His Holiness wanted to do was get some of the elders in the Tibetan tradition together and, of course, they would never change anything literally in the vows but they would talk about how to reinterpret things. And certain passages that were written later than the Buddha could be omitted. For example, gender-biased rules for ordination ceremonies were not developed by the Buddha. They came along later. So, the elders wouldn't be changing any vows, just reinterpreting them and omitting some of the things that were developed later.

### **The question of changing gender-biased Vinaya rules**

*[Audience:] What would be the impact of omitting the gender-biased rules?*

I am hoping that, in the least, it would change the seating arrangement in the West. In the East, if the seating arrangement was changed, my personal feeling is that everyone would freak out. The nuns would never sit equal to the monks. They would feel

incredibly uncomfortable with that. So, I doubt that it will change much in Asia. But whether or not they change, I think here in the West we have to change.

There again, when Western monastics visit Asia, I think, if anything, Westerners need to become a little bit more traditional. For instance, what usually happens when we all meet in Dharamsala is that among Asian monastics the monks sit first, then the nuns, and then the laypeople. In the Western section, the laypeople sit first and the monks and nuns just scatter anywhere they can squeeze themselves in. I think the Westerners need to become a little bit more traditional. [Laughter.] It's not a thing of pulling rank or hierarchy. It's a thing of being practical. What's happened to me in Dharamsala is, I've had to sit at the back of a couple, and they were doing this and that and it was really distracting, and I was trying to listen to the teachings. So I could see the reason for these people sitting behind the monks and nuns. [Laughter.] That makes sense to me. [Laughter.]

To recap the points of this vow, remember what it's stating is that when there is a greater benefit to be achieved, if you keep strictly to small Vinaya vows, it goes against the bodhisattva's purpose.

**Auxiliary vow 11: (To abandon) Not doing non-virtuous actions of body and speech with loving-compassion when circumstances deem it necessary in order to benefit others**

If there are certain situations where killing, stealing, unwise sexual behavior, lying, harsh words, divisive words or idle talk would be for the benefit of sentient

beings, then, if you don't do that, you are breaking the bodhisattva vow.

The classic story that you've probably heard many times is about the Buddha when he was captain of a ship. There were 500 merchants aboard and one of them was going to kill the other 499. The Buddha knew it was much better for him to take the life of this one person with compassion for that person as well as for the 499 others. In other words, he knew it was better to do that rather than let the guy kill the other 499 people. This story is a good example of keeping this vow as it describes how in situations like this it would definitely be more advantageous to do a negative action in the service of benefiting many beings.

The glitch is that it's very hard to do these kinds of actions with a good motivation and, further, you can very easily take this vow, rationalize it and make it what you want it to be. In actual fact, I think it's only when you've achieved a certain level on the bodhisattva path that you can genuinely do this. I can't remember if it's when you have entered the path of accumulation at which point you would have spontaneous bodhicitta, or it might even be higher on the path—I can't remember. But definitely, spontaneous bodhicitta needs to arise before you can genuinely do this.

But, there may be situations in our lives, for instance, let's say you were born into the situation where you could've killed Hitler and prevented all of that from happening. Maybe you don't have bodhicitta, but maybe you do the best you can and you say, "I am willing to accept the negative results

myself with this action.” But, then we have to be really careful about what we do. It’s not just a matter of, “Well, I don’t like this person because he is like Hitler, and so for the benefit of sentient beings I am going to kill.” This is just a rationalization: making excuses and actually breaking a whole bunch of vows.

So, what this vow is getting at is that the ten non-virtues, or at least the seven of body and speech, are not hard and fast things, but that there might be some situations where, for the benefit of others, we have to do these things.

### **Knowing one’s motivation**

Also, the motivation behind an action is very important. What is usually said in terms of action is that if something can produce a long term benefit (long term meaning in terms of the karma you create) and short term benefit, do it. If it produces a long term benefit and short term discomfort, it’s still worthwhile doing, because the karma can be very powerful and the long term benefit is going to out-weigh the short term discomfort of doing it. If it’s something that is of no long term benefit but does have a short term gain, it is better not to do it, because if it’s of no long term benefit that’s an indication that it’s some kind of negative karmic action. Even though it might bring you short term benefit, the benefit is gone completely after a while and you are left with the whole karmic result. And, if in the long term an action is of no benefit and in the short term it causes harm, then definitely don’t do it.

Yesterday I was thinking about how in India,



questions about life support and quality of life don't come up, because when you are in India or even in the Tibetan community in India, there is no life support system for people to hook you to for up to 50 million years. And when you get sick, your body collapses and you don't dwell on issues about quality of life. One of my teachers got stomach cancer and he died in a matter of months. And that was it. He went back to India, stayed in Dharamsala and died in a matter of months. In the West, he probably would have been hooked up to this machine and that machine and had chemo and blah blah blah. And then you'd get all these really difficult things going on. It's hard.

So, it's important to turn the observation eye in on our own self. We can look at others and say, "I don't know why they did that." They might have done an action with an incredibly compassionate motivation or they might have done it with a rotten motivation. But the action itself may not be one that I can do with a good motivation. So whether or not they do it with a good motivation is beside the point. If I can't do that same action with a good motivation I shouldn't get involved in it.

*[Audience:] Are you saying that, for instance, using chemotherapy as a treatment for cancer isn't necessarily always the best approach?*

Right, it's completely up to the individual whether or not they want that kind of treatment. The success of chemotherapy doesn't just depend on the chemicals, it depends on one's whole attitude towards it too. If you

don't have a good attitude you might actually be much better off not doing it. Every situation is dependent on so many factors that we can't judge what other people do. If we were in the situation, we have to look at what makes sense to us. My teacher who had stomach cancer could have chosen to stay in the West and get hooked up in some hospital. And he could have lived another year like that. But he didn't. He chose to go back to India and do his practice and die there. And I trust what he did.

**Auxiliary vow 12: (To abandon) Willingly accepting things that either oneself or others have obtained by any of the wrong livelihoods of hypocrisy, hinting, flattery, coercion or bribery**

This thing of acquiring things by wrong livelihood is a real interesting one. Besides the five that are listed there, which I'll describe in a minute, a wrong livelihood includes, for example, being a butcher, being a fisher person, being a prostitute or a pimp; also, selling Buddha statues or books for your livelihood or for profit, in the same way you would sell used cars; also, raising animals for slaughter, running a farm of animals that are going to be purchased for slaughter, or killing those animals; also, building bombs, weapons or other things of mass destruction. All of these kinds of things are considered wrong livelihood.

So again, as part of the bodhisattva's ethics, because these actions harm so many people, they need to be abandoned. In addition, we should not accept things from others who have obtained them by

any of these five wrong livelihoods. We went over this at the beginning of the Lamrim when we talked about making offerings to the shrine and not offering things that were obtained by the five wrong livelihoods.

## **Flattery**

It's very interesting that the five wrong livelihoods listed in the title of this vow are often things we are specifically taught or encouraged to do here in the West. For example, when somebody has something we want, we don't come out and ask directly for it. What do we do? We flatter the other person by telling them how nice, kind and generous they are with the motivation that if I say all these nice sweet things, this person will give me the thing. This is wrong livelihood.

## **Hinting**

Another thing we do when we want somebody to give us something is to make hints. Maybe they gave us something before: "Gee, that lemon pie you baked last year was SO GOOD." Hint, hint, hint. It means you're supposed to bake another one and bring it over. It's so interesting that these things which are considered wrong livelihood from the Buddhist viewpoint are considered as being courteous from the Western viewpoint.

## **Bribery**

Another thing we do when we want people to give us

things is to give them a small gift so they will give us a bigger gift. Don't we? Think of Christmas time—what do you do? It's kind of like: give Aunt Ethel something because she's loaded. So I'll give her a little gift and then she will give me a whole lot.

## **Coercion**

Another thing we do is to put people in really difficult positions where they can't say No. This is a type of coercion, but we don't consider it to be coercion. Or we abuse our power or authority so that people can't say no or so that they are forced to give us something. Things obtained in these ways are wrong livelihood.

## **Hypocrisy**

And then another thing we do is to act very hypocritically. But, we don't call it hypocrisy, we call it being polite. When we are around people who can benefit us, we act very well. When those people aren't there we just go back to our regular, old behavior pattern. So in a Dharma circumstance, when your benefactor comes, then you look like model A-1 top-notch practitioner, and you behave very well. As soon as your benefactor leaves, you pull out the TV guide or the novels and turn on the stereo, put your feet up and get a beer. [Laughter.] This type of action is very hypocritical.

This vow is a very interesting one to meditate on. Spend some time thinking about it and looking over your life. In what situations have we gotten things by flattery or by praising people and saying nice things,

while in the back of our minds, we're thinking, "I'll say this so that they'll give me something." Or, when there have been situations where we've kind of hinted to other people about what we need: "Oh gee, that's so nice," or, "You brought it last time, it was really helpful." Or, we give a small gift so that they will give us something big. Or, we put them in a situation where they can't say No. Or, we put on an act and pretend to be great and spectacular when the person who can help us is around, and when they aren't around we just act any old way. As an extension of this, it's very good to be aware of using hypocrisy, flattery or hinting not only to get material things, but also to get praise or a promotion, or to get to go on a business trip or other little things like this.

### **Selling Dharma items as right livelihood**

I'd like to add a few words about selling Dharma items such as statues and books. Technically speaking, what we're supposed to do is take the profit from the sales and use it for other Dharma works. For instance, the profit from all the books on sale here goes into a special account, then it's used for other Dharma things. I talked to someone who does that. He sells Dharma things and sells other stuff also. He uses the profits from the Dharma items to buy other Dharma items.

But it is a difficult situation in the West, because people here have a very different motivation for selling things. I think in ancient times, religious objects were made available free of charge and people who received them would make offerings. People

would always offer something back unless they were really poor. So you wound up getting a livelihood because you were automatically supported by offerings, but you didn't have to actually sell things.

Nowadays in America, there are many people who are motivated to serve the Dharma and earn their livelihood at the same time. They feel that if they work in a Buddhist publishing company or sell Dharma items, they are helping the Dharma by spreading these things and earning their livelihood at the same time. Whereas, if they were to sell used cars, they would be earning a livelihood, but who would there be to print the Dharma books?

## **Cultural considerations**

I have debated this one up, down and across with several of my teachers. It seems to me that the motivation of Buddhist book publishers, for instance, is to serve the Dharma. That's why they are doing it and they are earning their livelihood as a secondary thing. This is the only way to do it otherwise you won't get these Dharma things out there, because our economy is completely different. If Snow Lion printed books and put them in bookstores for free distribution, who would make offering? Who would send money to Snow Lion? Our culture doesn't work that way.

But, when I talk about this with my teachers, they won't budge. Lama Zopa told Nick, who is from Wisdom Publications, that because he's making a business from Dharma books, his compassion should be so strong that if he has to go to the lower realms due to his wrong livelihood, he should be willing to do

that, to benefit sentient beings. So it is pointing out to try and have a good motivation when we're doing this.

*[Audience:] It sounds like we're almost in a no-win situation nowadays in that the Dharma needs to be sold in order for it to spread, yet selling it is considered wrong livelihood.*

Yes. It is so clear that Dharma things wouldn't happen unless people did this, because the economy now is completely different than it was in ancient times. And people nowadays are doing it for different motivations than past peoples would have done. So I don't know. At the Western Buddhist Teachers Conference, it was quite interesting hearing that most of the other teachers there who wrote books use the royalties from their books to live on. I was one of the few who doesn't. It's harder, particularly for monks and nuns, to get people to support them, so they may live off royalties.

I was talking with one Tibetan monk whom I know quite well. He uses the money he gets from royalties for his livelihood. But the money people offer for his Dharma talks he feels it's not okay to use, and so he gives that money away, because he said he felt he shouldn't earn his livelihood by teaching. Also, he didn't want thoughts of, "I am giving a teaching, I wonder how much money they are going to give me?"

In contrast, the older lamas feel you can keep the money you're given when you give Dharma talks. But, I said to them, if you give a Dharma talk at the Center, and the Center charged people to come,

what's the difference between that and selling a book? You're still selling the Dharma. That's okay, from their point of view—maybe because there was no exchange of physical material. But, anyway, this one particular Tibetan monk I know thought just the opposite: the money he received from giving talks he gave to the monastery and the money for the books he saw as more like a salary for his services and used it for his livelihood. When you look at his motivation, I think he has quite a good motivation. So I think again it comes back to motivation.

### **Prostitution and right livelihood**

I mentioned before the other thing I nearly flipped out over was that Genla says that from a Buddhist viewpoint, in ancient India, prostitution was okay. I think nowadays the prohibition against prostitution or being a pimp is definitely justified, I would think, because it humiliates people. Now, of course what ancient men thought about it, I don't know. I know what I as a woman think about it.

I think so often with prostitution, on one level, it's consent and on another level, it's not consent. I think if you talk to female or male prostitutes and ask them if that is their favorite career choice they would probably say No. It's probably because of the socio-economic thing that they are doing it. It's interesting because a lot of the things we are faced with now, people in the past were not. They didn't think about these things because they weren't faced with them.

Okay. Let's sit quietly for a few minutes.



We've been going through the bodhisattva vows, and we're in the middle of discussing the 46 Auxiliary Vows, and completed the ones about the far-reaching attitude of generosity, and we're in the middle of doing the ones on the far-reaching attitude of ethics.

**Auxiliary vow 13: (To abandon) Being distracted by and having a strong attachment to amusement, or without any beneficial purpose, leading others to join in distracting activities**

We'll skip that one, go on to the next—I'm joking! [Laughter.] This is the mind of distraction that just wants to get involved in anything to distract ourselves from practice. So, hanging out and talking, reading the newspaper from cover to cover, turning on the music, blaring it and just spacing out, turning on the TV and watching anything from "Mickey Mouse" to "The Simpson's" to "LA Law" to the cable TV channel where you do your home shopping to any kind of distraction: going out all the time to the movies and the theatre and the sports events.

The purpose of this vow is not to say "Don't have fun, and having fun is non-Buddhist." That's not the purpose of the vow. There's nothing wrong with having fun. The thing is to have fun mindfully and with a good motivation and a certain purpose to it. And not just space out and pass our time that way.

So this vow is actually something that is meant to protect us. It's not something that is meant to make us feel guilty, but to emphasize to us that we have a precious human life that has great meaning, that doesn't last forever, and if we remember this vow,

then we'll remember the preciousness of our life and we'll use it.

This vow is a call for us to remember on a deeper level, the meaning of our life and its preciousness so that we actually use it instead of frittering it away. So don't take it as there's something bad about having fun, or that having fun is sacrilegious, or you can't be a good Buddhist if you laugh too much. If you're around the Tibetans, you'll see that they have lots of fun and they laugh a lot, and it's fine to be a nice, relaxed kind of person. But it's asking us to be aware, when we go to the movies, why are we going to the movies? What's our motivation? When we hang out and talk with somebody, why are we doing that? What's our motivation? When we go to the shopping mall, when we go to the baseball game, when we go on vacation, what's our motivation? And so doing all of these things with a mind that transforms all of them into the path—fine. Or that we're at least aware of what we're doing and why we're doing it. So this vow is to make us more aware of those things.

I think this vow is also an incredible protection against the impact of the media because we so often complain in America about how the media just tells us what to do, tells us what to think. This vow is emphasizing that actually, we have a choice in the matter. If we don't turn the media on, it won't have that power and control over us. Very clear. And so to look at why we turn the radio on and use the TV, all these different things.

*[Audience:] What kind of motivation should we have to go to the movies?*

I don't go to the movies very much, once a year or twice a year or something, but to keep up with some of the more modern things that are going on just so I can use some as examples in teaching or know what people are talking about, and so when people start talking about the Simpson's, that I know something about what the Simpson's are about. So that could be one motivation, simply so that you are knowledgeable in the culture so you can communicate the Dharma through the vehicle of that culture to the people. Lama Yeshe, when he used to go to places, he used to love to walk around the streets and go in the shopping centers, and then when he gave a Dharma talk, he would always use the examples in that particular country or that particular city that people could identify with.

Another motivation would be if you're trying to create contact with people and create some kind of relationship with people—either your colleagues, your family, whatever; then sometimes the things you do, especially with your family—I don't know about you guys, but I watch a lot of TV when I see my folks (it's about the only time I watch TV), because that's what they do, and if I don't watch TV, I'm not going to see them. Because everything in the house happens around the TV set. Everything! From eight in the morning until ten at night. So if I'm going to see my folks and talk to them, it has to be in the context of watching TV. That doesn't mean I sit in front of the TV all that time, I let them watch alone sometimes [laughter]. But I try and put in my time from time to time, because that's the way to communicate with them. And we'll sit and watch the news and talk about

what's going on in the news. So it's a way to establish relationships with people.

Similarly, if you're working with people in the office, you might chit-chat with them about what you did on summer vacation and the different things that are happening, because that's the way to establish contact and create a sense of friendliness and warmth with other people.

His Holiness was saying at the Dharamsala conference that when you go to the movies, it's possible to go with a Lamrim motivation. You see the movie as Lamrim. And I tell you, when you read the newspaper or watch movies with the eyes of the Four Noble Truths, it's incredible! You watch these people in the movies, exactly how the afflictions create problems in their lives, and the karma they create, and the karma they must have created to experience the things they're experiencing in the movies. And you can also meditate on emptiness when you're at the movies, because you're sitting there getting all emotional, and all it is, is light rays on a screen—nothing solid and substantial there. You can see how it's coming from the mind. So it's possible to watch all of these things with these kinds of motivations.

*[Audience:] What else could we do besides watching the television which to me is a stress-reliever?*

Yes, because life is stressful, when you come home, you just want to relax. So you're saying what other things could we do besides lie in the couch and watch TV? One of them is get some exercise. Go for a walk. Get some exercise. Play with your cat. [Laughter.]

You can read. Doesn't mean you need to read heavy philosophy, but you could try and find a book of some kind of value and read that. You can just do a relaxation technique, lying on the floor and relaxing the various parts of your body.

Or you could do some plain breathing. Just sit and as you exhale, imagine all the stress and all the junk from the day coming out in the form of smoke. And as you inhale, just let the peaceful, quiet mind come into you. You can do that stretched out on your couch—I won't tell anybody. [Laughter.]

So I think it's finding different ways to make that transition between work and home time. Because the thing is when we just plug ourselves into the media, we do it in order to relax, and yet they've done these studies and actually, watching TV is quite stressful because you have so many of these peak experiences that your adrenaline starts flowing and your heart is pumping. They were recording the different emotions they had during the course of watching one TV program, and it certainly wasn't very relaxing!

## **Art and the Dharma**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Art is an expression of creativity. So in that sense, it's quite positive. But when it tends to get self-centered and sometimes, rather pessimistic, then it seems to be counteractive to Dharma. Then the thing is, to either select the art you watch with care, or when you come in contact with those things that seem self-centered, clearly use that as part of your meditation to

understand the disadvantages of self-centeredness. And when you try and see into the artists' minds and what's going on, you can learn a lot about Dharma, about their suffering, about their relationship to society, and you can think of the kinds of Dharma antidotes and meditations that could be useful to counteract those things.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Personal alienation puts us exactly into the mindset when we don't do the equanimity meditation, when we don't do tonglen (taking and giving). This is the kind of suffering mindset that you get locked into. Alienation is related to self-centeredness. It just revolves around the ego or gets stuck in there. So in some ways it can help you reflect on the disadvantages of self-centeredness, the benefits of cherishing others. And generating compassion for the people that feel that way, that are stuck somehow.

It's interesting, this thing about art. Last year when I was in Dharamsala, I met two Frenchwomen who are artists and they had just had an interview with His Holiness. They asked him about art and they gave me the tape to listen to. It was quite interesting because what he was saying taps into what you were saying. He was saying that the value of art really lies in the motivation with which people do things. And if it's done to convey negative feelings, despair, and things like that, and if it's done just to express oneself, then he says that that motivation determines the value of that art. Whereas if you do art to be of service and benefit to others, and really explore yourself and

share that part of yourself with others in an effort to help them, then it becomes something quite positive. So it's interesting, because he wasn't talking about the quality of the art, or anything like that, he's saying it's the motivation that's important.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

If you do art to unburden yourself, that's fine. But then, the idea is about what we need to share with others.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Well, it depends on what we're trying to communicate with others. Because sometimes you expose something negative, and it stimulates people to correct it. But often times, you just expose something negative and it makes people feel more and more depressed and cynical. If I talk about, let's say, us as individuals. We're not great artists and things like that. If we paint or dance or do music or something as an unburdening of the emotions, then that's fine. If it helps you get in touch with your emotion and look at it and understand it and not get stuck in it, that's fine. But is that what you want to show to other people and express to them? Is that going to be beneficial to them?

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Yes, yes. Artwork about the holocaust definitely wakes people up. That kind of stuff has some kind of

social awareness, because I think holocaust art isn't just about the catastrophe and humanity; it tells us that if we're not careful, this can happen. So let's be careful.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I'm not saying that all art has to be pretty and cheerful and sanguine. I think so much of it comes again from the motivation—what one's trying to express. It's like literature. Literature doesn't have to just be “And they live happily ever after”, and “If I talk about anything nasty, then isn't that being awful?” So don't take me wrong. I'm not saying ignore the First Noble Truth in art. First Noble Truth is reality. Sometimes expressing it can wake people up. But it depends on your motivation and how you're doing it.

**Auxiliary vow 14: (To abandon) Believing and saying that followers of the Mahayana should remain in cyclic existence and not try to attain liberation from afflictions**

It says in the Mahayana texts that bodhisattvas give up enlightenment and remain in samsara or cyclic existence for the benefit of others. And so there is the danger that you misunderstand this and think, “Oh, bodhisattvas don't try and get enlightened. They just stay in samsara. Because they don't try and get enlightened, then they don't apply the antidotes to the afflictions. They don't purify their karma because they're staying in samsara to benefit others.



If you think like that, that's a misconception. That's what this precept is getting at. Although it says that bodhisattvas remain in cyclic existence to benefit others, what that means is, a bodhisattva's compassion for others is so strong that if it would be of ultimate benefit for sentient beings for a bodhisattva not to be enlightened, then the bodhisattva would happily give up even their own enlightenment because they're so committed to serving sentient beings. But it clearly isn't for the benefit of sentient beings for bodhisattvas not to be enlightened. Because a bodhisattva has this much ability to help others and the Buddha has this much ability to help others, so bodhisattvas are going to try really hard to get enlightened. They're definitely going to apply the antidotes to the afflictions and purify their karma. And while they're on the bodhisattva path, they're still going to continue to come back to our world in order to benefit sentient beings.

*[Audience:] What is it that gives the bodhisattva the ability to come back?*

It depends what level bodhisattva it is. If it's a bodhisattva on the path of accumulation or the path of preparation who wasn't an Arhat before, but who entered the bodhisattva path directly, that bodhisattva is not free of cyclic existence yet. They don't have direct perception of emptiness, so that bodhisattva, even though they have bodhicitta and have incredible good karma and understanding, they still are taking rebirth by power of their afflictions and karma. Then

once you get to the path of seeing, when you have direct perception of emptiness, there comes increased ability to direct one's future rebirth. And so then, one takes rebirth out of compassion and also out of wisdom.

So the lower level bodhisattvas have compassion, but they take rebirth because they're not out of cyclic existence. Even the bodhisattvas on the path of seeing and part of the path of meditation aren't necessarily out of cyclic existence. It's only when they get to the eighth bodhisattva level that they are.

*[Audience:] Can you tell us more about the bodhisattva levels?*

There're ten levels of the bodhisattva. One is on the path of seeing, the other nine are on the path of meditation. Each one corresponds with the development of a different far-reaching attitude, except in this list, there're 10 far-reaching attitudes instead of 6, and each one corresponds with a particular bodhisattva ground.

### **Auxiliary vow 15: (To abandon) Not abandoning negative actions which cause one to have a bad reputation**

Now, if we're going to be of service to others, having a good reputation is important, because if we don't have a good reputation, then other people are going to think we're a jerk, and then even we try and benefit them, they're going to go do completely the opposite thing. So if one is sincere about wanting to benefit

others, then it's important to have a good reputation. And here, the difference comes to motivation again, because normally trying to procure a good reputation is one of the eight worldly concerns, isn't it? It's one of the attachments that keeps us bound to cyclic existence. It's one of the things that when we have in our mind, then we don't do any Dharma action at all. So this is really distinguishing that. For the benefit of others, it's important that we have a good reputation so that others will listen to us. So it's emphasizing the motivation on this one. What this is pointing to, is for us to look at ourselves, at certain traits or behaviors we have that could really put a lot of other people off.

If we're very irascible and very short-tempered, or very complaining, or if you go out and smoke and drink, or insult people, if you're always the person who cuts somebody else off on the highway, or at work, or we're always the person who turns in the work at the last minute and makes everybody else uncomfortable, or we don't fulfill our responsibility towards the other colleagues, or you're the person who doesn't clean up your coffee at the staff coffee corner—that's a big source of conflict in offices, isn't it? Cleaning up after yourself with the coffee. If you're a bodhisattva, it's important to do that [laughter], because otherwise if you get a bad reputation as being inconsiderate or bad-tempered or something like that, then it becomes more difficult to benefit others.

I find this vow particularly interesting because it's getting us to look at different habits. We do lots of things that are perfectly ethical, where we're not going against the ten virtues, but still they bug other

people and can give us a bad reputation. And some things where we're definitely involved in the ten destructive actions and that gives us a bad reputation. It's taking care of what others think of us not out of attachment to ourselves, but in order to be able to serve them.

### **Auxiliary vow 16: (To abandon) Not correcting one's own deluded actions and not helping others to correct theirs**

If we're doing actions that are under the influence of afflictions, try and correct them instead of just letting them go by: "Oh yeah, it doesn't matter." The thing is, when we're trying to correct our own deluded actions, try and pick out the major ones. What are the ones that are most harmful to self and others, and what are the ones we do most frequently? Focus on those two. Instead of getting all nervous about "I brush my teeth with attachment!"

Sure, it's true. At some point we're going to have to give up brushing our teeth with attachment and attachment to the flavor of the toothpaste. It's true that that has to be given up to become liberated, but don't make that the center focus of your Dharma practice when in the meantime, you're completely careless about your speech and how you talk to people. It's much more important to figure out the major disturbing actions that we do that create the most harm and the disturbing actions we do very frequently. And then work principally at those, and as those get more and more refined, then we can extend it to choosing the flavor of our toothpaste without

attachment.

Also included in this one is to avoid not helping others to correct theirs. What that means is that when we see other people who are acting negatively, we should step in and try and help them stop that behavior. Now, this does not mean that you become everybody's boss and every time somebody does something that you don't like, you point it out to them. Because pretty soon, you won't have any friends, and nobody's going to want to be around you. So it doesn't mean that we get nit-picking and pick out everything. But what this one is saying is that when other people are involved in negative actions, if we feel that there's some space in the relationship for us to point that out to them, and to show them a different way of thinking or a different way of doing it, then we should do that. In other words, we shouldn't just close our eyes and say, "Well, they're doing all of that but it's none of my business."

So you're at work and somebody is extorting money from the company, and you just say, "That's none of my business, because if I point it out, then they're going to get offended or they're going to get mad at me, or something bad is going to happen to me." If we avoid pointing things out out of fear that the other person won't like us, or fear that they're going to get angry at us, or something like that, some kind of selfish motivation, then that's not correct.

If we don't point something out to somebody because we feel that it's only going to make them angrier and more rebellious and more stuck in their own ways, and it's going to completely close the door of communication with them, then it's okay not to

point it out to them.

So this one is saying that if we feel that there's some openness, we should say things. Especially with our Dharma friends, it is important that when we see somebody going off and doing something that's not very beneficial, as a Dharma community, we should point these things out to each other. In other words, with a motivation of kindness and concern, when we feel that there's space and the other person can take it in.

It is the same in our family. It is the same also with social issues. When something illegal or immoral is going on in the society, we should speak up and say something about it. I was thinking about this vow and I was thinking about the situation during the holocaust, when so many people pretended they didn't know what was going on. "We don't know where all these people are disappearing, and the government must be doing something good, and I don't want to know anyway." That kind of attitude where you know something horrible is going on but not speaking out against it.

And the same applies to our own society. When there are things that are harmful going on, we should speak out. Again, that doesn't mean we need to sit and wave signs and yell and throw rocks and stuff like that, but we can definitely support different social activism things. We can write letters to the Congress. We can do things to make things more prevalent. That's what His Holiness is doing, e.g. in the situation of Tibet, where there're all these human rights abuse. To not say something would actually be quite unethical.

*[Audience:] If you see something in the work situation that isn't going well, how can you give the feedback so it doesn't make things worse?*

We need to look at each situation quite individually and think of what to do. Sometimes I think it can be put in the form of a question. I'll just give you an example. When I was living in Singapore, you've probably heard me tell this story. One student was in the hospital. He was dying and when I came into the hospital, the doctor was trying to convert him on his deathbed. I came into the room and my friend was going, "Don't confuse me. Don't confuse me." The doctor saw me coming and said, "Well, you're intelligent. You know what to decide." I knew what the doctor was doing and I confronted the doctor afterwards. I didn't say, "You're doing this!" I said, "What were you doing?" I gave him a chance to explain. He said, "Well, I was telling him all about Jesus," and blah, blah, blah. And I said, "But you know, he's a Buddhist, and he died twenty minutes later and he was saying, "Don't confuse me. Don't confuse me. Do you think you were acting in his favor?" So I put it as a question.

And then what I did is, I wrote a letter to the newspaper and to the hospital, and I described the situation, and I said, "Is this acceptable conduct in the medical field?" So again, I put it as a question. And it got published in the newspapers, and everybody was so afraid that I raised this issue, because in Singapore, you don't raise any issues. But it was perfectly all right, and the newspaper took it up and they contacted the Ministry of Health and the answer came

back “No, this is not acceptable practice.” But I think there’s something about putting it in the form of a question. So to try and think of how to say things sometimes.

*[Audience:] What if people don't accept what we say?*

What can you do? The whole thing is, with as much wisdom and compassion as you have at the moment, you act. That’s all we can do. Being a bodhisattva doesn’t mean that everybody likes you and everything goes the way you want it to go.

*[Audience:] What's the best way in any situation?*

What’s the best way? Is there only one best way? Things are so interdependent and there are so many different factors, what is the best way?

*[Audience:] What if the outcome of things are not as we wished?*

Yes, it may not turn out the way we thought. But we can’t control things.

*[Audience:] What is the limit?*

It’s a thing of stretching the comfort level. Instead of saying “I’m not going to do anything I don’t feel comfortable with,” stretching the comfort level. Not tearing it, but stretching it.



*[Audience:] But sometimes the other person may not accept what we say.*

Like I said, it doesn't mean that you go and you correct everything everyone does. If you feel there is no openness from the side of the other person, then it's not worth saying. If it's just going to make somebody so angry and so defensive, and so hostile, then it's not worth saying. And especially, if somebody's saying, "I'm going fishing," that's not the time to tell them. It has to arise in another kind of context where you're not directly threatening something somebody's attached to. It has to arise in another context.

*[Audience:] But there will be little or no impact if we don't put our message across strongly.*

That's true. They won't take it very seriously, and probably anything you said at that time, they wouldn't take very seriously. But if you came on real strong, they'll probably get really self-righteous and have an adverse reaction and that wouldn't do any good either. That would make them more committed to kill more fish to show you how much they were enjoying themselves [laughter]. So like I said, it doesn't mean we go around correcting everybody, but really trying to figure out how, and in what situations to do and say things.

The whole thing is not to use this thing as an excuse to get self-righteous and put our trip on other people. But whenever we see some kind of negativity, to recognize that that is an external display of what

we have the potential to do ourselves. Like the LA riots. I was looking at all these different figures and the whole situation and unfortunately, I saw the potential to be every single one of them within myself. I could find some part of me that, put in the right situation, or rather, wrong situation, could be uncontrolled. And so using that situation to develop a sense of ethics, to develop compassion for others.

I have a real hard time when I walk around Green Lake, and I see people fishing. When they're catching a fish, it's so hard for me. And yesterday, somebody was with a net and a big fish, and I just want to go up to him and say, "Please, put the fish back in the water. Please put it back in the water." But I knew if I did, we might start a riot—I'm joking, I don't think it'd be that bad. It's really hard to walk by and see that going on. And so I try to put it in the Buddhist perspective and think about tonglen—taking and giving.

*[Audience:] Each of us have our own way of doing things and ours is not always the best way.*

Right. It doesn't mean that just because somebody has a philosophy of why they do something, that that philosophy is correct. It doesn't mean that. But I think what you're saying is very right. Rather than always looking at others, really look at what we're doing too. We're always talking about, "Oh, all these people are polluting the sky, and there's so much pollution!", and then we drive here and drive there and drive everywhere we want and we never think about taking the bus or car-pooling, or something like that. So in all these kinds of things, look at our own behavior.

*[Audience:] People need time to change, right?*

I lived in one family's house in Singapore. They were technically a Buddhist family but didn't know much about it. The son knew a lot about it; he was the one I knew the best. The mother would come and say to me things like, "There're all these cockroaches in the kitchen. I guess I shouldn't kill them, should I?" [Laughter.] And I say, "You're right. Cockroaches want to live". I went away for a few days, and I came back and she said, "Well, you'll be very sad. I killed those cockroaches. I guess I did something really bad." But it was a really interesting kind of thing, because we would talk about it, and she knew I didn't like it, and she would do it, but somehow, the thing that was good about it, was it was different than before when she did it, because before I lived there, she would just do it and not think anything about it. With our dialogues about this, she would do it but she would have some feeling of "I shouldn't be doing this. The cockroaches are getting hurt." She was getting somewhere with it, so I hope ... And every once in a while, she came and said, "I took that cockroach out. I didn't squish it. I guess you'd be happy." [Laughter.] And I say, "Yeah, very good!"

### **AUXILIARY VOWS 17–20: VOWS TO ELIMINATE OBSTACLES TO THE FAR- REACHING ATTITUDE OF PATIENCE**

*[Original teachings not recorded. This section is taken from teachings that Venerable Thubten Chodron gave in 1998.]*

**Auxiliary vow 17: (To abandon) Returning insults, anger, beating or criticism with insults and the like**

*[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]*

**Auxiliary vow 18: (To abandon) Neglecting those who are angry with oneself by not trying to pacify their anger**

*[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]*

... If that is the situation, it is very important to try and pacify that person's anger. What this is getting at is if somebody is angry with us, we can't just brush them off. We have to care about them. They're upset, miserable and creating negative karma by being angry; we cannot just brush them off.

On the other hand, this doesn't mean that you have to take all the blame yourself. Blaming the other or blaming ourselves are both extremes. It would be nice to look at conflict situations without the need to blame somebody. Instead, we could just look at, "Well, here is this dependently-arisen thing that happened. What can we do to resolve it?" It doesn't mean, "Well, okay, if I'm not going to blame them, then I'm going to blame myself." It doesn't mean that. It means caring about people if they are upset with us, doing what we can to try and pacify their anger, while also recognizing that we can't crawl into their mind and take the anger away. Sometimes we go to somebody and we try and talk with them about the situation, but they're still angry with us. Or the situation gets better for a few days but then it blows

up again. Or maybe they don't want to talk to us. Our attempts to pacify their anger may not be successful. But we have to, at least in our heart, care about them, not brush them off, and do what we can in the situation to help.

### **Auxiliary vow 19: (To abandon) Refusing to accept the apologies of others**

What is the difference between this vow and the third root bodhisattva vow? The third root vow is to abandon: "Not listening although another declares his or her offence, or with anger blaming him or her and retaliating." The two vows are similar in terms of refusing to accept the apologies of others. The difference is the root vow emphasizes rejecting others' apology out of anger, while this auxiliary vow is referring to not accepting others' apology for whatever motivation. What it is getting at is, if somebody is regretful of how they treated us, we should let go of our anger towards them.

Sometimes that's hard. Somebody comes and apologizes, but we are so hurt that we don't want to let go. When this happens, we have to go back to all the meditations on patience and do them, in order to try and let go.

This is the value of having taken this kind of precept. If you don't have this precept, you will be likely to just hold on to your anger and not feel responsible to let go of it. Whereas if you have this precept, it's right in your face, "I'm still very angry, but oh, oh, I made a promise [laughter] to the Buddha and I made a promise to myself that I was going to

accept others' apologies. One part of me had made the determination before that I'm not going to hold on to grudges. Another part of me that's active right now is wanting to hold on to grudges, so I'm not living according to my own principles here. There is some dissonance here. I should sit and look at my anger. I have to try and work things out in my mind so that I can get myself to let go of the anger."

It is a gradual process. It takes time to let go of our anger. But we have to try. This is what this vow is trying to achieve.

It only serves to benefit ourselves when we let go of our anger. Our anger hurts us, doesn't it? We sit there all knotted up in our anger, completely miserable. We hate someone because they were completely rotten. We want them to apologize, "We're not going to give in!" We get a lot of energy from this attitude. But we're not happy. We're totally miserable. Meanwhile the other person has gone on with their life, doing what they do. They are not making us miserable anymore. We are making ourselves miserable. We are not doing it intentionally, of course. Our anger just overruns our own mind. But when you have determined beforehand that you are going to work on your anger, then you will do something about it.

You work on your anger, doing it with an awareness that it's something that benefits you. Again, it's not like, "I promised the Buddha that I wasn't going to be angry at people and I was going to accept others' apologies. But this guy is such an idiot! I can't accept his apology. But since I have promised the Buddha I would, okay, I'll try." It's not with this

kind of attitude. This is not the attitude to keep in precepts. You're doing the same thing we were talking about yesterday, projecting our own inner decisions as coming from an external authority which is then judging us. It is not what this is about.

But rather, what we are doing is we are saying, "In my moments of clarity, I decided that I didn't want to hold on to my anger and my grudges. Here, my mind is all muddled up. It hurts me in the long term and in the short term. It also hurts the other person. So, I am going to try and work on this." The attitude is completely different.

### **Auxiliary vow 20: (To abandon) Acting out thoughts of anger**

This one is tricky. Watch how our mind works when we are upset. The situation is like this, but you tilt it a little bit. You change your explanation of it a little bit so that what you are doing looks like it's the appropriate thing to do in the situation. It looks like we are being kind to the other person. But actually, our motivation for doing it is that we are angry. Or our motivation for doing it is we are protecting ourselves.

It is like a father beating his kid and saying, "This is for your own benefit. It hurts me more than it hurts you." That could be true. I'm sure for some parents, that is true. But for other parents, it's just a big excuse for venting their frustration. The words are there but the meaning can be very different, according to the person.

It is the same thing here. Sometimes we're angry. It's hard to admit to ourselves that we have anger, let

alone admit it in the situation. We do something in the situation and attack the other person in an indirect way. It looks like we are not attacking the other person. It looks like we are doing what is reasonable, what is honest and what should be done. But our motivation is to attack them because we're mad. Often, we aren't even aware of it ourselves. This is a subtle level of acting out thoughts of anger.

Then there is the blatant level of acting out thoughts of anger. When we sit and meditate, we have the ninth of the ten destructive actions, which is maliciousness. We sit and do our mantra and plan very consciously how we're going to let the other person know that we're right and they're wrong. We plan very consciously how we can push their buttons because we know what they're sensitive to. So we go, "Om Vajrasattva ... how can I push their button ... samaya manu palaya ... this is going to really hurt them ... dido may bhawa ... oh lovely I'm so happy ... suto kayo may bhawa ... but I shouldn't look happy because then I wouldn't look like a good Buddhist ... sarwa karma su tsa may ... oh but it'd be so nice if I get my way ...." [Laughter.]

We have to be very careful of these two ways of acting out thoughts of anger. One is doing it consciously, having malicious thoughts. The other is not being honest with ourselves and holding on to the anger, and then going around the back door to get at somebody. For example, we created a lot of dissension among a group of friends. We talked to everybody in the group and tried to stir things up, or we tried to stir things up in the office. But we didn't look like we were the ones stirring it up, because we



only came along and pointed something out or started an “innocent” conversation. We know how to do this, don’t we?

## **AUXILIARY VOWS 21–23: VOWS TO ELIMINATE OBSTACLES TO THE FAR-REACHING ATTITUDE OF JOYOUS EFFORT**

**Auxiliary vow 21: (To abandon) Gathering a circle of friends or students because of one’s desire for respect or profit**

*[Original teachings on auxiliary vow 21 not recorded. This section is taken from teachings that Venerable Thubten Chodron gave in 1998.]*

An example would be if I come to Seattle to start a Dharma center because I want to be a big guru. I want all of you to give me many gifts. Or maybe I don’t wish to be a teacher, but I want to lead a group. In the back of my mind, my wish is that I want other people to respect me and I want to get some profit from this. I want a good reputation. Maybe they will write about me in Tricycle. [Laughter.] The ego takes the ball and runs.

It could be related to the Dharma, but it needn’t be. It could just be with our friends. You could be teaching acupuncture. You could be teaching bowling, badminton or computers. Whatever you’re teaching, part of the motivation is to gather a circle of people around you who adore you. Of course, we would not admit this is our motivation. It’s not very polite to say it in company. But if we look in our mind, this is what

is going on. We want other people to think well of us. We want a group of people on our team and by the way, they may give us some gifts.

Joyous effort is the attitude that takes delight in creating virtue. Here, it looks like you're creating virtue, because you're gathering a circle of friends or students around you to teach them something that would be helpful to them. It looks like you're doing something for the benefit of others. It looks like you're doing something virtuous. But the mind isn't taking delight in that virtue. The mind is looking for your own profit. This is why this vow is counteracting the far-reaching attitude of joyous effort. The mind is not taking joy in virtue, it is working for ego's benefit.

This points out how sneaky the ego is. How sneaky the self-centered attitude is. It comes up all over the place. That is why the precepts are here. They bring our attention to that. It doesn't mean that we are never going to have this attitude. It doesn't mean that from now on, these kinds of things are never going to pop up in our mind. It just means that by knowing this, we're aware and try to discern it when the thought does crop up.

Like I told you, when I first started studying the bodhisattva vows many years ago, I would think, "Who in the world would do this? Who in the world would gather a circle of friends or students out of a desire for respect and profit? That's totally opposite to the Dharma. Who would do that?" I understand now it's very easy to do that. Even though part of your mind is committed to the bodhisattva path, the other part of the mind is attached to the self-centered path.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

What this is getting at is to shift our attitude for doing a business or for working at our job or other tasks. You have to work because you do need to earn a living. That's fair enough. But it's not just to earn a living. You are trying to do something that's going to benefit other people. When you wake up in the morning, think to yourself, "I'm going to my job because I want to do something that's going to benefit the people I come in touch with." You are involved in making an object or providing a service that will benefit people. You can think how you are going to benefit the people who are in the office with you. Or your clients. Or your employers. Or your employees. Whoever it is you're working with. In other words, you generate the motivation, "I want to benefit others and not harm them." You try and hold that as your motivation. Usually our motivation for going to work is desire for respect and profit. Here, we're beginning to change our motivation. This is good. We need to try and do this.

### **Auxiliary vow 22: (To abandon) Not dispelling the three types of laziness**

What this is saying is, laziness is the thing that blocks our joyous effort. It's the thing that counteracts it, so what we should try and do is make efforts to counteract our laziness.

One kind of laziness is **attachment to sleep and lying around**. The teachers say to try and sleep what your body needs, not excessively. Sleep on a regular

schedule, not sleeping a long stretch, and then not sleeping, then another long stretch, then not sleeping. Don't get into the habit of sleeping in the daytime, unless somehow your body doesn't work without it. If you get into the habit of sleeping in the daytime, then you sleep in the daytime, you sleep in the night-time, you wake up for meals and that's it. Really try not to just give in to the mind that just wants to sleep and sleep and sleep. Get ourselves into a schedule, something that's regular, and not sleep excessively.

To counteract the attachment to sleep, it's good to remember impermanence and death.

*[Audience:] Is the first type of laziness also called the laziness of procrastination?*

Yes, procrastination is involved with the attachment to sloth and sleep. The *mañana* mentality.

The second kind of laziness is **attraction to running around and being busy**. Keeping ourselves busy, busy, busy. We usually see busy-ness as being the opposite of laziness, but in terms of the Dharma, worldly busy-ness is definitely Dharma-laziness. We keep ourselves so busy having so many things to do. We have 10 million, zillion, trillion picky little things to worry about and fuss over. When we're finally done with them, we'll be so tired we have to go to sleep. So, leaving aside the important things because we're too busy doing all the unimportant things.

Try and simplify our life. Set our priorities. Have some kind of rhythm in our life. Schedule in our formal Dharma sessions. Try and practice at other times as well instead of just running around being

busy all the time, which is basically wasting time and energy on trivial matters. We're quite good at that.

The last kind of laziness is **discouragement and putting ourselves down**. When we put ourselves down, we take away all of our energy. Isn't it interesting that putting ourselves down is seen as a form of laziness? Just sitting there telling ourselves all these bad things about ourselves and getting ourselves nicely discouraged is being quite lazy.

In this light, His Holiness was saying that there's a positive sense of self and there's a negative sense of self. The negative sense of self is the self-grasping. The positive sense of self is a feeling of self-confidence and will, which we need to have in order to practice.

We should try to make some efforts to counteract the laziness. This doesn't mean squeezing ourselves, getting ourselves into this mind of "should". It isn't, "I shouldn't sleep this much!" "I shouldn't be so busy!" "I shouldn't disparage myself so much." Doing all these "shoulds" is actually putting ourselves down, isn't it? What we want to do is to come back to our potential, come back to our Buddha nature, see the advantages of one way of action and the disadvantages of the other, and in that way, set our direction.

### **Auxiliary vow 23: (To abandon) With attachment, spending time idly talking and joking**

We've been through this one a number of times, in various forms. This is basically spending our time idly talking, joking, hanging out, blah, blah, blah, di, di, di

..., with attachment. Telling stories—some people like war stories, some people like love stories, some people like horror stories, some people like adventure stories, some people like their own stories [laughter], whatever it is.

This is an obstacle to developing joyous effort, because when we hang out, we're keeping our mouth very busy. Often our ears aren't nearly as busy as our mouth. Even though we have twice as many ears as mouth, we don't listen half as well as we talk. To develop a mind that takes delight in what is virtuous, we have to calm the mind that takes delight in wasting time. Like we've talked before, that doesn't mean we don't chit-chat with people. We can when there's a purpose, when we know what we're doing, when the topic of conversation doesn't go around to anything that's harmful to anybody. It's always good, when the conversation becomes a little bit difficult, to change the subject.

In circumstances like, if you don't know somebody very well, and you're trying to develop a relationship, you might just kind of chitchat about this and that, but you're doing it with the motivation to develop a relationship where you can be of service to that person. You're not just doing it so that you can feel good, so that you can make yourself look big, so that you can be amused, so that you can say, "Well, I couldn't practice the Dharma because this person kept me on the phone all night," even though you were doing most of the talking.

So these obstruct us from developing joyous effort. Joyous effort is very important on the path because when we take delight in what is virtuous, then the

whole practice becomes much easier. So often we feel like, “Oh, I just don’t have enough energy.” We do have lots of energy but usually our energy is for things that aren’t so virtuous. We’ve lots of energy to go out to the bar and drink, go dancing, go do this, and go do that. But not so much energy for meditation. It’s just a thing of rechanneling the energy.

### **AUXILIARY VOWS 24–26: VOWS TO ELIMINATE OBSTACLES TO THE FAR-REACHING ATTITUDE OF MEDITATIVE STABILIZATION**

Now the next ones have to do with eliminating obstacles to the far-reaching attitude of meditative stabilization or concentration. Meditative stabilization is very important in our practice because even if you develop understandings of different levels of the path, if you can’t hold your concentration firmly on those understandings, then it’s very difficult for them to become part of you. If you meditate on love, you get this kind of loving feeling, and then bam! your mind is off thinking about chocolate cake, and it’s difficult to recreate the loving feeling again. So concentration is important so that we can make those understandings part of us.

**Auxiliary vow 24: (To abandon) Not seeking the means to develop concentration, such as proper instructions and the right conditions necessary to do so**

What we should avoid is not seeking the means to

develop concentration, such as proper instructions and the right conditions necessary to do so. Or not practicing the instructions once we have received them. So, before we meditate to develop calm abiding, or zhi-na or samatha (these are all the same terms. “Samatha” is the Sanskrit, “Zhi-na” is the Tibetan, “Calm-abiding” is the English), we need to have proper teachings on those. It’s not a thing of, “Ok, I’m going to sit down and concentrate!” Rather, we have to hear teachings about how to do it, how to meditate on concentration. That’s quite important.

Actually, His Holiness commented on it at the Teacher’s Conference last year, because the topic came up at one point: why is it that some people who supposedly have these incredible realizations then act unethically? His Holiness said, “Well, maybe their realizations aren’t what they thought they were.” And one way that you can have “wrong” realizations or insufficient realizations is when you’re in the process of developing calm-abiding. At a certain point, it’s very easy to get stuck and think that you have clarity and stability—mistakenly think that you have actualized calm-abiding—when actually the clarity isn’t very intense, and there’s a level of subtle mental dullness there. His Holiness said this is due to not having proper teachings. So, when we get into that subject later on, when we cover the six far-reaching attitudes, we’ll go into all the steps in calm-abiding, and how to do it. That’s important to know.

So this vow is, first of all, not having any interest in developing concentration, and even if you have interest, meditating on it without teachings, or not seeking teachings on it. Just kind of being very lax in



that way. That makes a big obstacle because if we don't know what we're doing, it's hard to do it. And it's easy to go awry.

Also, it's extremely important to try to get the right conditions to meditate. If you go and do a samatha retreat, and if you don't have the right external conditions, even if you try, you won't get the results. In that kind of retreat, it's very important to have a secluded place, to minimize your activities, to train your mind in being content, to have a supportive community nearby, to have a quiet place where you don't hear water, you don't hear other people, animals, things like this, because these make a lot of noise, and they interfere with your concentration. It doesn't mean that you meditate in a vacuum, but when you go and choose a place to meditate, you try and get a conducive one. We should make an effort to get that kind of quiet place.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

If you've already realized zhi-na, then that's not going to bother you. The only other way for the water and the cars not to bother you is that your internal noise is greater [laughter]—I can't pay attention to the cars because my internal chatter is too loud!

**Auxiliary vow 25: (To abandon) Not abandoning the five obscurations which hinder meditative stabilization**

So, once we've gotten the teachings, we'll want to try and meditate properly. Here, what we want to try and

do is overcome the five obscurations that hinder the generation of concentration.

### **1st obscuration: excitement and regret**

#### **Excitement (or restlessness of body and mind)**

The first obscuration has two parts: one part is excitement, and the other part is regret. Actually, instead of excitement, I like the translation of restlessness better. Because when we're restless, it's definitely an obstacle to concentrating, isn't it? The body is restless, you can't sit still, you're itching, you're twitching, you want to get off and move. Maybe you've taken too much caffeine, whatever it is, because it takes a while for the body to calm down so you can sit still. The body is restless, or the mind is restless. It's like a kid that runs here, and runs there, and runs here, and runs there... all over the place. Anybody experienced that? [Laughter.]

#### **Enduring the pain in the body vs trying to relieve it**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

You have to balance them. Because if every time your body is uncomfortable, you try and make your body comfortable, you're never going to be comfortable. "Well, I can't sit in this position. I got to stretch this leg out." Then you sit like that. "No, I got to sit in the chair. No, the chair is not comfortable. I have to lie down. No, my back hurts when I lie down. I have to

sit up.” It’s impossible to make your body completely comfortable.

But, trying to do some macho trip of, “I’m going to sit here and face the pain! And it’s killing me and I can’t do anything else but sit here and ... (trying to endure)” That’s really stupid too. So, what we need is some kind of balance. When the pain is too intense, shift the body. But don’t shift the body every time it’s uncomfortable. Because you’ll be shifting the body every thirty seconds. And try not to form bad habits, like leaning against the wall, unless you have a physical disability. If you have a physical disability, lean against the wall. Do what you need to do. But if you don’t have a physical disability, try and train your back muscles slowly. Just sit up straight. It’s good to make short meditation sessions. Don’t make your sessions too long. Make a short one, and then if you need to, stand, walk around the room once, sit down, and then do another session. Don’t stand, go into the other room, turn on the TV for ten minutes, then come back. That’s not such a good idea.

## **Handling the restless mind**

Now the restless mind: that’s the mind that hears this sound, that hears that sound, that smells this, that’s thinking about that, that’s going here, and going there. The mind that hears one thing and then starts building a story on it, the mind that just wanders and is restless and agitated. We should try and calm that down. That has to do with cultivating this mind of introspective alertness, where we know what’s going on in our mind, so that if the restlessness comes up, we’re able

to identify it, and then renew our mindfulness and bring ourselves back to our object of concentration. And in this light also, if you're having a lot of problems with physical restlessness, it's good to make sure you're getting enough exercise and to do some yoga, or do Tai-chi. Do something with your body. I think that is quite helpful. But also be patient. Because it does take a while for the whole energy in your body to change so that you can sit still. So be patient, but continue to work on it.

It could be helpful to look at what you're eating. If you're eating a lot of sugar, it might cause some distraction, give you a big sugar rush and a big sugar letdown in your meditation. Caffeine, not so much tea, but coffee, just makes you wired. So see if it's contributing to the restlessness.

Watch the restlessness. Don't just give in to it. With the physical restlessness, it's quite interesting to watch what that feels like in your body. Instead of always following it, moving it and twitching it, just watch that restless energy. It's quite interesting.

For the mental restlessness, you need this mental factor of introspective alertness that can identify what's going on in the mind. When you identify the mind is restless and distracted, renew the mindfulness on the object of concentration, be that the breath or the image of the Buddha, or the feeling of loving-kindness or whatever it is.

## **Regret**

This could be regret for past negative actions, something like this. When you have a lot of regret

over past negative actions that prevents you from concentrating on what you're concentrating on, because you're feeling so remorseful for what happened in the past, that kind of regret is good because it leads us to do purification. That's a positive kind of regret. Though it's better not to do the negative actions in the first place because then we don't get the regret that distracts us.

A negative kind of regret is when you're sitting there regretting being there to start with: "Why am I doing this retreat? Why am I doing this meditation? I really regret sitting here, I'd much rather do something else." Or a kind of brooding mind where you just sit and brood. The mind is kind of remorseful and brooding ... so that becomes an obstacle too.

What's very helpful when you have these kinds of things is to try and understand where they're coming from. You can't just say, "Don't have them," but see where they're coming from. If it's some kind of regret from past negative actions, do purification. If it's regretting being there and doing the retreat, then meditate instead on the advantages of doing the retreat. If you're just brooding in general, then sit and watch the brooding and try and see what's motivating it. See what's behind it, what the mind is up to. Do some research on it, then you might get some clarity about how to dispel it.

So those two together (excitement and regret), are the first of five obstructions. Don't ask me why they put two completely different things as one, I haven't figured it out.

## **2nd obscuration: harmful thought**

Then the second one is harmful thought. Here is our old friend, maliciousness, again. Ill will, wanting revenge, wanting to get even, wanting to retaliate, this mind that is thinking of harmful thoughts towards other people. Here the antidote would be to meditate on loving kindness, on patience, on all those antidotes to anger.

### **3rd obscuration: sleep and dullness**

#### **Sleepy mind**

Then the third one is sleep and dullness. The sleepy mind becomes a clear obstacle when you try to meditate. You're concentrating and you're meditating and then ... [snoring sound].

Antidotes to that are first, try and sleep the right amount. If you sleep too much, you're often more tired. If you only sleep three hours a night, then you're often tired. Try and sleep a correct amount. Also, they really recommend going to bed earlier and waking up at dawn or just before dawn if you can, rather than staying up all night and then sleeping until like eleven o'clock and then getting up. The mind somehow is fresher, and the environment is much calmer in the morning, better for meditation. And get yourself on some kind of even schedule of sleeping, so that it's not four hours one night, and ten hours another night, and back and forth and in and out. If you can, be on some basic sort of general schedule.

#### **Dullness**

Dullness is when you're meditating and you're not sleeping, but the mind is definitely getting heavy. When the mind gets heavy, the clarity of the mind really goes down. It's like when you visualize the Buddha, when your mind is really alert, the colors and everything just seems bright and vivid, you have some kind of buoyant feeling in your mind when you're meditating. When it's heavy, it's like everything is collapsing inward. So here, the antidote is to think about something that is positive that will uplift your mind. Think about the Buddha nature, think about the qualities of the Triple Gem, think about the Precious Human Life and our fortune in receiving one, the advantages of it. Something that will uplift the mind and dispel the dullness.

*[Audience:] What if you're meditating and you realize you're falling asleep?*

Then it's better to say, "I'm falling asleep," and get yourself upright again. If you're doing Vipassana type of meditation, you can sometimes watch as your mind is getting drowsier and drowsier. But then the thing is, usually, at some point we just join in and fall asleep with it. If you can watch it straight through, that's fine.

Usually, when you're developing concentration, you want to stay on the object of concentration. So if you're trying to meditate on the breath, and instead you start watching how your mind starts doing these fanciful things as you're falling asleep, you're off your object of meditation. If your object of meditation is the visual image of the Buddha, and instead you

start following these other things, you're off your object. So it's better to wake the mind up and go back to your object of meditation. When you lie down to go to sleep, then, do what you're talking about. Then watch it as you're falling asleep. Ok? When you're dreaming, if you can be aware that you're dreaming, that's good. That's providing some awareness. But it also depends on what you do with that awareness.

#### **4th obscuration: desire for the five sense objects**

Then the next one is desire for the five sense objects. Attachment to the five sense objects. So we're sitting and meditating, and then, "I want something to eat. I want to listen to nice music. I want something soft to touch. I want to be with somebody nice to hug. I want to see something pretty. I want to go somewhere." You know, this mind that's just craving sense stimulation.

I think this is something that's quite difficult for us to free ourselves from, because the culture around us is overly sense stimulating. That's why I keep on saying be really careful of your relationship to the media, because the media is one of the main things that give us too much sense stimulation, so that when we sit down to meditate, it just keeps on pouring in.

Be careful what you do during break-time, in between your meditation sessions. Because it's not like meditation sessions and break-times are unrelated things. What you do in your break-times influence your meditation sessions. If you're chasing after all sorts of things of attachment during the break time, when you sit down and meditate, there they are again.



We can see that very easily. We talk to somebody. We sit down to meditate, what's going through our mind? Conversation we just had with somebody; what they talked with us about; our image—"Did I say the right thing? Did I say the wrong thing? Are they mad at me? Do they think I'm nice?"—all these kinds of stuff.

So what we do in the break time really influences our meditation session. Again we're coming back to this thing of simplifying our life. Not going into asceticism, but just basically simplifying our life. Getting rid of the things that really aren't necessary. Makes life much easier.

### **5th obscuration: doubt**

The last of the five obscurations is doubt. They say it's like a two-pointed needle. You can't sew with a two-pointed needle, because you start to go this way and it jams. And you start to go that way and it jams. So doubt is like that. Doubt is saying, "This meditation technique doesn't work. Maybe I shouldn't be doing this meditation. Maybe I should go to the Zen master and do Zen meditation. Maybe I should go and do Vipassana meditation. Maybe instead of meditating on the Buddha, I should meditate on the breath. Maybe instead of meditating on the breath, I should meditate on loving-kindness. Maybe instead of doing Death meditation, I should meditate on Precious Human Rebirth. Maybe instead of this, I should meditate on Emptiness." You know this mind of doubt. I see some nodding heads. [Laughter.]

## **Genuine question vs doubt that is restless or cynical**

Try and distinguish the kind of doubt that has a genuine question from the doubt that is just restlessness and the doubt that's just cynical, "Let's pick a hole in the stuff." If it's a doubt where you have a genuine question, where you're not clear on a meditation technique, then go and ask, or read a book, and try and get some clarity. "Hmm, I'm supposed to be meditating on the Buddha, but actually I wasn't listening very well to the instructions, I'm not sure how to do it,"—that's a completely legitimate kind of doubt; you need more information.

If it's the doubt that is restless, then recognize the doubt for what it is so that instead of getting involved in it, you can leave it alone. Recognize it as one of the old videos. And the same thing, if it's the kind of doubt that is cynical: "Let's attack. Let's pick holes in things," recognize that as an obscuration. Because very often, doubt comes in our mind, and instead of recognizing it as doubt—here I'm talking about a deluded kind of doubt, not the other kind of doubt—we start to take it seriously: "Gee, maybe I shouldn't be meditating on the image of the Buddha. Maybe I really ought to meditate on the breath. Everybody else is doing that. Oh gee, no, I've been doing it on my nostrils, maybe I should shift it to my abdomen. I've been doing it on my abdomen, maybe I should shift it to my nostril. Maybe I should meditate on loving-kindness instead. Maybe I should do my breath and loving-kindness together. Maybe I can meditate on love when I'm breathing in and emptiness when I'm

breathing out .... [Laughter.]” This kind of doubt is negative.

## **Advice on meditation practices**

One thing that is good to do in your daily practice, is to do the prayers that we do here. And then maybe either some breathing meditation or some concentration meditation on the figure of the Buddha, and then do some of the checking meditation on the subjects that we have gone through, either by following the Lamrim outline, or looking at your notes. When you take notes, this is not just to fill up your notebook. It's to try and get the main points of it, and make yourself an outline. Think of those points. And think of them in relationship to your own life. And then you cycle through the Lamrim in this way. Or what you can do is pay special attention to the subjects we're covering in class and really think about those because they're fresh in your mind.

## **Meditating on a particular topic over a period of time**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

You mean like meditate on death over a period of time? Yeah, that can be very helpful. If you choose to do something like that, then try and read this prayer, “The Foundation of All Good Qualities”, because that cycles through the Lamrim and gives you an overview of it. And then you can zero in on the particular subject that you're going to spend more time on. And

it can be very beneficial. Like if you meditate on Death every day for a week, or Precious Human Life every day for a week, it's very good. You'll start to see some change then.

But, let's say you're trying to meditate on Precious Human Life, and then you get this huge incredible thing of anger. Then you obviously have to switch to a different kind of meditation to calm your anger down. You don't have to put your mind in a strait jacket, because you can be quite creative. You think about one topic and it might lead you to another topic, but you do that with awareness instead of just dancing all over the place.

## **Meditation on the Buddha**

Can the Buddha sometimes be serious, and sometimes be smiling? I think they say try and get it on so it's basically the same. I'm sure it has some malleability to it. But you don't want the Buddha to be grossly different from one meditation session to the next. And there might be one part of the Buddha's body too, that really appeals to you more. It may be that you really like the Buddha's eyes, so if your mind starts getting playful and dancing, and Buddha's doing all these things, then go for the eyes, and kind of sink yourself into that again, back to some part of the Buddha's form that really appeals to you.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

You mean you're visualizing and you're just feeling pleasure because the visualization is beautiful? The

image is very beautiful but you forgot that you're meditating on the Buddha and the Buddha's qualities. Then remind yourself, "Oh yeah, that's very beautiful. That symbolizes his awareness, the merits he's accumulated over these countless eons. And so on ..." There're some teachings on the physical attributes of the Buddha—the thirty-two signs and the eighty marks. They are symbolic of different things. It might help you to know those, because then if your mind starts getting caught up with the aesthetics of something, you can remember exactly what it's symbolic of.

### **Auxiliary vow 26: (To abandon) Seeing the good qualities of the taste of meditative stabilization and becoming attached to it**

It's like at a certain point, as you're developing calm abiding and meditative stabilization, you get tremendous feelings of bliss—so they say, I've never experienced it. But they say, they really experience the bliss. And it's very easy to get attached to those, and just want to do the meditation because you feel so blissful. This can actually become a hindrance, because then what your mind is doing is, it's back to the motivation of attachment, isn't it? Except here it's attachment to the bliss of meditation instead of attachment to chocolate cake. It's getting stuck in that bliss.

You may go to some Buddhist teachings and immediately they start you off doing calm-abiding meditation, concentration meditation. Some people may find it strange that when you come to a Tibetan

teaching, they talk about Four Noble Truths, they talk about the six defects of samsara, they talk about the two mental factors and they talk about this, and they talk about that ... I remember sometimes in Dharamsala, those people would raise their hands and then ask Genla, "Genla, we want to learn to concentrate." I think the Tibetan masters, by and large, ease us into it really gently, and make sure we have a good, firm foundation of the whole Buddhist view of life. Because if you have that whole firm foundation, then if you get concentration, you're not going to get stuck in seeking the bliss of the concentration. If you don't understand the Four Noble Truths and the defects of cyclic existence, if you don't know anything about the determination to be free, then when your mind is very concentrated, it's real tempting for the mind to get stuck there.

I think it is good to meditate and we definitely should do that. But instead of having a goal like, "I want to escape from my life. I want to meditate," try and see, "I want to become a healthy human being. I want to become a whole human being, so that I can function well. And part of my functioning well is meditating and developing concentration. But that's not all of it."

If you're stuck in just being attached to the bliss of the meditation, you're never going to go on to develop that wisdom aspect of the meditation. And it's the wisdom that actually frees you. Like a lot of the Hindus, they have very similar methods to the ones the Buddhists employ for developing single-pointed concentration, but then what's missing there is the wisdom aspect.

## **Elaboration on the “bliss” of meditation: enjoy it but don’t cling to it**

I’ve yet to experience the bliss, but they did say that when you get very concentrated, physically, your body becomes very supple, and your mind becomes very supple, and your winds get purified, so there comes a very delighted feeling. And also when you can think of it, why is it we’re often so unhappy? It’s because the mind is going in all directions. If you can get the mind on one subject, especially the Buddha, and he’s there and he’s so beautiful, then you can get the blissful feeling from that. The concentration brings the bliss.

Bliss here just means a pleasant sensation. We’re not talking about the bliss of Enlightenment. And it’s not to say that every time you experience bliss, you got to get uptight. You can enjoy the bliss, but just not cling to it.

Do enjoy it because it does make your mind buoyant, and make your mind want to meditate. It’s when you say “Ok, I just want to experience the bliss, and forget about all the other aspects of meditation” that it becomes an obstacle.

## **AUXILIARY VOWS 27–34: VOWS TO ELIMINATE OBSTACLES TO THE FAR-REACHING ATTITUDE OF WISDOM**

Ok, then, the next set are obstacles to the far-reaching attitude of wisdom. “Wisdom” here can refer to the wisdom realizing emptiness, or reality. It can also refer to wisdom in terms of understanding cause and effect,

what to practice, what to abandon, or wisdom understanding just the relative nature and functioning characteristics of phenomena. We need to develop lots of different kinds of wisdom.

**Auxiliary vow 27: (To abandon) Abandoning the scriptures or paths of the Theravada as unnecessary for one following the Mahayana**

Auxiliary vow 27 is that we should abandon abandoning the scriptures or paths of the Theravada—it's sometimes called Hinayana—as unnecessary for one following the Mahayana. Sometimes people say, "I'm practicing Mahayana, I don't need to learn all those kinds of meditations that they do in the Theravada because Mahayana is a more expansive practice, this is all I need to know." That's incorrect because all the Mahayana practices are based on the Theravada practice, so we do need to know the Theravada practice. The only thing that we don't want to actualize in that, is the determination to free just ourselves from cyclic existence, without bringing everybody else into that. But all those meditations, all those teachings, they're all very much things that we need to learn. Especially in the Theravada teachings, there's so much talk about refuge, ethics, precepts, concentration, determination to be free, sufferings of samsara, four noble truths. These are teachings that are completely common to all the Buddhist traditions.

So we need to learn them for our own practice. We also need to learn them so that we can benefit others. Because at some point in time, we can become great bodhisattvas. When you're a bodhisattva, you have to



be able to try and help everybody, no matter what their disposition or interest or tendency is. So for those people who come to you, who have the kind of disposition or interest or tendency towards those meditations, you need to know those meditations so that you can teach them to that person. So the bodhisattva practice is really wide and inclusive. You try and learn everything, even though it may not be your central practice, so that when you meet others whom it might benefit, you can teach it to them.

Now, for us, how to apply that, what does that mean for us? Does that mean that we should start grabbing any practice, right, left and center? No, we're going to get confused. We need to stay on the course and build up the foundation of the Lamrim and have our path clear. But the more capable we get and the more firm we are in our practice, then the more we can start expanding and including all these other things.

Sometimes the lamas give these whole sets of tantric initiations, they'll give a hundred or two hundred initiations. Now, maybe at our level it's more important to take one or two and practice those intensely and gain realizations rather than jump back and forth and back and forth. But when you have a lot of capacity and a lot of training and you're really in a position to help others, then it's very useful to have those other initiations, because then you can pass them on to the people who can practice them according to their tendency.

**Auxiliary vow 28: (To abandon) Exerting effort principally in another system of practice while**

## **neglecting the one one already has, the Mahayana**

Whereas number 27 was you're kind of forgetting the Theravada because you're practicing Mahayana, this one is just the opposite. You're forgetting the Mahayana, and making your principal practice something else. What this vow is trying to get us to do is to help us remain centered on the Mahayana practice, which is based on the Theravada practice, and to always have this attitude of becoming a Buddha for the benefit of others. We might learn many different systems of practice, but to really remain centered on the Mahayana and bring what we learn from the other systems into that.

### **Auxiliary vow 29: (To abandon) Without a good reason, exerting effort to learn or practice the treatises of non-Buddhists which are not proper objects of one's endeavor**

It is possible to read texts and treatises of non-Buddhists, that's completely okay. And in fact, it can be very, very good to do. But what this is saying, is without a good reason, just doing that. Like, you take one of the monks of the monasteries in India, who's going through all the perfection of the wisdom sutras, and he says, "Oh, this is really boring. I think I want to learn New Age philosophy instead." And then he just starts reading New Age philosophy, and neglects the Buddha's teachings. That's a problem.

Reading New Age philosophy, or reading some other philosophical system, or reading things on psychology, these things can be good and beneficial to

our practice, but what this vow is saying, is when we neglect our practice to study those things. Or we study those things without a good reason.

The basic idea when you're trying to develop wisdom, and you study other things which are not specifically Buddhist texts, is to learn from them what is valid and incorporate that, and that helps to enrich our understanding of Buddhism. The idea is also to be able to detect in those writings the false premises and the wrong conclusions and then using your intelligence and your wisdom to refute them.

So let's say as a Buddhist, we might want to read some Christian text at some time. That's completely okay. And sometimes maybe you read the biography of a Saint and you see all the stuff that they went through, how much perseverance they practice with, and it can be very inspiring because that's very similar to our practice and the whole thing of enthusiastic perseverance, and if that can help you, great. When you read the Christian teachings, you can take from it the things that are really helpful, maybe some of the teachings on patience that Jesus taught—very, very good. Or you read the Torah, the Jewish scriptures, and you think about all the things on ethics—incredibly stimulating. But when you start to just read all sorts of Christian teachings and forget about Buddhism, then that's going to the other extreme.

Another purpose for reading those scriptures is to be able to see where the flaws in the reasoning are. Because we want to strengthen our wisdom so that we can think very, very clearly. And one way to do that is to think deeply about different philosophical tenets, and what is true and what isn't true. So you might

read something that's Christian and they talk about God creating the earth. Then you think about that—is that true, is that not true? Well, if that were true, then how come this, and how come that, and through this reasoning, you start to see the flaws in that way of thinking. Or you read something and they talk about a permanent soul, something that is “me”. And you begin to think about that. You can see the pitfalls in that. Then that's very, very helpful for your growth of wisdom.

So reading things that are not specifically Buddhist can be helpful in both those two respects, in terms of using what is beneficial, and also in terms of refuting the wrong conceptions. But if we read those things without a good reason, and neglect our practice, and start to study those things, that's not beneficial.

### **Auxiliary vow 30: (To abandon) Beginning to favor and take delight in the treatises of non-Buddhists although studying them for a good reason**

So here, you're studying them for a good reason but you begin to like them too much. “Oh gee, maybe God did create the world. Oh gee, maybe there is a permanent self. Oh gee, maybe the path to salvation is just to open myself to the saving grace of Jesus or Mohammed or something like this.” So we're beginning to favor those things.

My personal feeling is, the purpose of this vow is to help us recognize what we're doing, so that if we start to favor that kind of thing, a little bell goes off in our mind, and says, “Oh! What am I doing here? Am I really thinking clearly about this material, or am I just

getting enchanted by the flowery language and the beautiful context?” It’s not saying that you’re bad because you might believe those things, you might give things that space in your mind. It’s not saying, “That’s outside of Buddhist teachings, you can’t believe that.” We’re not saying that. But what this is, is just be aware of what we’re thinking.

Here, maybe you’ve been hearing all these teachings about selflessness, and it makes sense to you all along, and then maybe you start studying something from another tradition, and you find yourself starting to think, “Oh well, maybe there is a permanent soul that goes from life to life, or a permanent soul that gets reborn in heaven.” And this vow is going to make you say, “Hmm, that’s interesting. I’m beginning to believe that. Why? What is it that I find so attractive in that view? Is that view really logical?” I see it much more as a reminder to us to be aware of what we’re thinking, so that we don’t just kind of trip along, getting enchanted by one idea, and another idea, because it sounds good. Is that making some sense to you?

I remember a lot of the philosophical studies are refuting all these wrong ideas of other schools. One time, we asked one of my teachers, “We’re refuting all these ideas. How come?” And he said, “Well, I’m sure if one of the teachers of these ideas came here and taught you, you guys would all believe him!” [Laughter.] He says actually when we look at it, our discriminating wisdom is not that astute, and we’re pretty gullible and we’re very likely to believe anybody who can come and suggest anything that sounds good. So you see that part of yourself, when

somebody says something that sounds good, you'll say, "I believe. I'll enlist."

So you have to think deeply about those things, so that you don't just follow along because that's something that sounds sweet. Lots of times at talks, people will ask me questions, and they'll have some kind of language. Or some of the talks that other people give, the New Age things, the light and love, and those stuff .... The language sounds great, but it's like, I don't understand what they're talking about. And if you really have a critical mind, "What do you mean by light? What do you mean by love?" The big saying is, "It's all one." Sounds great, doesn't it? We love it: "It's all one." It's fantastic, we believe it: I bow down to "It's all one". What in the world does that mean? All these people who go around saying "It's all one." Does that mean you two people are the same people? Does that mean the cat is the dog? Does that mean the cat is the chocolate cake; I can eat the cat and not the chocolate cake? What are we talking about here? Sounds great, but what do we mean?

So with wisdom, we're really trying to develop that acute mind, that sharp mind that can analyze, figure out what exists and what doesn't. Instead of just being led away by those stuff.

## **The value of debate**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

With debating, what they do is, very often, in the text they'll bring up these different wrong ideas, and the monks and nuns would debate them. And in the

middle you might find that you really believe in some of these wrong ideas. And so you're sitting there really defending these ideas, because you think for sure, the Buddha's wrong here, Lama Tsongkhapa is wrong, and you're all behind the outsiders. And that's the value of debate, because when you debate it, you start seeing where your reasoning is off-base. Or, if you can prove it, then fine, great. In ancient India, this is what they did. They have this big debating contest. If the other guy won, you convert to his belief.

So this is really the value of debating, so that we bring up all these ideas, and instead of saying, "Oh, that's not Buddhist, I don't believe in it," we bring it up, look at it, and figure out if it's true or not true.

Sometimes you're debating points from non-Buddhist scriptures, sometimes you're debating points from Buddhist scriptures of the lower philosophical schools. His Holiness said that the monks should learn more about science and Western philosophy and begin to debate that. Science is something that's developing. Those principles of science that can really be sustained, we find that they usually correspond very much with what Buddha said. And then those things from science which from year to year are changing (though the scientists are sure it's true this time), you don't want to put all your eggs in one basket.

I think even with the scientists, when I talk with my friends who are scientists, they very much have this idea, "Actually, we don't know very much. And this is kind of a scenario that looks good for right now." It's the public, or the scientists, when they're talking to lay people, who go, "These things are true." But when you find scientists talking among

themselves, they always say, “Actually we don’t really understand this.”

These vows are not to entrench us in the Mahayana camp which we’ve got to defend at all costs and not let any single doubt enter our mind. Because the whole spirit of the Buddha’s teachings is investigation and inquiry.

So we have been talking about the bodhisattva vows, and we’ve been doing the ones particularly concerning the far-reaching attitude of wisdom. We have talked about different things to avoid, such as abandoning the scriptures, thinking that the paths of the Theravada are unnecessary for one following the Mahayana, exerting effort principally in another system of practice while neglecting the one one already has (the Mahayana practice), and without a good reason, exerting effort to learn or practice the treatises of non-Buddhists (that are not proper objects of one’s endeavor). If you study different philosophies which are not Buddhist, with the idea that they help you develop your wisdom because you can come to debate their points and see where the holes in their philosophies are and so on, it’s perfectly all right to do that.

**Review of Auxiliary vow 30: (To abandon)  
Beginning to favor and take delight in the treatises  
of non-Buddhists although studying them for a  
good reason**

This next one follows up upon that, about beginning to favor and take delight in those treatises even



though you are studying them for a good reason. So again, it's not about trying to limit ourselves to just what's Buddhist. These are set up so as to have warning bells go off in our mind if we feel like we're beginning to get too interested or too involved in some other philosophy that before we thought maybe wasn't so worthwhile. But if our mind is all of a sudden starting to get really entranced in New Age bliss, "spaciousness", "we're all oneness and part of the big self" stuff, then this kind of vow sets off the alarm and we ask ourselves, "Why am I studying this? Am I beginning to favor it because I think it's really true? Or am I just getting enchanted with the language? What is really going on?" And we begin to see if that kind of study is helping our practice or if it is becoming a distraction. The main thing is to understand reality and the vow is to help us get to that understanding.

**Auxiliary vow 31: (To abandon) Abandoning any part of the Mahayana by thinking it is uninteresting or unpleasant**

In one of the root vows, we had: Abandoning the Mahayana by, like saying, "It's so difficult. These bodhisattva practices, they're too difficult. I'm sure the Buddha didn't teach them." That was when we had it in the root vow, we're abandoning the Mahayana by saying it's not the Buddha's teachings.

Here what it's saying is that you're reading Mahayana scriptures and you think, "Oh, this writing style is really awful. They aren't written very well. They're unclear." Or "This is really boring. This

practice is really stupid. It has nothing to do with me.” And so this vow is about the general disdaining of the Mahayana practice.

This is something to be aware of in that it can very easily lead us to sectarianism if we get involved with putting down different aspects of the Mahayana. In each Buddhist tradition, certain sutras are emphasized. One tradition emphasizes the Amitabha sutras, another one emphasizes the Prajnaparamita sutras, while yet another one emphasizes something else. If you begin to criticize a sutra just because one of the sutras is not your favorite one, or you don't understand it so well, or it's not the one of interest, then it can very easily degenerate into sectarianism. So to realize that the Buddha taught all these different teachings, and if we have an open mind and a correct understanding, we can understand where they're all getting at, and where they're coming from, and how they can really help our practice.

There is still this tremendous amount of debate over the meaning of the Buddha's scriptures. So you'll find, when you talk about the Mahayana philosophical tenets, you have the Cittamatra and you have the Madhyamika, and each of those have different subdivisions, from ancient India where they divided into different philosophical schools. And the teachings of these schools are all within the Mahayana scriptures, the basis of them all. And there's tremendous amount of debate between them. The Madhyamikas are saying to the Cittamatrins, “Oh, you're too extreme, you're negating external phenomena.” And the Cittamatrins are saying, “Oh, you Madhyamikas, you're nihilists.”

So there's a lot of debate going on. And it's really good. It's really healthy. Because the whole purpose of doing that is to get us to think. To think what is really true. And what's going on here? What do I believe in? So all these vows about not casting aspersions and putting things down do not mean that we're not allowed to debate and question. What we're getting at is, when you debate, when you question, when you say to somebody, "That just doesn't make any sense," and you give your reasons and they give their reasons, then that's quite good and it's really helpful for people. And you're all doing it with the motivation of developing your wisdom.

This vow is referring to one being narrow-minded or prejudiced: "Well, this doesn't suit my fancy. This doesn't make me feel good. I don't find it amusing and entertaining. Therefore I'm going to put it down." So you see that's a different mental space? As opposed to when there's a lot of debate, and it's really fun and done in very good spirits. It's not like criticizing without a very good reason.

### **Auxiliary vow 32: (To abandon) Praising oneself or belittling others because of pride, anger and so on**

So again we had one similar to this in the root vows, which is praising oneself and belittling others. And that one was out of attachment to material possessions and reputation. So that's the motivation in the root vow. Here in the auxiliary vow, it's the same action but motivated by pride, or anger. Again, the vow is about feeling proud and so praising ourselves and putting other people down. Or feeling angry and

jealous of other people and so praising ourselves and putting them down.

It's interesting to notice that this one comes under the perfection of wisdom. In other words, this is really emphasizing that when we get into that behavior, with a very proud mind, it inhibits the growth of our own wisdom. It's so interesting because often when we get proud and we're praising ourselves and putting others down, we're doing it in an attempt to make ourselves look really good and really wise. And what Buddhism is saying is that it actually backfires and produces the exact opposite result because it becomes an obstacle to the development of our wisdom. As soon as we start thinking that we're really top stuff and we know it all, it becomes very difficult to learn anything. I think that's why people like His Holiness the Dalai Lama are just tremendous examples for us because their example of humility and their willingness to listen open-mindedly to others is incredible.

### **Auxiliary vow 33: (To abandon) Not going to Dharma gatherings or teachings**

When there's somebody who is a qualified teacher, it's a good teaching, and you're well, there's no reason for you not to go except you're lazy, that's where this one applies. So this does not mean that every time there's a Dharma teacher in town, or anybody who calls themselves a Dharma teacher, you need to run around and take every teaching and take every initiation. It's not saying that. You have to be discriminating and know who you consider your teacher and what level of practices to get involved in.

But this vow applies when we know somebody is a good teacher, they're already one of your teachers, you know it's the level of practice, either a teaching, or a puja, or a debate session, or a discussion group, and instead of taking part in it, we just feel lazy. We'd much rather just sit at home and eat a McDonald hamburger and watch TV.

Again this vow is not saying, "You must go to every Dharma activity!" Because we take it as, "Oh-oh, big Daddy looking down at me!" That's not what it is. This vow is really made as a way of preventing us from getting distracted. Because if we have foremost in our mind that it's important to go to Dharma activities, either teachings or discussions or practice sessions, and we know that it's important for our own practice, because that's how we're going to progress, then when we see ourselves start to take out our book of 5,399 excuses and thumb through it to see which one we're going to use tonight, we say, "Oh oh, wait a minute, hold on, Buddha said beware of this one." This is where awareness of the vows comes in very handy.

Or out of pride, thinking, "Oh, I've heard this teaching before." You often hear people say that. "I've heard Lamrim before. I don't need to go. I want something new and interesting." Yet when you go to India you watch all these very high lamas who teach Lamrim, they go when His Holiness teaches. And they listen to Precious Human Life, to Death and Impermanence, and Refuge, and Karma—the very basic teachings they listen to, again and again and again. But we hear something once and we say, "Oh, I know that one already. Give me something new and

exciting.” So a kind of proud mind that just wants to be entertained. Or a mind that’s just very lazy and doesn’t want to exert itself in any kind of way. We’re the one who suffers from it. It doesn’t make others suffer. It basically acts as a big impediment to our own practice. That’s why again I encourage people to get together and to discuss the teachings, to continue the sessions when I’m not here. You learn so much from these discussions.

I got a letter from a student in Singapore and she’s doing a Lamrim course in Singapore. I was telling Venerable Sangye Khadro and so she started doing something similar there. She gives some tests. [laughter and exclamations from audience.] Yeah, she does, she gives some tests and they get a certificate at the end. But anyway, this student was writing to me, because Venerable Sangye Khadro does it where they have scheduled discussion groups in the teaching. And she wrote and said that she finds the discussion groups incredibly beneficial. Because some things that she never would have thought of, or considered, came up in the discussions that really made her think. And it’s true.

I got another letter from another student in Singapore. And she was writing that she was at another temple in Malaysia when some Westerners came up to her to ask about the different statues on the altar. And all of a sudden she felt very ashamed because she didn’t know who they are or what the symbolism was. Unless somebody puts a question to you, you don’t realize what you don’t know. And so that’s why the discussion groups are just so important, because these kinds of things come up, and it makes

us think about things we've never thought of before. That really increase our knowledge because we have to do some research.

**Auxiliary vow 34: (To abandon) Despising the spiritual master or the meaning of the teachings and relying instead on their mere words; that is, if a teacher does not express him/herself well, not trying to understand the meaning of what he/she says, but criticizing**

You go to somebody's teaching, and they kind of teach in a very traditional style, or they read from the scriptures, they're giving you a Dharma talk like this, or they don't crack any jokes, or they speak in a monotone, something like this. And instead of looking at the meaning of the teaching and what's being spoken, you say, "This is stupid! This person is just an ignoramus. They don't know what they're talking about. They don't speak well." Criticizing in this way.

And so again, this is our difficulty. Our problem. We're missing a big opportunity. People might be incredible teachers and very, very wise, but because their delivery is not up to our standard, we just get fed up and leave. And we criticize. And then we lose out on the teachings there.

What this one is really emphasizing, is when somebody speaks, try and understand the meaning of what they're saying, and not just merely the words. And not just evaluating something by whether it happens to be entertaining and the person is a good speaker. This is really something for the West because in the West, people want to be entertained during

teachings. You have to be an incredible orator, crack jokes at the right time, and whatever. You have to compete with the TV. I don't know how many flashy, gimmicky things you have to do to keep them tuned in to your TV. They did some research. You have to have violence every so often to keep the audience interested, so what do you do with the Dharma teaching? No violence, no sex, how do you keep their interest?

So this is really something to be made aware of. I look at the situation now and it's so different from that when I studied back then. When I went to Nepal, we were studying and we had one Geshe who's an incredible teacher but he taught in Tibetan. The translator wasn't very good. We would sit there and write down word for word what the translator said, even though the sentences didn't make any sense. And then in the evening we would get together and try and make sentences out of what he said. And figure out what the Geshe was really saying. So it was like the English words weren't even clear. We had to piece together the words.

And there was hardly anything published in English. But whatever there was, we would try and look through and figure out what was being said. Because the translator would use one term—it didn't make any sense. But if we could find out what teaching it was in a book, and use another word, it might begin to make sense. And we get this week after week, month after month, going through a translator and then trying to piece it together afterwards. This is just to get the words, let alone trying to understand the meaning. And one of my



friends, years later, he said to me, “I don’t know how we actually stuck it out.” Because by this time he was living and teaching in Hong Kong and he said, all the people who come to hear, they wouldn’t put up with this. So we were thinking it’s like some very special karma just sitting hour after hour listening in this way and trying to figure out what was going on.

Nowadays, it’s a completely different ball game. You have things in English. You have good translators, or you have people speaking directly in English. You have books. Everybody tries to be really humorous, and give it Western style. I learned with all the Tibetan stories. And it is hard to figure out the meaning of some of these stories. You just sit there and you listen and you try and get from it what you can. It really took some effort.

So the vow is just saying to approach teachings with a good motivation and try and learn what you can instead of having the idea of wanting amusement and entertainment and wanting it to be tailor-made for your own particular style.

*[Audience:] Did people volunteer to help Rinpoche with his teaching style?*

Oh yeah, people have wanted to give him elocution lessons. So many people have volunteered. Rinpoche didn’t believe in it [laughter]. So that’s a good example. Rinpoche is an incredible teacher. But you have to have that kind of patience to learn to put the sentences together, and understand why he’s repeating things so much, and be able to ignore all the coughing. Actually it was so interesting, because

when he was speaking here, he was going [soft coughing sound] a lot, which was actually very good. Because when he was having lunch, he was coughing and he would cough so loud that it actually hurt my ears. So when he was teaching he was just going [soft coughing], I thought it was fantastic. But many people came up to me afterwards and said, “Oh why does he go [soft coughing] during teaching?” But it was different as many people were concerned for his health.

*[Audience:] What was Lama Yeshe’s teaching style like?*

Lama Yeshe didn’t cough, but sometimes Lama’s English is just really far out. He couldn’t say “f”, so it all came out as “p”, so everything was “pantastic” [Laughter.]. And again the sentence structure, because Lama never studied English, but he wanted to communicate with us. It makes you listen more acutely in order to put it together.

Again the reason that this is under the wisdom section is saying that when we become picky, choosy like that, and don’t try and understand the meaning, but just wanting to be entertained, then we inhibit our own learning, hindering our own wisdom.

## **AUXILIARY VOWS 35–46: ELIMINATING OBSTACLES TO THE ETHICS OF BENEFITING OTHERS**

Now, the rest of the bodhisattva vows here are about the ethics of benefiting others. There’re three kinds of

ethics, and one of them is the ethics of benefiting others. All the remaining vows come under this. There's so much to talk about. And I'm thinking of having discussion groups to go into these quite a bit, because they relate very much to our daily life and figuring out how to practice these.

### **Auxiliary vow 35: (To abandon) Not helping those who are in need**

What it's saying is, when somebody needs something, help them. Unless of course, we're sick, or we don't have the skills, or we're incapable, or we're doing something else that's more important or more virtuous. So it doesn't mean that every time somebody needs something, you drop whatever you're doing and go do it. Because obviously if you're sick, if you're doing something else more important or if you don't have the skills or the materials, then that's a completely different ball game.

What this is really hitting at is again, the lazy mind, or the procrastinating mind, the miserly mind that doesn't want to share. So it's saying that in many different situations when people need things, to try and help them. For example, if people need a traveling companion, if they're going somewhere and it's dangerous and they need a traveling companion to go with, and we're not doing anything else, and we're capable of doing it, and so on, then we should do that. Of course if you're about to sit down and meditate or you have something very, very important to do, or it's in the middle of your work schedule or whatever, then obviously you can't. But when we have the ability to,

and somebody wants a companion because it's dangerous, then we can go with them.

Or if somebody needs employment, and if we have the ability to, we should employ them. Or if they ask you to guard their property, to keep something for them, to watch their things, when you're traveling a lot, and take turns watching each other's stuff, or house-sitting, or watching their kids, or whatever. If we have the ability and the time, then to do that. If people are quarrelling, and they're in need of somebody to help mediate, then again, try to do that. There're several other examples here. Somebody is doing some useful work, some kind of purposeful work that's definitely benefiting and they ask you for help, and then because you're lazy, or you're bored, or it doesn't give you enough fame, and excitement, or they're not going to take you out to lunch afterwards, you refuse. If somebody is doing something useful and they ask for some help, then try and help them.

Again, if somebody is making a journey or if they ask you for protection and due to laziness, you refuse. If somebody needs help learning a language, and they ask for help, we have the ability to help them learn a language, but we refuse. Or somebody ask for Dharma teachings, and out of laziness, we refuse. Also, if somebody asks us to protect their possessions, to take care of their things, and we refuse.

Or if somebody invites us for a meal, not because they want to waste our time but because they wish to make an offering out of respect for us as a Dharma practitioner, then we try and accept that, rather than not going because we're proud, or whatever. Again

this doesn't mean every time somebody ask you to something, you have to go. This is referring specifically to the case where somebody is inviting you, a Dharma practitioner, so that they get the opportunity to create merit, and you don't accept. This isn't saying when somebody invites you to a party, it's a good excuse not to meditate, so you accept because of that. It's not talking about that.

Or somebody who is visiting our country, who doesn't speak English need some help getting around. They need to know where the buses are, or how to do things. So help them. And this is something that, having traveled a lot, I appreciate so much. Sometimes people would go so out of their way to make sure you got on the right bus or turned at the right street. Or found the restaurant or the hotel. And you just feel so grateful, because when you're in another country, you don't speak the language, you don't know your way around, you're so lost. You feel really vulnerable. You meet somebody, and you ask directions, and if they're rude to you, it just makes you feel completely out of it. So when somebody is kind, your heart really opens up.

I think sometimes those of us in America aren't aware of what that's like, either because we don't travel very much outside of our own country, or if we travel, we only go to places where people speak English. So we don't know what it's like for travelers in our country, for newly-arrived immigrants, for people from Southeast Asia—there's a huge rush in population in Seattle. They're people who don't speak English, who don't know the custom, who don't know how to get around, and just so many of these small

activities that we do, even just meeting them on the street or in informal occasions, can be really beneficial for those people. But if we figure, “Oh, this guy doesn’t know English. What kind of idiot are they? They don’t speak English. Who are they?”, as people sometimes get towards the Hispanics, or whatever, it’s so devastating to these people. Once you’re in a foreign country and you have that happening to you, you really know what it’s like.

So as much as we can, be kind to travelers. Helping them, showing them around, try explaining things to them. And that includes, of course, when new people enter the group. New people come to the temple or a Buddhist gathering. To recognize that they feel like strangers, that they feel lost, and to help as much as we can.

It is so interesting. Somebody asked and you can tell the teaching was obviously given in India: “Do we have to give to all the beggars?” Notice the wording of this question, “Do we have to give to all the beggars?” And this is typically Western. It’s like, we want to know what to do and what not to do, and we’re completely forgetting about the mind and the motivation behind it. It’s like “Do I have to give to all the beggars?” And if you say, “Yes”, then okay, I’ll do it. If you say “No”, that’s even better, I can keep some myself. But it’s not even looking at the mind. And that’s the whole thing here. It’s to cultivate the mind. Cultivate the attitudes. And with that, go and relate to the world.

So anyway, the way this particular lama replied was, “No, you don’t have to give to them all. If they’re really sick, missing limbs, or whatever, then

it's very good. If it's something that's just going to increase their own greed—you give to them today and then tomorrow they're back asking more and more and more—then it's not really beneficial for them.” So again, it's the kind of situation where we need to look and see. If somebody is asking for money because they want to buy booze or whatever, then I don't think it's so wise to give. Or you sometimes go into these gas stations and people come with this story that they ran out of gas and they need five dollars, and you know very well that they're not going to use it for gas, then I don't think it's so wise to give. Or if you really want to give, buy the gas and put it in their tank, so you know it's going for that.

But generally in our life, when people ask us for help, if we have the time, and the ability, and the resources, and there's nothing else more important or more virtuous going on, to really see other people asking us for help as an opportunity instead of as a burden. So instead of, “I *have to* help somebody move house,” it's “Do I get to offer service to somebody who has been kind to me?” Instead of “Do I *have to* clean up?”, it's “Do I get to offer service to help other people?” So really transforming the mind whenever we're asked for help. And instead of jumping back into our excuse book to try and find an excuse, to assess the situation and transform our mind and say, “Yes, this is an opportunity to repay their kindness and I'm going to do it, and in doing so I am also accumulating a vast amount of positive potential if I do it with a bodhicitta motivation. So it's something worthwhile doing, not just for others, but also for myself, for my spiritual practice.”

Instead of looking at things in very narrow ways if somebody asks for help: “This is two hours of my Saturday afternoon that I have to give up,” recognize that your own spiritual progress depends on creating a lot of positive potential. And positive potential is generated by having a good motivation and acting on that, in ways that serve others. So it is trying to take joy in those things.

*[Audience:] Should I look and see when I give money where it will be used?*

You don’t want to get into this whole thing of every time you give somebody something, “Give me the receipts for what you buy”. But if you think that something is going to be misused, then it’s not to that person’s benefit to give them something.

*[Audience:] What if I know that drinking is the other person’s only pleasure in life, should I still give the money for a drink?*

I’m sorry. I don’t buy that. Really, I don’t buy that. I don’t buy that drinking is the only pleasure that somebody can get in life, and so it’s good to support that habit. I think it’s just as well to give him a granola bar. Or give him an apple. Or give him a pizza bread. I’m sure they get happiness from that.

*[Audience:] But I am not able to change that person?*

You’re not going to change them but you don’t need to contribute to it. I mean I’m not going to stop the



sale of weapons in America, but if somebody is asking me for money at a gas station, and I feel that they look like a sleazy guy and they might go and buy a gun with the money that I gave them, and use that gun at somebody, I don't feel any need to support them.

*[Audience:] Should I give based on what will make the other happy?*

You have to have a big view what happiness is. Happiness is not what makes you feel good at this present moment. Remember all the teachings on karma? Remember all these teachings about the four noble truths? There are two kinds of happiness. There's the temporal happiness, and there's the long term happiness. Temporal happiness is here and it's gone [Ven. Chodron snapping her fingers]. It's here and it's gone. If, in giving somebody temporal happiness, you're going to make them have long-term suffering, then it's of no benefit to them.

That's why they always say if something is for the long-term good and the short-term good, do it. Even if it creates some problems, it's still good to do. When we say long term, it means karma, thinking about the karmic result. If something is for the short term, it makes you feel good, but long term, it's harmful, don't do it. If you're doing something that's going to create negative karma, or induce somebody else to create negative karma, they might think that they're getting a lot of happiness, but it's harmful in the long term. Somebody finds happiness by robbing somebody else's house, does that mean that I'm going to give them happiness by helping them rob the

house?

So in other words, we shouldn't just look at what people say brings them happiness. Look at our own lives. Samsara is a dysfunctional relationship. And we do so many things that are totally unproductive. Things that are self-destructive. Does that help us? It makes us feel good in the moment. Does that help us in the long run? It doesn't help us. So real friends aren't people who just help you feel good in the present moment. Real friends are the people who are going to help you get your life together. When somebody likes to eat pizza and somebody likes Chinese food, then we definitely don't need to get judgmental and make sure they eat exactly what we like. Because that kind of thing is really neutral. But if it's something where the behavior can be detrimental to many other people, then it's not good to encourage that.

*[Audience:] How can I be truly sure that the help I give will be for the long term good?*

I think a lot of it is trial and error and in what you were doing, in every situation, just being aware of what's going on. Just being aware of what's going on in your mind and your own limitations. And the thing is that it's not like there's one clear, right answer in every situation.

*[Audience:] I think that we can't always be sure how the help we give will turn out. Would Venerable like to speak more about this?*

I think you're right. We can't know exactly what everybody's going to do. The basic thing is to deal with the situation at hand. But to deal with it in a way that we don't cause more harm. And that's why we don't want to have idiot compassion. So what I'm getting at is avoiding idiot compassion. Of course we can't know all the conditions in any situation. We can't know whether these kids are going to give the money to their parents, and what their parents are going to do with it. How are we supposed to know? Whether our nickel goes to buy them an apple or our nickel goes to something else—we don't know. So we have to have a good heart and do what seems to be the wisest thing. But what I'm getting at is situations in which “helping” actually increases harm. Then we shouldn't help.

*[Audience:] Should I give with a motivation that in future I will be able to give them the Dharma?*

It's true. Whenever you give, if you can give with the thought, “And may I eventually give them the Dharma.” Because the Dharma is the thing that's really going to help people. There's a big difference between giving politely and just throwing things at people which happens a lot of time in India. That's so humiliating. In the East, it's the custom that when you give, you give with both hands. Your whole being is involved with that giving.

*[Audience:] Are you saying that what is important in giving is our motivation?*

What I'm getting at is what's really important is your motivation. But when we have the things and we're able to give, we shouldn't just say to ourselves, "Well, I really don't have to give, it's just my motivation."

*[Audience:] What do I do if my mind is confused about whether to give?*

What do I do then? When I get into those situations and my mind is confused, what do I do? The basic thing is that I'm not willing to look at that person as a human being. I'm just looking at the situation and how to get them away from me as soon as possible and make myself still feel okay about myself. That's the basic thing that's going on when I get stuck. And so I think the thing at that point is just to not worry about what I'm doing, whether I give or whether I don't give, but be able to just stop for a minute and say, "This is a human being." And we should be able to look at that person with respect as you do with any other human being. And I find actually that's the thing that I need to do in those times when our mind goes, "What do I do?"

### **Auxiliary vow 36: (To abandon) Avoiding taking care of the sick**

Again, there are exceptions. If we're sick ourselves, if we don't have the medicine, if we're busy doing something that's more important, we don't have the skills, or whatever, then if we do not help the sick, that's okay. But here, the thing is when somebody is sick, to try and assess what they need and help them

as much as possible. People who are sick have different needs. Some people need medicine, some people need help in their house, some people may need you to help spiritually, some people need you to run an errand, and things like that. For example, I know a number of people are going to this one man who has aids, reading to him and things like that. You know you shouldn't just think, "Oh, I was only called in here just to read the book and to give spiritual help. But meanwhile, he needs some food. I'm sorry, that isn't my job. Somebody else is supposed to do that."

When we're with somebody who's sick, to try and tune in to see what it is they need. Because often they need something really practical. And sometimes they need something spiritual. Sometimes they need material things. And so to try and tune in, rather than go in with our agenda. And especially when you're trying to help somebody spiritually, it's so tempting, the biggest pitfall is, "I'm going to save them! I'm going to help them spiritually! Here I am. I'm going to help them spiritually." And then we put our whole agenda on them about what they should be thinking about and what they should be dealing with, who they should be talking to or what they should be saying. We have our whole agenda of how to run their life. And instead of going in where we're trying to help, we go in with our idea of how we want the session to go, then we're basically just trying to make the sick person do what we want them to do. Instead of going in just with an attitude of offering help and what they need at this particular moment.

If we don't help out of anger, or arrogance, or miserliness, or laziness, then it becomes a downfall.

So again, with people who are sick, they need all sorts of different things. Because we know sometimes if we are sick, maybe you need somebody to bring you some food. Maybe you need somebody to do the house-cleaning. Or maybe you need somebody to do an errand outside. Whatever. We know what it's like when we're sick. So just to recognize that for other people, they may have an idea what they want done first, what is the most important thing on their mind. And that's what needs to be done first.

I think we'll stop here.

### **Review of auxiliary vow 35: (to abandon) not helping those who are in need**

We've been discussing the bodhisattva practices. Particularly here the bodhisattva vows act as guidelines that help us steer our energy in a proper direction in this life so that we can really act for the benefit of others. This last group of precepts from Number 35 to 46 is specifically to eliminate obstacles to the ethics of benefiting others. We have talked about the first couple of those: Not helping those who are in need. In other words, when people need things, to help them. And not make up our lazy excuses like finding ten million other "better" things, i.e. more pleasant things that I want to do, as excuses why we can't do it.

### **Review of auxiliary vow 36: (to abandon) avoiding taking care of the sick**

Often we avoid taking care of the sick not only

because it's too much trouble and we're lazy, but because somehow their illness reminds us of our own mortality. And because we don't want to look at our own mortality and look at the essence of our own life, and at the transience of cyclic existence, we just want to avoid people who are sick. Basically it is a way of avoiding a part of our own experience, which is that we have a body that will get old and sick and die.

So when we find ourselves in situations where our mind is avoiding taking care of the sick, instead of building up lots of defenses and excuses and reasons why we can't, we can sit down on our cushion, and look at what's going on in our mind and be honest with ourselves. Because if we can tap into that fear of suffering that we have ourselves and acknowledge it, then it ceases to be so terrifying and so fearful. And if at the same time, we think about the four noble truths, we recognize that this is the nature of cyclic existence. And recognizing exactly this gives juice and energy to our practice. Instead of being overwhelmed by that fear, we can really energize our practice. Because this shows us how important it is to follow the three higher trainings, to purify our minds and gain the realizations that will lead to liberation and enlightenment. But we can't transform it if we can't acknowledge it, if we can't face it. That's why when we feel that resistance in ourselves, when we don't want to go near sick people or take care of them, we need to look at what's really going on in our minds.

**Auxiliary vow 37: (To abandon) Not alleviating the suffering of others**

People have suffering, problems or difficulties of one kind or another. They might have physical difficulties. They might be blind or deaf or paralyzed, have mental difficulty either in terms of retardation or different mental illnesses. They may have economic difficulties, or social difficulties. They may be looked down upon. They may have lost their jobs. They may have lost their social status. Maybe their family has been shamed by the whole community. Or a scandal has broken out. People suffer from an incredible number of different things. Either being abused by others or they suffer from their own guilty conscious from having abused others. Or people live in fear and suspicion and paranoia. There are many different kinds of suffering. And so, whenever we can, if we have the skills and the ability, we can help. Of course, this precept is not saying that we have to become Mr. or Miss Fix-it. Keeping bodhisattva precepts does not mean that we then get into our American habit of “Let’s fix everything.”

It’s real interesting when you come back here after living abroad. We have this idea in this country, “Oh, I’m sorry. Problems just shouldn’t exist! I’ve got to get in there and fix the situation! It can’t be like this. I’m going to go in there. I’m going to raise all hell and we’re going to fix it and it’s going to be all okay from now on. Amen.” We have this attitude. It’s like we feel that if we don’t have this attitude, then we’re completely lazy. So we vacillate between these two extremes of “I’m going to fix everybody else’s problems” (even though I can’t even fix my own, and I don’t understand theirs, but that’s beside the point, I’m still going to fix it!), or we fall into the other



extreme of total despair: “I can’t do anything. The whole world’s screwed!”

We vacillate between these two extremes. I think what Buddhism is saying here is as much as possible try to alleviate the suffering of others with wisdom. And just go slowly. Look at the situation. What really is the suffering? What is the cause of the suffering? What actually is the remedy to it? Because sometimes we fix the external symptoms but we don’t change the root cause. Sometimes all we can do is fix the external symptoms. Sometimes we make it worse by fixing the symptom and not looking at the cause. So we have to really go slow and assess things. And recognize that we can’t march into something and create a new world order. It just shows so clearly in our national policy, doesn’t it? “We’re going to create the new world order.” We don’t ask other countries for input on what they like that new world order to be. We just go in there and we want to fix it. And in the course of it, we had several blunders along the way.

So acting to remove the suffering of others is a different kind of attitude than just fixing problems because we can’t endure them. It’s really understanding what’s going on. Having some kind of understanding that goes together with the compassion that will see the possibilities of the situation. And recognize that often, changing something requires an incredible amount of time. That it isn’t a matter of making a new law or giving somebody a loan, or setting up a new school that’s going to change all the problems in the community or in somebody’s life. But it’s going to take time and support from many different directions. But here, what this vow is

referring to is, if we're capable of it, if we have the time, (in other words, we're not doing anything that's crucial and more important), if we have the resources, then without falling prey to laziness or pride or anger, we give the help that we can give.

Sometimes, like if we have a grudge against somebody, when they want help, we say, "Oh, I'm sorry, I can't do that." We feel so good we have our pet little excuse why we can't help somebody who has once slighted us. That kind of thing would be a transgression of this guideline.

### **Auxiliary vow 38: (To abandon) Not explaining what is proper conduct to those who are reckless**

This is when people don't understand what is ethical behavior, or what is unethical behavior. When people don't understand what is conducive and beneficial for happiness and what isn't, try to help them as much as we can.

In a previous precept, in Number 16, we have "(To abandon) Not correcting one's own deluded actions or not helping others to correct theirs". There seems to be some similarity between that one and this one. Again, different teachers have different ways of interpreting the difference between these two. One teacher says that Number 16 is referring to correcting people's afflictions and pointing those out to people, whereas Number 38 is concerned more with their external behavior. Another lama has a different take on it and says that Number 16 is more concerned with specific, really heavy actions that somebody is doing that causes suffering, whereas Number 38 is more just

reckless actions that don't cause that much severe suffering but do create minor problems and chaos.

My own feeling about the wording of the vows is that Number 16 is referring again to things that a person is doing, whereas Number 38 is referring to when people don't even know what is beneficial and not beneficial. And here, I think of guiding the young people, children and adolescents. This vow isn't just going in and jumping in and telling people how to run their lives, or giving unwanted advice, but it's rather thinking how to communicate this with people.

What is a good way to give people advice so that they can use it to reflect on their own actions and improve themselves? This is hard in the West, especially here. Look at our own minds. We don't like anybody to tell us what to do, do we? As soon as somebody comes and tells us what to do, what do we do? We say, "Who are you? Mind your own business! Pot calling a kettle black isn't it?"

We don't like to be told anything. We do not like even if somebody with compassion comes to us and points out some incredible gross mistake or negative karma we're doing. We don't want to listen. We get really angry and upset and defensive, telling them they're bossy and pushy and they should mind their own business.

If we act like that, and we're Dharma practitioners, then what about other people who aren't Dharma practitioners? I don't know. Maybe they act better than us! If you look, sometimes our own mind is so tough and so of course, if we're like that and we try and help others, very often in this culture, what we meet with is people with very tough minds who're

basically just like us and don't like to be told anything. So it's a very delicate thing how to explain proper conduct to those who are reckless. If it's an adult, then you really have to think of how to do it skillfully.

I asked in the Tibetan monasteries, how do they do that, like if one monastic is misbehaving. What they do is, if there is a close relationship, sometimes they just tell the person directly. And sometimes what they do is, they just talk generally to that person and say, "Oh, this person over here is doing blah, blah," kind of pointing out that behavior in another person, without pointing it out to this person, that he or she is actually doing it. Or talking in a group situation and leaving everybody to get it themselves. Or using some of the skills of assertiveness but with a lot of gentleness and really owning it ourselves. These are ways of getting it across.

So it requires a great deal of skill here. But basically we should try to avoid the mental attitude that out of apathy towards another person, or anger, or laziness, or pride, or whatever, we don't try and show them a path that is good for their own welfare. And really here for kids, I think this is essential and since kids often don't yet have the "Don't tell me how to run my life" attitude, although they generally get that way quickly if parents are a certain way. If parents let the kids run the house, what do the kids do? They rise to the occasion! But I think especially with kids, it is important to explain things to them. Why do we do this? To help children see if you do this, what's the result; and if you do that, what's the result. So that kids begin to understand and develop

their own wisdom.

Sometimes in Buddhism, we think we have become Mickey Mouse bodhisattvas and think, “I’ve just got to make everybody happy. That means I can’t discipline my kids, because whenever I discipline my kids, they become unhappy. So I’m just going to give them everything they want.” And that’s not very compassionate towards the child because then they become like us, completely spoilt and unable to function. I’m joking, by the way. [Laughter.]. But I think it’s really beneficial here to guide kids and really get them to think about things.

*[Audience:] How do we know which is a beneficial way to correct others?*

Well, sit down on our cushion and try and figure it out. Or just share the dilemma with somebody else. It depends very much on the situation and who it is, and what is going on. But sometimes it’s just helpful to share with another person about, “I’m really stuck. I look at it this way and I look at it that way. What do you think? What are other factors?” I think that’s when Dharma friends can be really helpful for us.

### **Auxiliary vow 39: (To abandon) Not benefiting in return those who have benefited oneself**

It is not repaying the kindness that other people have shown us. As somebody who’s meditating on bodhicitta, we’re trying to see all beings as having been kind to us. All beings have been our parents in previous lives. All beings do different functions in the

society and we're inter-related and they help us. So we try to repay the kindness of others because everybody has been kind to us. And again to understand what it means to repay their kindness. It doesn't always mean going around being goody-two-shoes. Sometimes we might even get completely fanatic. "How do I repay their kindness? I don't know what to do!"

We have to recognize that doing our practice is repaying the kindness of others. We shouldn't think that the only way to repay kindness is to run around and fix things. Just doing our practice and generating the altruistic intention with our practice can be a very good way of repaying the kindness of others. Because before we can do things physically and verbally to help people, we have to get our own mind clear and our own intentions clear and understand things deeply ourselves. So taking time to sit on our cushion and looking at our own mind and processing what's going on in our life and thinking about things, and discussing them with friends can be a way of repaying the kindness of others.

Another way is making prayers for people. If we can't do something, we can make prayers. We can do different virtuous practices. We might do prostrations and dedicate it for all beings, and especially for them. We might make offerings and dedicate it especially for them. Or we can do the Chenrezig practice, or request the community to do the Chenrezig practice. Repaying the kindness of others can be done in many, many ways.

Although all sentient beings have benefited us, this vow is also pointing out to us to pay special attention

to repay the kindness of people who have benefited us especially in this lifetime. That doesn't mean becoming partial to them. It doesn't mean, "These people, they're my friends and they have been kind to me this lifetime. So I'm going to repay their kindness and benefit them because they've helped me." It doesn't mean becoming partial in that way, just to the people whom we like and who have been nice to us. It's not closing our minds off to other people and just helping them. But it's reminding us not to ignore the very direct benefit that other people give us, and appreciating that. This helps us to expand, to recognize the more subtle benefits that we've received from other people who maybe we don't know in this particular lifetime. So here when we're talking about repaying the kindness of specific people who've helped us in this lifetime, it is not to make us more attached to them or to make us people-pleasers or to make us more biased towards them. But to use them as an example and then from there extend that open heart to others.

Very often the people whom we receive the most direct benefit from, because we're in such regular contact with them, we take them for granted, and we don't recognize their kindness and we don't repay their kindness because they're always around. Look at the people we live with and all those little kindnesses in the living situation—people taking out the garbage or doing the dishes or sweeping or answering the phone for us or doing any number of little things—but because we see that person all the time, we don't appreciate that kindness that they're showing.

Or, often, we forget the kindness of our relatives who have helped us—the kindness of our parents, the kindness of our teachers, or the kindness of our bosses who gave us the job, or who keep us on at the job. So be aware of the various ways in which people have really benefited us, and to take care of those people specifically and then from there, generate it out to others.

I think that this involves basic manners. One thing that I'm continually amazed at, is how people don't say thank you, or how they don't acknowledge receiving gifts. Like you give somebody something. You sent it to them. And they never write a thank-you note saying it arrived. So you're sitting there going, "Did this gift arrive or not arrive?" This is something for us to look at. When people send us things, do we write and say "Thank you"? Do we even acknowledge that they sent us some money or they sent us a Christmas present or a birthday present? I think this is incredibly important. And also for DFF as an organization. I think when people make special donations or go out of their way, it's really important for us to say "Thank you." And not just, "Oh yeah, we're all working so hard, so thanks for chipping in." Or just kind of tuning it out, "Well, it's about time you added something to the group energy." But really appreciate that we exist due to the kindness of others.

When I was a child, whenever somebody gave me something, my mother made me sit down and write a "Thank-you" note. And I'm so appreciative of her now for making me do that because it's made me so much more aware of these kinds of things. And so to really look in our life and acknowledging these things



—when a colleague works overtime for us or takes some extra added pressure off of our back, or somebody fills in for us, or watches our kids. To at least say “Thank you” and really try and repay that kindness by doing something for them.

And again often towards our parents, “It’s mum’s and dad’s job to take care of me! I’m their kid. It’s their job to take care of me. But they shouldn’t take care of me when I don’t want to be taken care of. But when I want to be taken care of, it’s their job.” And we don’t think so much about what we can do for our parents, even small things. Helping them out with this or that. Even small things can be incredible kindness.

I was so surprised. Several years ago, my mother had surgery. I went down and I saw her in the hospital because I don’t live near my folks. When it was the day to check out of the hospital, she had a few articles there and so I put them in her little bag and got them in the car. And it was amazing. I heard her afterward telling all her friends, “Oh, do you know how helpful my daughter was?” I didn’t do anything. It was some small thing but because she was sick and in the hospital and recovering from surgery, it became a big thing in her eyes. In my eyes, it’s nothing. But just to be aware of those things. When our parents or older people need just that small kind of help that we can give. So with this again, do we through anger, or laziness or not being conscientious, not repay the kindness of others?

*[Audience:] Does this vow apply only to people within the Buddhist community or others and is it our interpretation of the vows versus their*

*interpretation?*

It depends very much on the situation. There're certain things where it doesn't matter whether somebody is in the Buddhist community or not. We can give suggestions for conduct or behavior that can be helpful for them. Again it's depending very much on the relationship we have with the person and the situation. If it's something that's in terms of interpretation of vows, we can raise the issue with somebody else. If somebody else has the same precept that we do, and it seems like maybe they are doing something that isn't so right, then to raise it up and say, "Well, you know, this is kind of how I understood the vow to mean. What do you understand it to mean?" Or bringing it up in a community setting with many people to discuss what the meaning of the vow is. Or asking the teacher who gave it. It's not becoming moralistic and judgmental. If we're like that, that kind of attitude clearly shows through and it really puts people off and it generally makes them do the exact opposite. Or it makes them feel very guilty and resentful. So it's without a moralistic attitude. But you know, raise the point, raise the question and get people thinking about this.

**Auxiliary vow 40: (To abandon) Not relieving the sorrow or distress of others**

Maybe somebody is grieving because they've lost somebody that's dear to them. Maybe they have lost their job. Maybe they have had a traumatic thing happen in their life. Maybe they are refugees. People

in distress. People who are filled with sorrow and anguish. Then trying to do what we can to alleviate that.

Here, it's actually quite helpful, I think, to do some reading about social problems and stuff. I've begun to do some reading about trauma and what happens in abuse. Simply because it helps you understand where people are coming from. It helps a great deal trying to figure out what it means to console people who've had different things happen to them.

For example, somebody who's going in the hospital for surgery on cancer. It isn't necessarily consoling them to say, "Oh, everything will be perfectly all right. You will be up and out of the hospital two days after surgery." Consoling people doesn't mean lying to them. It doesn't mean being falsely optimistic. I think we can address the situation and be optimistic but also be realistic at the same time without giving people false hopes. Without saying, "Oh, I know everybody in your family died but don't worry, you'll get over it in a month and you'll be alright."

Sometimes the best way to console people is just to listen to them. Let them recount their story. And in that recounting, there can be real healing for them. And sometimes, asking questions, or guiding the recounting of their story so that they can see it in a certain way. So it's not just "I am telling my story to this person and I'm telling it to this other person, and I am telling it to the next 49 people along the street!" Because telling our story isn't necessarily healing and it can actually be creating another ego identity that we get very attached to. So sometimes in the process of consoling, we need to listen. Sometimes we need to

come in and present other viewpoints that can help people go beyond too much identification with the problem. Sometimes we can refer them to other people. Or give them books written by people who have experienced similar things to what they've experienced because often it's very helpful for people to know that other people have gone through what they're going through and have been healed from it. That can be very inspiring. So that can be a way of consoling them.

So we try to do our best. But again recognizing that it's not a thing of "Here's somebody in this incredible anguish and I'm going to come in and make it all better. I'm going to put a Band-Aid on it so they don't feel the pain." We can't even control our own emotions, let alone control somebody else's. People are going to feel what they're going to feel. But if we can give them some encouragement or give a different viewpoint, or lend an ear, then that can really help them.

But recognize that some of these things take time. And that with different people, how you console them is going to be different. Some people, you can see where they're stuck and if you have a close relationship, you can go right in there! I've seen my teacher do that sometimes in such situations. And if you have that kind of relationship, sometimes somebody might come in and go zoom! It really hurts at first. But in the end you realize it's actually right. So some situations we have to do that.

Other situations, it's more a thing of gently nudging somebody on, or giving them some support, or something like that. So what we're talking about here

isn't any specific technique, but more an awareness of the situation, "How can I console those who are distressed? How can I repay the kindness of others? How can I help alleviate suffering?" It really involves some sensitivity to each situation and some creativity in each situation.

So the section that we're now on is the bodhisattva vows. Even though some people may have taken the vows, some people may not have. Still, hearing about it is very good because even if you haven't taken them, it gives you a lot of practical information to use in your daily life, and a good framework to help us discriminate what's a positive action, what's a negative action.

### **Review of vows 35–40**

I think we're on vow number 39, but I thought I would just start with 35 again and do a little bit of review, because this whole last section, vows 35 to 46, is to eliminate obstacles for practicing the ethics of being of benefit to others, and so it is really quite applicable to our daily life. Like I said, whether or not you've taken the vows, these are things that are really good to bear in mind in your life.

### **Review of auxiliary vow 35: (to abandon) not helping those who are in need**

So, number 35, which is the first vow in this last section on the ethics of benefiting others. These are all things that we're supposed to avoid. Here, the

thing to avoid is: Not helping those who are in need.

People who are in need: it could be that they have physical needs—may be food and clothing, it could be a traveler who needs help, or somebody who doesn't speak the language and needs language assistance, somebody who's lost and doesn't know where they're going, somebody who's organizing a big conference and needs help, etc. So there could be lots of people who are in need of help. This precept is to help us to open our minds and hearts to help those who are in need. Sometimes, we wait until we're asked for help. But if we can clearly see that somebody needs help, we can just right away give it without being asked. The thing to abandon is the kind of lazy mind that says, "Well, there're so many other things to do. And actually, they don't really need my help. If they'd wanted my help, they would ask. I'll just be getting in the way and they'll resent me if I offer to help. So I think I'll lie down and take a nap instead." That's not the way to think. This vow's to avoid that kind of lazy, rationalizing mind that doesn't want to get involved with other people when we can clearly see their need.

This last batch of vows here is talking about engaging with others, but of course it has to be seen in perspective. If you're sick, then you don't go out and help in a hospital. If you're doing something that's quite important already, you don't cut that short to do something that's less important. Or somebody asks for your help, and you don't have the skills necessary to help, then it's better to explain rather than say "Yes" and then not deliver. So all of these precepts have to be tempered with some kind of reasonableness in our life too. It doesn't mean that any time that anybody

needs help, no matter what else is going on, you drop it and then go do that. It depends on the situation.

### **Review of auxiliary vow 36: (to abandon) avoiding taking care of the sick**

It could be somebody at home who is sick, we don't want to go near them. Or a relative who is suffering, we don't want to see it. Their pain frightens us, and so we don't go to the hospital to visit them. We don't call and find out how they are, or if we go, we get out as soon as we possibly can because their suffering makes us quite jittery because in actual fact it reminds us of our own mortality.

Rather than just avoiding taking care of the sick, if we can, we should offer the services necessary, whatever it is that they need. And if it's bringing up some kind of fear or apprehension within us, then to take some time out and look at what's coming up inside of us and then do some of the meditation on loving kindness so that we can overcome that. Because when we feel repulsed by people who are suffering, we're very much locked into the view of "me". And it's so funny: we're repulsed by their suffering, and we suffer so much from it, but actually we're completely well and everything is okay, and they're the ones who're suffering. But the mind creates this kind of tightness. So it's really good spending some time meditating on compassion, and especially putting ourselves in the shoes of the people who are suffering so that we can feel for them.

### **Review of auxiliary vow 37: (to abandon) not**

## **alleviating the sufferings of others**

So again, if somebody is having great difficulty—physical problems, mental problems, or whatever. Maybe they're distressed, they're suicidal, they're paranoid, maybe they're just lonely—to try and do whatever we can to alleviate the suffering. Now it doesn't mean that we're always going to be successful, because being a bodhisattva doesn't mean that you have a 100% success rate with everybody that you try and help, because anyway what is success? It's really hard to know sometimes. So rather, from the bodhisattva perspective, it's eliminating the obstacles that we have of being of service to others, without expecting that everything we do is going to cure the world's problems and everybody is going to come to us and say, "Oh, you're so kind. You helped me so much. Thank you so much." And so without that kind of expectation, doing whatever we can to alleviate the suffering of others.

As we know, there's lots of suffering in this world. We don't need to look too far for it: there's the very gross sufferings, and then there's more subtle sufferings. In poorer countries, you have more physical suffering. In rich countries, like in this place, you have a lot of mental suffering. We have mental suffering here that people in poor countries couldn't even dream of. So there're lots of different ways of suffering, even though there's really not a lot of difference between us and them. We want to be happy, they want to be happy with the same intensity. We want to be free of suffering, they want to be free



of suffering with the same intensity. If we have this sense of equality, then helping others isn't a big burden, it's just something that's quite natural.

And I think that another thing that would really help us to overcome our obstacles to helping others is to lose some of our individualism. Now I know this may sound unfamiliar to you; you might try me for having a conspiracy to overthrow the constitution if I talk about the disadvantages of individualism. But if we get too locked into our individualism, we focus only on the pain within us. In other societies, in other cultures, people's identity is much more bound up with the group: people automatically think of the welfare of the group more than what they feel like individually. So if we can slowly expand our mind, we can start recognizing that the boundary between self and others is not that big. Of course we still have our individuality, there's nothing wrong with that, but this real tight mind that's always so concerned about "*me*": "Am *I* doing the best things for *me*?", "Am *I* actualizing *my* potential?", "Is anybody taking advantage of *me*?" "What are *my* hidden talents?", we should learn to let go of that.

### **Review of auxiliary vow 38: (to abandon) not explaining what is proper conduct to those who are reckless**

People who are engaged in doing harmful actions, if we can, it's really good if we can correct their behavior or give them some extra information to help them rethink what they're doing. But if we're too lazy, and we don't care about them, that means: if

they're harming other people and we don't care about the people they're harming; if they're harming themselves and we don't care. In other words, basically, out of our own ill-will, our own laziness, we are not trying to provide them with other ways of acting, other means of behavior, then that would be a break of this particular precept.

Again, it doesn't mean that we go around meddling in other people's business. It doesn't mean saying to people: "You don't have proper conduct, so I'm going to tell you how to act." Keeping our little antenna up for any small error that somebody makes. It doesn't mean that. It doesn't mean minding other people's business. But when we see people making quite gross mistakes in their lives: you see a friend who starts to drink too much, or you see one of your Dharma friends who stops their daily practice, or you see somebody who's getting angry quite a bit, or who is about to get involved in an illegal business deal, or something like that. Or somebody who's being quite cruel to their family members. These kinds of situations, if we can discuss it with this person, not give them orders, but help give them more information, help give them alternative ways to handle whatever difficulty they're having so that they don't act in ways that are harmful to other beings.

So those are the ones that we did before.

**Review of auxiliary vow 39: (to abandon) not benefiting in return whose who have benefited oneself**

This refers to not repaying others' kindness. Generally

in the world, repaying the kindness of people who have helped us is something that's held in high esteem. Often, in worldly ways when we repay the kindness, we're doing it out of attachment or out of obligation, and that's not what we're talking about here. What we're talking about here is, doing it with a heart of equanimity. In other words, we're not picking out the people who've been particularly kind to us and favoring those amongst other people, but we're having equal compassion for everybody but recognizing that in this particular circumstance, we're close to a few people and if we really repay their kindness and benefit them, it'll really have an effect. But it's not doing it out of a sense of obligation—because they may not like us otherwise or other people will think badly of us, or out of a sense of guilt, or something like that. But again, it's with a heart recognizing that they're basically like us, wanting happiness and not wanting pain. And so being sensitive in our life to particularly the people who have been very kind to us. Because often, we just space out and forget it.

### **Recognizing the kindness of our parents, teachers, strangers etc**

One big thing they talk about in the scriptures, that really in our culture we don't think of, is the kindness of our parents. In our culture, we tend to attribute so many of our difficulties and problems to our parents. I'm not saying disregard problems in the family, but I think it's also equally important to remember the kindness of our parents. The fact that without our

parents, we won't be alive. It's basically very simple. Without our parents, without people keeping us alive, we wouldn't be here. So there's some very fundamental kindness. Really remembering that, having some gratitude and respect for our parents, regardless of what else happened.

Also having a sense of gratitude and repaying the kindness of our teachers, be they the kindergarten teachers, the grade school teachers, our spiritual teachers, our Yoga and pottery teachers. Whoever teaches us something, whoever shares what they know, shares their talents and skills—to remember that.

And especially remember the kindness of the people that we share the Dharma with, the kindness of the people who organize Dharma teachings, because often we forget that. It takes tremendous organization, like when His Holiness comes to Seattle, people work months and months and months, for a-day-and-a-half event. How many of us remember the kindness of all these people who work all those months preparing? So to remember the kindness of the people who organize. Remember the kindness of His Holiness. Really thinking in our life the various people who have been kind.

When I was on this trip to China, it became real evident to me all sorts of little kindnesses that strangers gave, because we'd be traveling from one place to the other, and stop for lunch and these people would bring food out on the table, and we would eat, and then we'd pack in the bus and go on. It's like you drop into somebody's life, eat their food, and run away. I began to stop when I was offering the food, to

really think of the people who had grown the food, prepared the food ... people who were going to wash the dishes after us. All these people whom we'd probably never see again in our life, whom maybe I didn't even take the time to look at properly when they bring the rice out on the bowl to the table. So, remember their kindness to us, and especially of the people that are close to us, to try and take care of these people.

### **Review of auxiliary vow 40: (to abandon) not relieving the sorrow or distress of others**

#### **Develop the motivation to help**

Another way to put it is: (To abandon) Not consoling people who are distressed. If somebody is bereaved, somebody they love has died, or they themselves are sick, or one of their dear ones is ill, or they lost their job, or they're distressed over something or another, then to try and console, to try and offer help.

And here, it's good to develop some skills in how to offer help. First of all, we need the motivation, we need the compassion within us that wants to actually sit and listen to people's problems. And again, sometimes, we don't want to hear other people's problems. It's like, "You're on the phone again, sorry, I've to do something else." We don't want to hear somebody else's problems, we don't want to have somebody dump their stuff on us. And so to look at that part of us that doesn't want to engage, that just wants to close off, and meditate on compassion. And in that way then develop a compassionate wish to be

able to relieve their distress. That's on the mental side, the motivation side.

## **Learn practical skills to help**

And then on the practical side, to learn some skills for doing that. Because if somebody is distressed, we have to be real sensitive about the best way to help them. Some people, if they are unhappy and you go, "Don't worry about it. It will all be okay," then they get really angry and more upset. Because that's not what they want to hear. They just want to be heard. They don't want anybody making commentary, especially if they feel rather pessimistic about the situation. Some people, when they are distressed, they don't want us to say anything, they just want us to listen. Other people, when they're distressed, they're actually happy when we share with them some of our experience. But another person may be unhappy.

So helping them requires a sensitivity of who needs what, who needs you just to listen and be silent, who needs you to share your experience, who needs you to ask questions, who needs you to tell them that it's going to be okay, and who needs you to say "You know, it might not be okay. How can we prepare, because it might not be okay." "This person in your family may not live." "You're right. They may not live, so how can we start to prepare for that right now?" So consoling those who're in distress isn't necessarily painting over something or lying to them. It's being sensitive to what it is they need. There's no set prescription for that.

## **Auxiliary vow 41: (To abandon) Not giving material possessions to those in need**

Those who come and ask us for things: if we have those things, we could try and give.

One of the root vows that we did earlier was: “(To abandon) Not giving material aid”. Some people may wonder what’s the difference between that root vow and this one. The root vow is done with miserliness. In other words, out of clinging to our own possessions, we don’t share with other people who come and ask us for something. This one is much more out of other motivations besides miserliness, like ill-will, or laziness, or arrogance, or something like that.

Another way to differentiate them is that in the root vow, the people who are asking for help are the people who really, really need it, who are really suffering, whereas the people in this vow are people who are not quite in such a bad state. So there’s some difference in the degree of the object too. That’s why different lamas explain the difference in different ways.

Again the question comes up: if I’m in India, every time I see a beggar, do I have to give to a beggar? Every time an announcement comes to my house from an organization asking for money, do I have to give money? Again, there’s no hard answer. It’s something that you have to look inside at your own motivation. If it’s something that out of laziness, or neglect, or ill-will, that we don’t do, then we need to check up. If it’s something that we don’t have, whether it’s the things that they’re asking for, or money, or that we just gave a couple of months ago,

or if we prefer to make one big donation a year rather than several smaller donations—there could be a whole lot of other reasons—that’s okay.

The most important thing is that when people ask, and we can’t give them for one reason or another, that we still have an attitude that wishes them well in their fund-raising or what they’re doing instead of dismissing them with an angry attitude. Some charities may appeal to you more than others. Some may seem where your heart goes and you want to help them and so you give them more, and that’s fine. Basically, it’s not to have this heart that shuts people out.

If somebody is asking for something, and you think that they’re lying to you, or you think that they’re going to misuse what you give them, or they’re asking for something that seems dangerous, then unless you’re completely convinced that their cause is legitimate and their motivation is good, it’s wiser not to give. If somebody is asking you for money and you think they’re going to use it for a drug deal, it’s much better to say “No.” Our acts of charity must be tempered with wisdom.

**Auxiliary vow 42: (To abandon) Not working for the welfare of one’s circle of friends, disciples, servants etc**

This is talking about people who are very close to us. Very much the example in this is somebody who is a Dharma teacher, and not taking care of the people who are their students. But this vow applies whether you’re a Dharma teacher or not. Because often, we get this kind of idealistic view of bodhisattvahood:



“I’m going to save all these mother sentient beings!”, and we completely ignore the people who are very close to us. It’s kind of like the doctor’s child who is malnourished and sick, because the doctor is out treating other people. Or the psychologist’s child who’s completely screwed up and neglected because the psychologist is treating somebody else. So this is reminding us to not forget the people that we live with, people we work with, our colleagues, our employees, people who help us, people who are our students, who are our friends. In other words, those people we rely upon a lot, not to neglect them in the name of helping everybody else.

**Auxiliary vow 43: (To abandon) Not acting in accordance with the wishes of others if doing so does not bring harm to oneself or others**

Another way of saying that is not behaving sociably. As much as possible when we’re with others, to be sensitive to what their wishes are, and if their wishes are not in conflict with our ethical precepts or our ethical norms, and what they’re asking is not going to bring damage to self or others, then it’s good to go along with it. So you’re with your friend and your friend wants to have Chinese food and you may feel like eating pizza, but you refrain from making a strong case for pizza. So just being amenable, being a nice person, is basically what this vow is all about. Listening to others, taking their needs into consideration, not always having to get our way and do what we want, make our stand and have things the way that we want. To give space to others and to go

along with their wishes and their wants, even though it may not be the thing that we particularly choose or feel like doing at that time.

### Softening up on “*my*” opinions

Of course that doesn't mean everything somebody else wants to do, we go along with it. If a friend is asking you to a party, where you know there's going to be a lot of alcohol, you're completely free to say no. Or if you would prefer to meditate, and your friend's asking you to go to the movies, you can say no. If there's something more important, some Dharma work that you want to or need to do, something more important to help others, then it's fine to say no. Or if what the person's asking seems a little risky or dangerous or insincere, then it's okay to say no.

So what it's talking about here is to overcome that mind that we're so attuned to in this country, “What do *I* feel like doing?” “*My* opinions.” I was thinking about it: from the time we're very little, we've been raised to have opinions. We feel like we have to have opinions about everything, from the time we were little. For example, “What's your favorite color?” We have to have an opinion. We can't just say, “Oh, I never thought about it.” or “They're all okay.” It's like we have to have an opinion. Or somebody says, “What do you think about Bosnia?”, you can't say, “I don't know,” you have to have an opinion. And so we're so full of our opinions—“What do you feel like drinking?” “Well, let's see, I have to have an opinion. I want peach juice.” So, always our opinions, our

wishes, so much importance ... And if we look, so much conflict in our life comes out of trying to get our way with these little bitty things. An incredible amount of conflict and confusion comes.

So we may try to soften up a little bit about going along with our opinions and our wishes and being a little bit easier to get along with and doing things other people's way. The person you live with may like the house vacuumed in the morning and not in the evening. But it's basically the same to use the vacuum in the morning. So these kinds of things.

### **Minding our manners**

Also included under this is manners. This is something I learnt so much when I was staying in the Chinese nunnery. Because they really stress to us our manners. It's amazing. You have people in their twenties, thirties, forties and fifties and they are getting told to mind their manners. But I really tuned in that there's so much conflict happening because we don't mind our manners. I mean very simple things. We tell a person we're going to be somewhere at some time, and we don't call them when we know we're going to be late. We just show up late. How many fights start because of not making a simple phone call to say that we'll be late?

Or the way we eat: we might be at somebody's house, and it's just so easy to eat according to their way of doing it, and not make a big fuss. Or saying "thank you" when people give us things. And another thing is writing "thank you" notes, and really saying "thank you". It's just amazing how many times we

receive things from other people, we never say “thank you”. I know from direct experience. I’ve sent things to people in other parts of the country or other countries: they never write to even say that they received it. So you’re stuck here—“Did they get it? Did they not get it?” And meanwhile, the person who got it doesn’t even think that you might be concerned about this. And so for us, when we’re on the receiver’s end, to realize that when people send these things, they want to know that we got it okay. Even if we don’t want to say “thank you”, at least have the courtesy to say we got it.

Just so many things like this of being sensitive to other people’s needs and minding our manners. If we’re in somebody else’s house, helping to clean up instead of just making a mess. Or if we’re staying at someone’s house, not running up the phone bills that they have to pay, unless of course we ask them first. Just basic things of being a thoughtful person. There’s a lot which is included in this vow, and I think if we all went home and spent some time thinking about this, we could all think of very specific things in our life where we could use some improvement about being thoughtful of other people’s feelings and needs. It’s very helpful, because just even small things can set up huge amounts of conflict. Whereas if we really take care, stop and think and mind our manners, it can be a tremendous boost to harmonious relationships.

#### **Auxiliary vow 44: (To abandon) Not praising those with good qualities**

It’s actually quite a bodhisattva practice to get in the

practice of praising people; to get in the practice of training our mind to look for people's good qualities. And again, in our society, we're very quick to find faults. You look at journalism. Journalism, very often, what it is, is about finding faults with a person or a policy or something, one thing or another. We learn to be critical, put other people down. And actually, the more we train our mind in this attitude of looking for people's faults and mistakes, the more unhappy we get. Because we're only seeing part of what a person is, we only see what we look for basically, and meanwhile all the positive qualities, all the ways in which they help us, all the things which they do good or are acting kindly, we just take those things for granted.

It's very important to start to notice those things and make it part of our practice to notice those things and to praise the people for them. It doesn't have to be stupendous things that we praise people for. It's not like, "Oh you won the Nobel prize. I'm going to praise you." But just even small things that people do very well that we appreciate. E.g. somebody calling us to tell us that they were going to be late, to say, "Thank you. I really appreciate that." Or somebody who goes out of their way to drive us home. Whatever. To be thoughtful in that way. And to praise the people's good qualities.

And not only noticing people's good qualities and comment to their face, but also when we discuss other people, instead of talking behind their back—they did this and they did that—and psychoanalyzing people: this person, when they were in their childhood, must have done this, because look how they're acting at

work. Instead of getting into this whole thing of how we're going to put other people down, even if the people do have some weaknesses or make some mistakes, we look at what they do well and comment on those things to them and to other people.

### **Be specific in our praises**

And when we praise people, it's good to be specific. Instead of just saying, "Oh, you're such a wonderful person." Because that doesn't give somebody much information, does it? So it's good, when we praise, to point out specific behaviors that somebody did that we appreciated. Whatever it is. "You're a very thoughtful person because on such a day, you did this and such." Or "You paint very well because I saw such and such a picture." And so instead of this vague praise that leaves people in the middle of space, to point out the things that they do well.

And especially with children, I think this is very effective. Because if you just say to a kid, "Oh you're a good boy." "You're a good girl." It doesn't tell them much. Because you might be thinking of something that they did yesterday and they're thinking of something that they did half an hour ago, and they don't know what they did was good, what it is that you're pleased with. But especially with children, if you say, "Oh, you did your homework without me having to remind you," or "Oh, you turned off the TV set at dinner time, I'm really glad." Whatever it was, to say specifically, then it gives people—children and adults—a lot of very solid information and things that help them know exactly what pleases other people. So

in our practice, to get into the habit of praising people with good qualities.

**Auxiliary vow 45: (To abandon) Not acting with whatever means are necessary according to the circumstances to stop someone who is doing harmful actions**

With the preceding vows, we've been talking about more peaceful ways of helping others. With the last two vows, we're talking about more forceful ways that we might use to intervene to help people. If somebody is doing something quite harmful, if peaceful methods fail to dissipate their energy, then we might have to act in very forceful ways. So this vow is saying that when there's a situation that calls for forceful intervention, but we don't intervene out of laziness or apathy or ill-will, then we transgress this vow.

For example, if one child is beating up another child, you may have to forcefully intervene and grab one of them. In our society, if somebody is harming people and beating them up, or murdering or raping, or whatever, they may have to be in prison. If somebody is doing something harmful, they may need some severe discipline. And so again, to give the discipline with a kind heart but not to avoid disciplining because we're attached to the person, or because we were apathetic towards the other person that they're harming, or something like that. So there are situations where forceful energy is called for and we need to do that with kindness.

And so you'll see in the monasteries, for example,

in the Tibetan system, they often ordain little boys and little girls, who enter the monastery when they are seven, eight, nine, ten years old. Now they're not little angels. They will do the regular childhood pranks and they will get beaten sometimes. And at first you might be shocked to see—in the monastery and with all these people meditating on compassion—that they're beating the kids. But you have to look very much at the motivation. I'm not saying that they all get beaten up out of compassion. It depends very much on the person who is doing it. But there might be a certain situation in a particular culture where that behavior (of beating somebody) fits. Or of forcefully intervening. Or of loudly scolding somebody and yelling at somebody to get a point across. Or restricting their physical movement.

So there might be certain situations where that's helpful, and so this vow is talking about doing that, but doing it with a compassionate heart, not with a mind that's full of revenge. So for example, in a criminal justice system, if we want to lock people up because "These people are so evil. They hurt so many people and they deserve to suffer in prison!", that's not what we're talking about here because that kind of motivation is wishing other people suffering; it's not what bodhisattva training is about. On the other hand, you might say, "Well, these people, they definitely have some kind of very harmful behavior pattern, and to protect the other people who might be their victims, and to protect them from creating more negative karma, then we need to imprison them." So you might imprison them, but it's with a compassionate attitude, not one that's wishing them



harm. It's a big difference.

**Auxiliary vow 46: (To abandon) Not using miraculous powers if one possesses this ability, in order to stop others from doing unwholesome actions**

That's one vow I know I won't break [laughter]. What it's saying is if you have miraculous abilities, some kind of psychic powers, and the situation calls for them, then to use them in that situation if it's for the benefit of others, if it would stop harm or inspire faith, or something like that. So one should try and do this. On the other hand, the lamas emphasize too that if you have psychic abilities or whatever, not to be flamboyant, but to keep them very closely guarded and not let other people know. Because sometimes it just creates more misunderstandings for people.

Okay, so those are the bodhisattva vows—the 46 secondary vows.

**Questions and answers**

*[Audience:] Why are they saying what not to do instead of what to do?*

The “what to do” is inferred. But the “what not to do” is like saying something quite specific. It's pointing out the very specific behavior that's to be abandoned, so it doesn't leave it nebulous and vague. It's pointing out something quite specific to abandon, and then from that, you can generalize the more broader thing

of what to do. We can see this, like if somebody says “Be kind to others.” “Oh yeah, that sounds good, be kind to others.” But if somebody says, “Don’t insult somebody and avoid kicking them.” Then it’s like giving very specific ways about how to be kind to them.

*[Audience:] Can you really beat somebody with a good motivation?*

Remember we talked earlier in the bodhisattva vows, there’s one about not doing one of the ten negative actions if it’s actually for the benefit of others (Auxiliary vow 11: “(To abandon) Not doing non-virtuous actions of body and speech with loving-compassion when circumstances deem it necessary in order to benefit other”)? And so the question comes: could you kill Adolf Hitler with a good motivation? So there, it gets a bit touchy. You have to look at your mind quite clearly, and there’re two kinds of motivation. There’s what’s called the causal motivation, and the motivation at the time of the action. It might be that the causal motivation is good, but the motivation at the time of the action is a harsh one. What’s important is that the causal motivation is good, and that you try and make the motivation at the time of the action also as good as possible.

It’s the same thing: can we give negative feedback to somebody with kindness? It’s something to check up. Yes, we can have a positive motivation in giving the negative feedback, and at the time that we do it, unless we’re bodhisattvas, it’s quite easy for a little bit of “Now I got you!” to sneak in there. So to pay

attention to that. Be careful.

And don't get me wrong. I'm not advocating beating children. [Laughter.]

## CHAPTER 5

### Introduction to the Six Far-Reaching Attitudes

The six far-reaching attitudes are the six practices that we engage in because we want to attain enlightenment for the benefit of others. First, we generate this altruistic intention to attain enlightenment. Then, to be able to actualize it, to be able to purify our mind and develop our good qualities, according to the sutra path, these are the six things that we must do.

In Sanskrit, the term is the six *paramitas*—sometimes it is translated as the six perfections. I don't think 'perfection' is such a good translation, because in English, 'perfection' is such a sticky word. We have such perfection complexes anyway that I think it's better to just say six 'far-reaching attitudes'.

#### Why “far-reaching”?

These attitudes are very far-reaching because:

- They encompass all sentient beings in the scope of who we are doing them for.
- We have a far-reaching motivation to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all those beings, no matter how they act, whether they bite your toes or not. [Laughter.]

All these six far-reaching attitudes are necessary to attain enlightenment. If we miss one of them, then, we miss a big chunk. There are various ways in which we

can discuss these six. Before I start discussing them individually, I'm going to talk a little bit about them generally and how they fit together.

The path to enlightenment consists of the method aspect of the path and the wisdom aspect of the path. The method aspect of the path are all the actions done out of the altruistic intention to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, where this intention is truly cognizant, present in the mind. The wisdom aspect of the path is the wisdom that realizes emptiness.

The first five of the six far-reaching attitudes are considered part of the method aspect:

- Generosity
- Ethics
- Patience
- Enthusiastic perseverance
- Concentration

The **wisdom** aspect of the path is the sixth far-reaching attitude, the far-reaching attitude of wisdom.

There are other ways to look at the far-reaching attitudes too. One way is to say that we practice the first three—generosity, ethics and patience—for the purpose of others, to accomplish their purpose. We practice the next three—enthusiastic perseverance, concentration and wisdom—to accomplish our own purpose.

Accomplishing others' purpose refers to being able to directly benefit others. In order to do that, we need to have what's called the *rupakaya* or the form body of the Buddha. To accomplish self-purpose is to attain

enlightenment and attain the *dharmakaya*. The *dharmakaya* is analogous to the mind of the Buddha. When we become Buddhas, we need both a Buddha's mind and a Buddha's physical form, a Buddha's physical form not being like our physical form, but rather, a body made of light and the ability to manifest in many different forms.

## **Mahayana disposition**

When we talk about the six far-reaching attitudes, the basis upon which they're practiced is somebody whose Mahayana disposition has been awakened. What's Mahayana disposition? 'Mahayana' refers to the vast vehicle of practice, the one that is vast in terms of our motivation, in terms of the number of sentient beings it encompasses, in terms of the goal that we're aiming for. So the basis is somebody who has the altruistic intention to attain enlightenment for the benefit of others, where that has been awakened.

We may not have spontaneous bodhicitta, but there is at least some spark, some interest. In the scriptures, there is a lot of mention about the Mahayana disposition being awakened. It's quite important, because when you think of our lives, the difference between when you've heard teachings on bodhicitta and have some aspiration towards that, versus the time before you heard teachings on bodhicitta where you didn't even know about it, you can see that there's a big difference.

Even though we haven't actualized bodhicitta yet, just knowing that it exists, knowing that it is a possibility, having admiration, having it awakened in

our hearts that we want to become that altruistic and have that loving-kindness, that's a big change in the mind. So, we say the Mahayana disposition has been awakened.

And then through relying on teachers and receiving extensive teachings on Mahayana texts, together with the bodhicitta and the wisdom realizing emptiness, we try and practice these six far-reaching attitudes to attain enlightenment. So the basis of doing these six is somebody who has the appreciation or the actualization of bodhicitta.

## **The Six Far-Reaching Attitudes**

### **1. Generosity**

There's a difference between the far-reaching attitude of generosity and regular old generosity. Regular old generosity, everybody has—almost. You give something to somebody. That's regular old generosity. It's virtuous. But it's different from the far-reaching attitude of generosity that is undertaken on the basis of the bodhicitta. There is a big difference in the action and a big difference in the result that you attain, because of the basis of the motivation. So we have to remember the importance of the motivation here. We keep coming back to it again and again.

The first far-reaching attitude, generosity, is physical or verbal actions based on the willingness to give and the kind thought that wants to give. Generosity is not giving away everything you own. Generosity is not satisfying everybody else's wishes,

because that's impossible. Generosity is the physical and verbal actions we undertake based on the wish to give.

## **2. Ethics**

Ethics is restraint from the seven destructive actions of body and speech and the three destructive actions of mind. It's the wish not to harm others and so thereby getting our ethical act together.

## **3. Patience**

Patience is the ability to remain undisturbed when we are facing difficulties, suffering, or harm from others. Patience isn't just suppressing your anger and putting a plastic smile on your face. But rather, patience is the mind that's undisturbed whether all hell is breaking loose around you or not. It's that mental attitude.

## **4. Enthusiastic perseverance (joyous effort)**

Enthusiastic perseverance is sometimes translated as joyous effort. I don't know which translation you prefer. I vacillate between the two. It is delight in accomplishing the purposes of self and others. In other words, delight in doing what is constructive, what is virtuous.

It is a mind that is happy to be of service to self and others. It's not the mind that is of service to self and others because we feel guilty and obliged and so on. But it's the mind that takes delight in service.



## 5. Concentration

Concentration is the ability to remain fixed on a positive focal object without distraction. The ability to steer our mind towards a constructive or virtuous object and be able to keep our mind there at will, without the mind getting distracted by something, or falling asleep, or going bananas in some way or another. A mind that is very subdued. Instead of our mind controlling us, the mind is quite flexible.

## 6. Wisdom

The far-reaching attitude of wisdom is the ability to distinguish accurately, conventional truths and ultimate truths—the conventional way that objects exist and the deeper or ultimate natures of their existence.

Wisdom is also the ability to distinguish what to practice on the path and what to abandon, in other words, what's constructive for enlightenment and what's destructive.

That's the **nature** of each of the far-reaching attitudes. I've gone through a quick definition of all of them to give you a brief overview.

## Necessity and Function of the Six Attitudes

We can also talk about the necessity and function of each of the six attitudes.

## Generosity

To accomplish the welfare of others, in other words, to lead them along the path to enlightenment, we need generosity. We need to be able to provide them with the basic physical necessities, teachings and protection. Otherwise, it would be difficult to lead sentient beings to enlightenment. So, generosity is necessary to fulfill their purpose, to accomplish their welfare.

## **Ethics**

Also to accomplish their welfare, we need to stop harming them. That's fairly straightforward, isn't it? First way to start helping somebody is to stop harming him or her.

## **Patience**

The way in which we need patience to accomplish others' welfare, is that we need to be patient when other sentient beings don't act so nicely. If we're trying to work for other people's benefit, but instead we become angry and upset when they don't do what we want, then it becomes really difficult to work for their benefit and to be of service.

We need incredible patience to be able to let go and not hold on to all the stupid things that people do. And if we look at our own behavior, we know that there are lots of stupid things that we do. Just as we want others to be patient with us, we then turn around and extend that patience to them.

## **Enthusiastic perseverance (joyous effort)**

We also need joyous effort to be able to continuously help them. To work for others' welfare, to serve them, we need to have this joy that can do it continuously. Because to really make changes, to really help people, it's not a one-time shot.

It's a real commitment to stick it out and be of service continually. We can see this even in regular helping professions—whether you're in social work, medicine or therapy, etc. It's a continuous process. We need that joyous effort to really make change.

## **Concentration**

We also need concentration because we need to develop different psychic powers in order to be able to serve others better. In other words, if we have psychic powers that can know people's past, where we could tell past karmic connections, then it becomes easier to know how to guide people. We will know who are the teachers whom people have karmic connections with and how to guide them there.

If we have psychic abilities that can understand people's thoughts and their dispositions, then again it becomes much easier to guide them. When we know what their interests are, what their personalities are, it's easier to give a practice that's suitable for them.

In Buddhism, we do have the practice of developing psychic powers, but it's always in the context of using them for the benefit of sentient beings. It is not to make a big deal out of oneself or to rake lots of money by showing them off.

## **Wisdom**

We need the far-reaching attitude of wisdom to accomplish others' welfare because we need to be wise in order to teach them. We need to know what to teach them. We need to know what is conventional reality, what is ultimate reality, because it's that teaching which is going to help others remove their defilements.

Before we teach it, we have to understand it ourselves. We have to be able to teach them what to practice on the path, what kind of actions to cultivate, what kind of actions to abandon, what attitudes and actions are contradictory to happiness. In order to teach that to others, we have to be wise in those things ourselves.

### **How the Six Attitudes Fulfill Our Own and Others' Purpose**

We can also talk about using the six far-reaching attitudes to fulfill others' purpose and to fulfill our own purpose. Like I was saying before, the first three fulfill others' purpose while the last three fulfill our own purpose. When we talk about "our" purpose and "others'" purpose, it's not like the first three only benefit others and do not benefit myself. And it's not like the last three only benefit me and not benefit others. It's just a matter of emphasis.

The first three far-reaching attitudes of generosity, ethics and patience all work to fulfill others' purpose. There is an interesting relationship between them.

### **How generosity, ethics and patience interrelate**

## with one another and fulfill others' purpose

### *Generosity*

Through generosity, we try and make other people happy. We try and give them what they want. We satisfy their needs, so we make them happy. Also, it becomes a skillful method to interest others in the Dharma because if we give people things, then they tend to like us. They might then get interested in things we're interested in, like the Dharma. So it becomes a skillful way to make people think. And so generosity is one way in which we try and fulfill others' purpose.

### *Ethics*

Now, while practicing generosity, we also have to stop harming them. If we keep giving people things and we are quite generous, but then we turn around the next day and slander or criticize them or beat them up, then all the good energy that we put out by being generous is completely contradicted. It doesn't fulfill their purpose. It makes them suffer more and it doesn't make them interested at all in what we are doing.

Being unethical is not the way to attract other sentient beings to be interested in the Dharma, because they tend to say: "Oh that person really acts awful. Whatever they are into, I want to go 180 degrees away."

I find this quite interesting to think about because often we think of ethics as something that we do to

avoid lower rebirths and to create cause for upper rebirths. Or we think about it as not harming others, or something like this.

But, actually, if we start thinking about it in terms of how to guide other sentient beings, if we want to influence others in a positive way, being ethical is very, very essential, so that we don't undo everything.

Also, if we behave well, then other people are impressed, and again, they get quite interested. If they see us at work and everybody else is involved in some kind of shady thing at work, or everybody else in the office is gossiping, but we stay away, then they may develop some trust in us, and may become interested in what we're doing.

## *Patience*

When we're practicing both generosity and ethics, we need to be patient as well. This is especially the case if we have been generous with other people but they turn around and harm us. If we lack patience, then what are we going to do? We're going to harm them in return. Patience is an essential quality to fulfill others' purpose because it's what supports our practice of generosity so that we don't regret being generous.

One thing that happens so often is we're very generous but the other person turns around and acts like a jerk to us, and then what do we do? We regret what we did. "Why was I so generous with that person? Why did I protect them? They turned around. They betrayed my trust." And so we get angry and resentful in return. And that destroys the practice of generosity that we did because we develop so much

regret for our positive actions. And, then, of course we make a very strong determination not to help that person again in the future and not to be generous no matter what happens.

If we lack patience, then it really undermines the practice of generosity. We need to cultivate patience because very often, people don't repay kindness with kindness. They repay it otherwise. Of course when that happens to us, we feel like we're the only persons that it has ever happened to. But if you read the scriptures, you'll see that this has been happening since time immemorial.

If we look at our own lives, we probably will see that we, too, have behaved that way towards other people who had been kind to us. This is reality, and so if we can develop some patience for it, then it helps us to accomplish others' purpose. Also, if we can be patient, then we won't act unethically towards them when they act poorly towards us after we've been generous.

So that's how these first three attitudes—generosity, ethics and patience—all fit together. There is an interesting interplay between them. I think it is very important to contemplate this kind of thing, because we tend to see things as individual, isolated units—there's generosity here and ethics here and patience here; this one here and that one there.

But when you hear this kind of teaching, then you see that, well, generosity and ethics blend and they fit and they complement each other. Patience is in there too and it's necessary. And then you need the effort, the joyous effort to be able to do it too. So you start seeing inter-relationships between practices. I think

that's very important, so that our minds don't get too blocked up and square.

It's interesting to think about this in relationship to your life and to different things that happened.

*[Audience:] How do we dedicate the positive potential accumulated from a generous act?*

It's the same kind of dedication that we do at the end of Dharma teachings. At the end of any kind of virtuous acts, whether it's generosity or other actions, take that positive potential and dedicate it principally for the enlightenment of ourselves and others. And also dedicate for the long lives of our teachers and also for the existence of the Dharma in a pure way in the world and in our minds. You take some time and imagine sending out positive energy to other beings so that it ripens in that way.

Dedication is very important. If we have been generous or ethical or patient, but we don't dedicate the positive potential accumulated, then later on if we generate wrong views or get angry, we burn up the positive energy we accumulate. But, if we dedicate it, it's like putting it in the bank. We're all very wise "financially" here [laughter], we don't want to waste anything, so the dedication is quite important.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

You can also rejoice at other people's positive potential, plus the positive potential that you have accumulated, then take it all and imagine it as light that goes out and touches all the sentient beings. So



we are not just dedicating our own positive potential. It's good to dedicate other peoples' too, because then that becomes a practice of rejoicing. Instead of getting jealous of other people who act better than we do and being in competition with them, we focus on how wonderful it is that there are all these people doing kind things, and we dedicate all of it.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

That's why I prefer the translation 'positive potential' to 'merit'. When we translate the Tibetan word 'sonam' as 'merit', what do we think of? We think of little gold stars, "I got eighty-four gold stars!" I always like to tell the story in this regard. One time when I was in Singapore, one man came and wanted to do some chanting. I spent an hour teaching him "om mani padme hum" and how to do the chanting and the visualization.

At the end of the session, I said: "Now let's dedicate our positive potential for the enlightenment of others." He looked at me and said: "I don't want to dedicate it because I don't have very much." [Laughter.] It was so sweet because he was really concerned and worried that if he gave away his positive potential, what would happen to him? He was just so sweet. I'll never forget that. I had to remind him that it isn't like you give it away and then you don't experience the result of it anymore. You're not losing anything by dedicating. Rather, we're gaining by that.

**How enthusiastic perseverance, concentration and**

**wisdom interrelate with one another and fulfill our own purpose**

### ***Wisdom***

Then, to fulfill our own purpose (to attain the mind of a Buddha, to eliminate all of our defects and develop all of our qualities, to attain enlightenment and liberation) we definitely need wisdom. Wisdom is like a sword that cuts the root of the ignorance. Since ignorance is the source of all of the problems, then definitely wisdom is needed to transform our mind into a Buddha's mind.

### ***Concentration***

But to develop the right kind of wisdom, we need concentration. We need to be able to control our mind. We need to be able to focus on the object of this wisdom instead of having our mind run all over cyclic existence with its fantasies. If we need wisdom to attain enlightenment, then we need the concentration that supports the wisdom.

### ***Enthusiastic perseverance***

To develop concentration, we need to overcome laziness, so we need enthusiastic perseverance. It is the specific antidote to all the different kinds of laziness, which we'll get into in later sessions.

So that's another way of thinking about these six far-reaching attitudes, how the first three accomplish

others' purpose and the last three accomplish our own purpose.

## **Creating the Causes for Precious Human Rebirth with the Six Attitudes**

### **The motivation for wanting a precious human life**

Then, yet another way to think of these attitudes: if we want to become enlightened, we need to ensure that we have a whole series of precious human lives, because it's going to take a lot of practice to become a Buddha. We may do it in this one lifetime, but we may not. If we don't do it this one lifetime, then we need to be concerned with creating the causes to have precious human lives in future lifetimes so that we can continue our practice.

This is quite important. We try and create the cause for precious human life not just because we want it and we don't want a lower rebirth, but because we know that to help others, we need to have this kind of life in order to practice.

The motivation on this level of the path is different from that on the level of the initial being. The initial being just wants a good rebirth so that they don't have to go to a horrible one. But here, we want a good rebirth because we know that without it, it's going to be very difficult to help anybody.

I think this is an important thing to think about. They say try and attain enlightenment in this one lifetime, but don't count on it. Don't expect it—because it requires this huge accumulation of both

positive potential and wisdom. Although some people do attain it in one lifetime, many people don't. Since we'll be reborn if we're not Buddhas, then it's helpful to make sure we have a good lifetime in the future so that we can continue to practice.

It could be that, in previous lifetimes, we had precious human lives. We heard this teaching. We did this kind of practice, so this lifetime, we have another precious human life. We shouldn't see that our present life is something that just happened by accident or dropped in from outer space, or in the back by the store. It's something that we accumulated the cause for, quite deliberately in previous lives.

By practicing the six far-reaching attitudes and dedicating the positive potential so that we can have a precious human life again, this gives us the excellent basis to continue our practice. Hopefully, we can continue to create the cause to get more precious human lives so we can continue to practice all the way until we become Buddhas. It provides a slightly different angle on how to view our life, how to view how we are.

We need all six far-reaching attitudes to attain this kind of precious human life in our next life. If one of them is missing, we won't be able to attain the precious human life and this will obstruct our practice of the Dharma.

### **The difference between a precious human life and a human life**

Like I was explaining before, a precious human life is very different from a human life. In a human life, you

have a human body, but you don't necessarily have any kind of spiritual inclination or live in a place where the teachings are available and you can practice it, or have other favorable conditions for practice.

In a precious human life, you not only have a human body, but you have healthy senses and a healthy body so that you can practice. You're free from certain obscurations. You have an innate curiosity and interest in the spiritual practice. You are born in a country where there is religious freedom so that you can practice. You have the ability to meet teachings and teachers and there's a lineage of pure teachings that exists. There's a community of people that support you in your practice. There are enough financial things for you to be able to practice.

So, in order to practice, there's a lot of other conditions we need besides just the human body. On this planet, there're over five billion people who have human bodies, but there are actually very few who have precious human lives.

## **How the six attitudes help us to attain the precious human life**

### **Generosity**

First of all, in order to attain enlightenment, we need to be able to practice the Dharma in our future lives. To be able to practice, we need resources. We need to have clothes, food, shelter and medicine. The cause of attaining these resources is being generous. Karmically, the cause to receive things is to give.

This is contrary to American philosophy whereby the cause of having is holding on to it yourself. In Buddhism, the cause of having is being generous and giving to others. If we want to practice in future lives, we need clothes, food, medicine and shelter. To have those, we need to karmically create the cause, we need to be generous this lifetime.

## **Ethics**

But just having resources in a future lifetime isn't sufficient. We also need a human body. This is where ethics comes in. By abandoning the ten negative actions and practicing ethics, we're able to attain a human body. But it's not necessarily a precious human life, it's just we have the fortune of having a human body.

Through generosity, we have some kind of wealth and resources. Through ethics, we have the human body. But these are not sufficient.

## **Patience**

When we practice, we also need to have good companions to practice with. We also need to have a good personality because it becomes extremely difficult to practice if we are grumpy and angry and short-tempered. It is extremely difficult to practice if nobody wants to practice with us because we turn everybody off with our bad temper. So to avoid that, we need to practice patience.

Remember patience is the antidote to anger. So karmically, if we practice patience this lifetime, then

the results in future lifetimes are that we have a kind personality and that we have a lot of companions and people to practice with. We can see the value in that.

## **Joyous effort**

And in future lifetimes, if we want to continue to practice, we have to be able to complete our projects. If we want to undertake some study or we want to do a retreat or something, we need to have the karma to be able to finish what we start. If we keep starting things but never finish anything, it is very difficult to become a Buddha, because you start the path and then you stop. And then you start and you stop. In order to have the ability to complete our practices in future lives, we need to practice joyous effort this lifetime, the mind that takes delight and acts continuously to practice in this lifetime.

So, do you see how the karma works? By being able to practice continuously and going through the ups and downs this lifetime, then, it creates the karma so that in future lives, when we undertake some kind of spiritual practice, we will be able to finish it without things getting interrupted.

And, so often, we can see things getting interrupted. Let's say you live in Tibet. Your practice got interrupted when you had to flee over the mountains. Or you start to study a text but you can't finish it because your visa runs out or your teacher goes and travels somewhere else. Or you start a retreat but you can't finish it because the food supply runs out or the weather turns bad or your mind goes nuts. [Laughter.] 'Nuts' meaning there was some

distraction.

In order to complete things, we need enthusiastic perseverance, and so it needs to be cultivated this lifetime also.

## **Concentration**

Also, in future lifetimes, for our practice to be successful, we need to have a peaceful mind, a mind that isn't completely distracted and irascible. A mind that has some kind of control and can concentrate.

Also, we need to have the psychic abilities to be able to see other people's karma and their dispositions and tendencies. In order to have these kind of capabilities in future lives, then this lifetime, karmically, we need to practice concentration. Practicing concentration this lifetime leads to having those kinds of abilities in future lifetimes. And then, with those abilities, it becomes quite easy to attain enlightenment.

## **Wisdom**

Similarly, in future lifetimes, we need to be able to discriminate between what is a correct teaching and what is an incorrect teaching. Between what is the path and what isn't the path. Between who is a qualified teacher and who isn't a qualified teacher. To do this, we need wisdom, and so we need to cultivate that wisdom this lifetime.

You can see it. Some people find it quite difficult to discriminate who's a good teacher and who's a charlatan. Or it becomes quite difficult to discriminate



between what is a constructive action and what is a destructive one. Or it becomes difficult to understand what emptiness means. Having those obstacles in this lifetime comes from not having practiced the far-reaching attitude of wisdom in previous lives. If we practice it in this lifetime, then in the future lifetime, we'll have these abilities and then they all work together so that we can attain enlightenment much quicker.

What I am essentially doing is, I'm doing a big pitch for the six far-reaching attitudes. [Laughter.] I'm doing this so that you develop some kind of enthusiasm to practice them. Because you see the advantages for future lives, because you see the advantages for yourself and for others, then you want to practice them and you want to listen to teachings.

*[Audience:] How do you practice the wisdom you haven't yet attained?*

First of all, we listen to teachings. There is a three-step process: listening, contemplation or thinking, and meditation. We are not wise. We are completely confused. Our minds cannot discern one thing from another. We have no discriminating wisdom. It's like our mind is totally foggy and we're constantly making unwise decisions. If we are experiencing these, then, what we need to do is listen to teachings because the Buddha described quite clearly what is a constructive action, what is a destructive action, what is a constructive motivation, what is a destructive motivation, what are positive mental factors, what are negative mental factors.

By listening to teachings, you get a certain amount of wisdom right away. You get this outside information and even though you haven't integrated it into your character, you have some tools to use to start to assess your life.

When we talk about listening, it also includes reading books and things like that. It's the process of gathering information and learning. This is very important for spiritual practice. Some people say: "Oh, teachings—that's all just more intellectual garbage. I think I'm just going to sit and meditate." But what do they wind up doing? They make up their own meditation. Well, we've been making up our own path to liberation since beginningless time and we're still in cyclic existence.

At a certain point, we decide: "Well, instead of making up my own path, instead of making up my own teachings, maybe I need to listen to the teachings of a fully enlightened being, the Buddha, who was able to describe from his own experience, what's constructive and what's destructive."

So, there's a little bit of humility in there that wants to learn, because we recognize we can't do it ourselves. We've been trying to do everything ourselves since we were born. Look where we are at. We got somewhere. We can take care of ourselves more or less. But we're not enlightened. So we need some teachings. We need to learn.

The second step is we need to think about what we learned. Not just gathering information and learning it, but we need to think about it. We need to understand it. Here's the role of debate and discussion and talking and discussing things. I was telling you when I was in

China, I was with these young men who would stay up very late just talking, debating this one point. In the beginning, they would translate for me. At the end, they were so into it that, forget the translation! [Laughter.] It was this kind of discussion. They were discussing what they had heard in the teachings: “Is this really true?” “How does this work?” “How do we know this?” “What about this?” “How come it says this here?” “How come it says that there?” “What do you really do?”

Trying to take the teachings and understand them is a very essential thing in Buddhism. Buddhism is not a thing of: “Well, I’ll just listen. There’s the dogma. There’s the catechism. If I’m going to be a good Buddhist, I just stamp my seal and say, ‘I believe!’ and that’s it!” That’s not it. We need to think about it and make it our own.

The Buddha himself said: “Don’t accept anything just because somebody else said so. Or just because it’s written in some scripture. Or because everybody else believes it. But think about it on your own. Test it out yourself. Apply logic and reasoning. Apply it to your own life. Apply to what you see around you. And if it works, then believe it.”

So, this process of thinking is very important, because it develops conviction, and it also ensures that we have the correct understanding of something. Because, often when we listen to teachings, we think we understand it correctly, but as soon as we enter into a discussion with somebody else, we can’t explain ourselves at all. It’s like: “I thought I understood this but this guy at work just asked me what loving-kindness is and I can’t think of how to

answer him.” And then we realize: “Well, actually, I don’t really understand what it is.”

*[Rest of the teaching was not recorded.]*

## Chapter 6 Generosity

We were talking about the six far-reaching attitudes in general, how we need to practice all of them to accomplish the welfare of others, in order to fulfill our own purpose and to fulfill their purpose.

### **Worldly generosity vs. far-reaching attitude of generosity**

Tonight we are going to start on the first of the six far-reaching attitudes. The first one is the far-reaching attitude of generosity, sometimes called giving. It's not just generosity as we normally think of it. Generosity is giving things, which is great; but the far-reaching attitude of generosity is combined with both compassion and wisdom. It's different from ordinary generosity, because it is motivated by the wish to become a Buddha in order to benefit others. It's very different from ordinary generosity that happens at Christmas time or at Halloween, Thanksgiving, or Valentine's. That kind of generosity is very much based on the happiness of this life.

The far-reaching attitude of generosity is based on the wish to become a Buddha to benefit others. Also, the far-reaching attitude of generosity is combined with the wisdom aspect that recognizes that this whole act of generosity is a dependent arising: it is dependent on the giver, the giving, the gift, and the recipient. In other words, this whole act of generosity

is not inherently existent nor are any of its particular parts. This kind of attitude recognizing the emptiness of the action, and at the same time the fullness of it (in other words, that it is a dependent arising), is conjoined with giving to make up the far-reaching attitude of generosity. You can see, then, that it is very different from ordinary generosity, because when ordinary people give, even amongst Dharma practitioners, we very seldom think of the emptiness of the whole process. Instead of that, we would think of the emptiness of our pockets after we give. This is the wrong kind of emptiness to think of.

Generosity is the wish to give. It's the wish to share. If we can actually give it's even better. Sometimes, however, we don't have the actual materials to give. Therefore, to avoid people thinking, "I can't do the far-reaching attitude of generosity unless I am rich," the Buddha said we can perfect this far-reaching attitude by developing the wish to give, because it is the wish that is the most important thing. If the wish is there, then when we have the material or whatever it is we might wish to give, then the giving comes quite naturally. But even if we have lots of things, if there is no wish to give then the giving doesn't happen.

Also, practicing generosity doesn't mean that we are necessarily able to satisfy sentient beings' wishes and needs. To fulfill this far-reaching attitude doesn't mean that we are capable of removing everybody's needs and wants, and giving them everything that they need, because that is clearly impossible. It is impossible to satisfy sentient beings, totally impossible. We give them one thing and they want

another. Just look at us. We get one thing and we want another. We want more; we want better. It's not about fulfilling all of sentient beings' needs and wants in order to perfect giving. It's developing this wish and this graciousness, wanting to share with others.

The Buddha really stresses this practice a lot. There was a king who came to him and said, "Buddha, how do I practice Dharma? I am stuck with this whole kingdom I have to govern." Maybe this was Bill Clinton in a former life. [Laughter.] The Buddha said, "You don't have to leave the kingdom. You can still govern, but there are three principal practices that you should do. One is generosity; a second is rejoicing at other people's merit; and the third is dedicating the merit of yourself and others." These became the main practices for the king, so he had a very rich practice.

Generosity is really a very basic thing. It's the first of the far-reaching attitudes, therefore it is the easiest one. We think generosity is the hardest one [laughter] but actually it is the easiest one. If you think about it, one way, our whole life, we have been giving, simply by the fact that we are so interrelated to each other. We are constantly sharing things and giving them to other people. There is definitely that potential, that tendency, that seed of generosity in us. What we have to do is to enrich it, bring it out and give it the right kind of motivation.

## **The Three Kinds of Giving**

There are three kinds of giving: One is the giving of

material aid; the second is the giving of protection from fear; the third is the giving of Dharma. (Sometimes a fourth type is listed—the giving of love; but another way is to combine that with the giving of protection from fear.) There are different ways of listing the far-reaching attitudes, but I'll discuss the three kinds of giving here.

## 1. GIVING MATERIAL AID

First, giving material things. This is actually one of the easiest things to give, but it's really hard. I remember my teacher telling this story, which was somehow very comforting to me. At the time of the Buddha there was an old woman who was extremely miserly. It was very difficult for her to give, yet it was this basic practice she had to master. So the Buddha gave her a very simple practice. He gave her a carrot and he had her practice giving the carrot from one hand to the other hand. [Laughter.] If you think about this, it is actually quite profound. Try it some time. Sit there and give it from one hand to the other hand; then at one point imagine that the hand you give it to is attached to somebody else's body. Why is there a difference? Why is it that passing the carrot from one of my own hands to the other is okay, but if it's attached to somebody else's body I feel lost? A hand is still a hand. Really do it sometime, and look at your hands and think about this.

In the practice of giving material, as with other practices, the motivation is the most important thing. We want to give with a kind motivation toward the receivers. We also want to develop the specific



thought beforehand that we are giving in order to become a Buddha so that we can eventually benefit all sentient beings, and that we are giving in order to directly benefit the person whom we are giving to. Giving in this way, then, isn't just feeling warm-hearted and giving somebody something. The far-reaching attitude of giving is definitely conjoined with this bodhicitta motivation. It's important to remember that.

### **Being wise and realistic in our giving**

We have to give what is quite realistic for us to give. In other words, if we all went home and gave everything away, then it would be very difficult to survive and we would probably become burdens on other people. We have to give what is realistic, what is practical in terms of our own financial material status.

They say that it's very important to imagine giving even when you can't. That's why when we do the offerings to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, we may put a few things on our altar but we imagine them expanding and the whole sky being full of things. This is done to develop the wish to give. However, we shouldn't think that imagining giving is as good as actually giving, and use it to rationalize not actually giving. [Laughter.]

One time an old woman went to an initiation by a Lama in Tibet. There was a big crowd there, so at the point in the initiation where the Lama sometimes touches the top of a vase to each person's head, he said, "Please imagine that I am touching the vase to your head and you are receiving the initiation." At the

end of the initiation came the time for everybody to make offerings to this Lama. This woman had brought a big cake of tea as an offering. She came before the Lama and said, “Please imagine that I am giving you this cake of tea.” Then she kept the cake of tea for herself. [Laughter.] The idea isn’t just to use the visualization as an excuse for not actually giving, but rather to use it as something that increases our wish to give.

We have to combine our generosity with wisdom. Trungpa Rinpoche had this expression, “idiot compassion”, and I think it’s something to think quite deeply about, because again the far-reaching attitude of giving or generosity isn’t just the act of giving. It’s definitely conjoined with some wisdom and some thoughtfulness. For example, you don’t give things that are going to be harmful to other people. You don’t give weapons and poison. You don’t give money if you fear that it’s going to be misused, if you feel that that the person is going to use it for a harmful purpose. In this case, maybe it doesn’t help the other person, and maybe it can be misused to harm people.

Don’t offer things that people aren’t supposed to have. If a person is diabetic, don’t offer them ice cream. If somebody’s taken the eight Mahayana precepts, don’t offer them dinner. We have to use wisdom combined with our generosity. Don’t give to the wrong people. If we don’t trust somebody, if we think something is not going to work out right, we don’t want to give in a way that we might regret it later. If we give and later feel regret, then we destroy a lot of merit that was created from the giving, and sometimes we also become disillusioned and

disappointed and more suspicious. Really think well, then, about giving so that later we don't regret it.

When we don't have enough material to give, we can pray to be able to give more later. Even though we can't give everything that we would like to or we don't have it, at least have that wish, "Gee, I wish I had the ability to actually give more and to have things to be able to give in the future."

### **Giving without pride**

When you give things, don't get proud about it. This is something we see very often. How many times have you seen in our culture that people give things with the idea that their name is going to be put on the board? If you give so much money to the hospital, then you get a gold plaque with your name on it. If you give so much money you get a silver plaque. Sometimes I have even seen it done by temples or at initiations: if you give so much money, you get to sit in the front row. If you give so much money, you get a gift of a Buddha statue. I personally feel that we should never give with the wish to obtain these kinds of things. I'm not saying not to give to temples or support Dharma activities. It is good to give. But try to avoid giving with the motivation of, "Oh, I am going to get this special Buddha statue if I give a whole lot of money," or "I'm going to sit in the front row if I give a whole lot of money," or "I'm going to get a private audience," or whatever it is. I think it really damages the giving; it becomes basically buying an illegal ticket, because what the mind is doing is buying an illegal ticket. The mind is not really giving.

Giving isn't just the transfer of material things from here to there. It's the mind that really wishes to give. So when we make gifts, we don't do it with the expectation of everybody recognizing how wonderful we are or with the motivation of feeling, "Oh, look at me. I'm so good. I did this and this." I say this because sometimes in other places where I have been, people will make offerings and they will get quite puffed up about it. "Oh, I offered all this money to the temple. I built this hall in the temple." I don't think it's very nice. People do this and the temple may get a lot of money, but personally speaking, I think that the mind isn't very pure about the motivation. There is a lot of conceit and arrogance, as well as glorifying the rich above the people who don't have as much to give.

Actually, this reminds me of another story that proves this point. During the time of the Buddha, there was a custom of inviting the Buddha and the Sangha community for meals. One day a layman invited the Buddha and the whole Sangha community to a big feast. While this was going on, there was one very poor man who was standing outside the gate. It was customary that after the meal the Buddha would give a small teaching, then he would dedicate the merit (the positive potential) of the offering of the food. When it came time to dedicate this positive potential, the Buddha dedicated it in honor of this beggar who was standing outside the wall. The wealthy patron said, "Ahem, what happened here?" The Buddha explained (he said it politely, I am sure), "Your mind wasn't really giving. It was very concerned with your reputation and your status in the

community for having made the offering. This beggar who was standing outside, even though he didn't have anything to give, he rejoiced at the fact that there was this giving and generosity going on. So his mind was much more pure in terms of giving and sharing than yours was."

I think this is something to really remember. Again, don't use what I am saying to say, "Well, therefore I won't give, because if I give, I might get arrogant. Therefore, I'd better keep the money for myself." Our ego thinks in many spectacular ways; it can develop so many different rationalizations. Don't go to one extreme or the other about this. I am emphasizing this thing about pride because I have seen it in some places, too, where people compete with each other to give. You will get a few wealthy people in the community and it's like they're saying, "Well, who can give the most? Who gets the most status? Who will the lama look on with the kindest eyes for giving the most money?" I think, again, that kind of motivation—of competing with other people, trying to make ourselves look really good—just totally destroys the giving. There is no real gift in that. So really watch that. Even though we might think, "That's how people with millions of dollars would behave. I just have five dollars." Still, these things enter the mind. If we watch carefully, they definitely do.

### **Giving without expectation of return**

Also, when we give things, don't expect things in return. Don't expect the person to come up and say, "Oh, thank you so much, you are so wonderful!" We

don't expect them to come and give us a gift back.

I think it is fair, if we send something to somebody, to ask them to acknowledge that they received it. I think that is fair enough. I think it's even wise, with different charities, to ask them for a written receipt to make sure that the money is actually going to where it's supposed to go and not into somebody's pocket. I think that is perfectly all right to do.

Sometimes, however, the mind is fishing for compliments. "Tell me how great I am. Tell me how wonderful I am." Watch that mind, because it comes up so much. We give somebody a birthday present and they open it when we are there. If the person opens it and goes, "Ah," and puts it down, we feel crushed. "Oh, no, they didn't like what I gave them. That means they don't like me. That means I am a failure. That means I am a horrible person. That means nobody is ever going to love me!" It's very 'logical', isn't it? [Laughter.]

When we give, we need to feel, "Now it belongs to the other person." If they like it, that's fine. If they don't like it, that's also fine. The real purpose was my kind heart in giving. We do not expect them to make a fuss, hold it up and say, "See, they gave this to me. This is my favorite present." Watch what happens at Christmas time as everybody opens their present, how we're so attentive when people open our present. [Laughter.] Really develop this motivation of giving and feeling that it belongs to the other person so that after you give it, if they want to return it to the store, that's okay. If they want to give it to somebody else, that's okay. If they want to use the china vase that you gave them to put paper clips in, that's okay. It

belongs to them. Sometimes when we give something, part of our ego attaches to it. Especially if we give people clothes then afterwards we are always looking to see, “Are they wearing what I gave them?” Don’t we? Look what happens when people give us clothes. We try to wear it when they are going to be around so that they feel good. If we do that, then we definitely look to see if they are wearing what we gave them.

I like to tell a story from my own life that illustrates the idea of being willing to completely let go when we give something away. One time in India I had been doing some work with another monk for Lama Zopa. When we finished this work, we felt like we really wanted to offer Lama Zopa something nice. I went down to a cloth shop in McCleod Ganj and got brocade, the really pretty brocade that they have. I hand sewed a couple of book covers with the red brocade and the gold brocade. Hand sewing brocade with Indian needles is not easy. I did all of this and I gave them to Rinpoche feeling very happy about it. Right after I was there, Geshe Jampa Wangdu went in, and when Geshe Jampa Wangdu left, he was carrying the things that I gave to Rinpoche. [Laughter.] So I had to really think, “I did give them to Rinpoche. They didn’t belong to me anymore. He can do with them what he wants. If he wants to give them away, that’s okay.” [Laughter.] So when we give, we need to think, “It belongs to the other person. I don’t have any authority over it.”

An exception might be that sometimes you might give to a temple or a monastic community and you might specify a particular purpose for it. You might give some money and you say, “This is to build toilets

with.” I say this because this is what you have to do to get them to build toilets in India. Otherwise they might build another prayer hall or something, when they need toilets. When you give them the money, you have to say, “This is to build toilets,” or you might say, “This is to buy Dharma books.” In that case, if you specify the purpose, then you can ask them about it later and check up. That’s okay.

### **Not giving things obtained by wrong livelihood**

Then it says in the teachings not to give things obtained by wrong livelihood. If you have obtained money or items through cheating people, through stealing, through flattering people or bribing or dropping hints or coercing, or hypocrisy, any of these ways, then don’t use them as gifts. Now, I find this quite curious and I thought about it. What happens sometimes is you hear a teaching about the five wrong livelihoods and you think, “Wow, I have this incredible thing that I got because I dropped a hint, or because I gave them a present so that they would give me something back.” In reviewing our actions we feel a sense of regret. “It isn’t right for me to have this. I did obtain it by wrong livelihood.” We feel we want to give it away as an act of purification. To me—I am giving my personal opinion here—I think it would be quite good if we gave that away. If we realize we got it because of wrong livelihood and feel it’s not right for us to have it, that it’s better for somebody else to have it. I feel that with that kind of motivation, it’s okay to give it to somebody else. In fact, it’s probably good to give it to somebody else.



What they are talking about here is, I feel—my interpretation—to not deliberately do the five wrong livelihoods, or any wrong livelihood, so that you can be generous. So don't have the idea of, "Well, I want to give such-and-such amount of money because then I am going to look good. But I don't have this much money; so how about if I cheat somebody, get the money and give it?" Like that. That is how I interpret what this means. Again, that's my personal opinion.

### **Giving good quality items**

Also, when we give, it's good to give good quality things. Don't give the things that are rotting and ready to fall apart. "I am so generous at Christmas time. I am going to give away all my old clothes so that I can buy new clothes." We are not really giving in this case. Basically, we are recycling things, which is better than throwing them in the garbage; but there is not really the generous motivation. We are thinking, "Now my closets are empty and I can justify going to the mall and buying a whole bunch of stuff. I am going to buy the new stuff for me and other people are going to get the old stuff." Why shouldn't other people get the new stuff, and we keep the old stuff? Like when we make offerings on the shrine, "I am going to keep the best things. I am going to keep the prettiest bananas and apples and things for myself and I am going to give the old ones to the Buddha. Buddha has equanimity. He won't mind." [Laughter.] The apples are moldy or something. Instead of thinking like that, we want to look for the good quality items, and develop a sense of joy and

happiness in giving nice things, because that is where the giving comes, where there is the wish to give, where there is the happiness in giving. It's a very essential practice. If we can get in touch with how much we like to receive nice things and if we can develop the feeling of how nice it is to give those same things because other people get to receive them, then a much different kind of feeling comes in. It's really nice.

When we are novices we have to practice giving old things. We give the remnants of the vegetables to the worms. Maybe something like that. But we also need to try and practice giving things that we like, not just giving things to clear out space; giving the things that we like, giving the things that mean a lot to us because we want other people to enjoy those things, too. Giving nice quality things because it makes other people happy.

### **Giving frees us from fear and miserliness**

We can recognize that when we can train our mind in this way, it's something that benefits others; but it's also something that benefits ourselves, because it frees us from the prison of miserliness. That prison of miserliness is something that has tortured us from beginningless time. Miserliness and attachment are things that really impede generosity, because the mind is always saying, "Well, if I give, then I won't have!" That mind is so full of fear, isn't it? "If I give, I won't have." Of course, if I keep it I am still going to be afraid of losing it. That miserly mind, then, is quite fearful. We might stockpile lots and lots of stuff but

we never feel secure enough because the mind is always saying, “Oh, but I won’t have. I may not have.” We are worried about these things, so even if we have a lot, the mind isn’t happy. It becomes very difficult to fulfill the miserly mind. It becomes, in fact, completely impossible, because the miserly mind says, “Oh, I’ve got to save this for myself because what will happen if I don’t have it? And I also need this and I also need that, and I can’t give these things away because I won’t have them.” We get bound up in these fears, and sometimes we are so miserly that we can’t even use the things ourselves.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Exactly. We get something very beautiful, “But if I use it I might get it dirty or I might break it”, or whatever. We have this incredible beautiful thing and it sits in the closet because we are so afraid of using it, that it’s going to get ruined or spoiled or lost. I mean, it’s just incredible how the mind thinks sometimes. We hoard away all these things in our closet that we never look at, we never see, but we can’t use them ourselves, let alone give them away. That’s what the miserly mind does. It’s just completely squeezing us, like one of those corsets [laughter], making us more and more uncomfortable. The point of giving is to free ourselves from that miserly mind, to learn to take delight in sharing and giving and realizing. Like I was saying before, what is the difference between giving it to this hand that is attached to my body and giving it to that hand that is attached to somebody else’s body? It really doesn’t matter. So, just have that joy.

## Antidotes to miserliness

### *Reflecting on the advantages of generosity and the disadvantages of not being generous*

If we are having a lot of difficulty with miserliness, then we need to apply some antidotes. One antidote is just to reflect on the advantages of generosity and the disadvantages of not being generous. This is a very simple antidote. Sit on the cushion and say, “What are the results of not giving and what are the results of giving? Well if I don’t give, I am miserable. I am bound up. I am tight. I am fearful. What happens to me in future lives? Well, I won’t have resources in future lives because I haven’t created the cause for it. Other people are not going to want to be near me because I am always thinking of myself, making the universe revolve around me, around my needs and my wants. It’s going to be impossible for me to attain enlightenment, because I have never heard of a stingy Buddha before. And I am all bound up in being stingy.” Just to sit down and reflect, “What are the results of this miserly attitude? Where do they take me?”

Then sit and reflect, “Well what are the results of being generous? If I can really be generous, my heart is going to be free. If I am generous, the other person is going to be happy and I am also going to create a lot of positive potential that will bring about wealth in future lives. This will make me comfortable. It will also make it possible for me to be more generous in future lives. I am also going to create positive potential that I can dedicate to becoming enlightened

for others' benefit." I am going through these points quickly, but we can sit and think about them slowly. Think about what are the results of not giving and what are the results of giving. In that way, through understanding, it becomes very clear what is the best course of action to take, not only for ourselves but also for others.

That's very different from the mind that says, "I should give. I should give. I should give." If we sit there and 'should' ourselves a lot, sometimes we might give but our heart isn't in it. We are giving because we feel obliged, because we feel guilty, in some way like that. The giving is tainted. However, if we seriously think about the advantages and disadvantages, then the giving becomes much more natural. It's not something that we *should* do, but it's something that we understand, and so we want to do. Again, as with all the practices, understanding is very important.

### ***Contemplating impermanence***

Another thing to do if we are having a lot of problems with miserliness is to contemplate impermanence. We can think, "Okay, I am holding on so tightly to this thing. This is *my* thing." But look at it. It's totally impermanent. Moment by moment it's changing. Moment by moment it's in the process of decaying and getting old. Even if I hold on to it with attachment I am still not going to be able to make it last forever. Someday or another it's going to end, so why not give it away now while it's in good shape and somebody else can benefit, and I can enrich my mind through

the positive potential created? Why not do that instead of just sitting there holding on to this thing that one day in and of itself is going to end?

It is very helpful to consider all the things around our house that we are so attached to—"I can't give this. I can't give that."—and to think of the impermanence of the object or the impermanence of our relationship with it. "Someday I am going to die and I'm not going to have this anymore. My relationship with this thing is impermanent. I am going to die someday, and I am moving out of this house for good. When I die, I am not going to have the time to give everything away then. Since I don't know when I am going to die, why not give some of it away right now? It makes other people happy. Some time or another I am going to have to separate from it anyway, so why not give it now?"

We can recognize that anything that our mind seems so stuck to, we are not going to have forever. It's totally impossible. I personally find this kind of reflection very beneficial, very helpful, because then you think, "Well, someday I am going to have to separate from this thing anyway. Why am I getting so wrapped around it right now? What's the use? What's the purpose? This just doesn't make any sense." If it's so nice, it's better to give it away. Giving creates so much good energy, so much positive potential, and makes the other person happy, so why not?

We can train the mind in this way. Again, it's very different than giving ourselves this super-ego, parental lecture about how stingy we are. That is not what applying the antidote is. Applying the antidote is having the understanding in our heart and wanting to

give.

### *Considering the recipients of our giving*

Also, it's said in the teachings that there are certain groups of people with whom it is especially good to practice giving. One group is the poor and the needy. They become special objects of giving because of their need. "Special objects of giving" refers to the fact that we create a lot more positive potential when we give to that person than when we give to somebody else. If we give to aryaas, people on the path of seeing who have realized emptiness directly (what you might call Buddhist saints), then it becomes very powerful because of that person's level of realization. Or if you give to a bodhisattva it becomes very powerful because that person, due to their loving-kindness, will use the thing for the benefit of sentient beings. If you give to your Dharma teachers, it's also very good because of that special relationship and their kindness. If you give to your parents, because of the kindness of our parents in giving us this body and bringing us up, they become a particularly potent object of our gifts. So to pay attention to that kind of thing is important.

Now, I feel that in Asia this sometimes gets abused in some way. They talk about special people to give to and special times to give. For instance, it's really good to give on the four special days in the Buddhist year—the enlightenment day, the turning of the Dharma Wheel day, etc. It's also very good to give on full and new moons. Sometimes, then, what you see happening in Asia is that people won't give on a regular basis.

Then when it's Buddha's birthday they go and give all the beggars something. It's kind of the business person's mind. "This is a special day and I am going to get more merit, so I am going to give." But the day after the Buddha's birthday they won't give to the beggars anymore.

I have had some people come and say to me, "This seems rather materialistic, doesn't it? You give one day but not the next; or you give to one person because you are going to collect more merit, but you are not going to give to another person because you don't get as much merit. Isn't that wrong motivation?" I think my teachers might say something different, but my personal feeling is that I feel there are many different levels of motivation. Compared with the bodhicitta motivation, that motivation is definitely rather self-centered and limited because it is basically looking at positive potential or merit as a business commodity and how you can get the most of it. Compared with the generous mind of bodhicitta, that motivation loses out; it pales in comparison.

But then there are people who normally won't give anything. But if you tell them that if they give on this one special day they get special merit, then at least on that one day, out of the three hundred and sixty-five days, they will give. Or if you tell them they get special merit by giving to a particular person then at least they make an effort to be generous to that person. Whereas if they didn't get that motivation, then they probably wouldn't give to anybody at all. I think in that kind of context these kinds of things make sense. But from a broader perspective, we shouldn't start thinking, "Well, I'll give on Buddha's



birthday but I'm not going to give on the other days." Or, "I'll give money to these people because I get special merit, but I am not going to give to those people because I won't get as much merit."

My own personal opinion on this is (again, my teachers might disagree), I feel that the thing is to develop the heart of giving and not worry so much about whether am I going to get so much merit or not. The important thing is to have enough bodhicitta so that we are willing to sacrifice getting that much merit in order to benefit people. For example, one thing that happens in the Tibetan community is, they say the more vows somebody has then the more merit you get by giving to them. Because the full ordination for women didn't spread to Tibet (only the novice ordination spread to Tibet) the novice nuns have ten vows while the fully ordained monks have three hundred and fifty-three vows. Then people think, "I am going to get more merit from giving to monks." Thus everybody gives tons of money to the monks and not very much to the nuns because of this kind of mind that says, "I get more merit when I give to these people than to those people."

Of course, when I point out that the fully ordained nuns have more vows than the fully ordained monks, somehow they don't feel quite the same about this thing that you should give to the people with the most vows. [Laughter.]

*[Audience:] What is the basis for saying that more merit is created on certain occasions, e.g. on new and full moon days?*

You are saying, who made all this up to start with? I think that the emphasis on the full and new moon days, for example, came about for a few reasons. One is that there is some kind of special energy on full and new moon. Sometimes people have different kinds of energy, so to make an effort to do virtuous practices on those days becomes a little bit more potent. For example, the police department discovered that there are more homicides on full moon days than on other days. If you take the eight precepts that day, it's like you are really going against even the influence there.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Oh, no, nobody gives you merit. Nobody else is giving it to you. Buddha isn't sitting there with gold stars. And there is no ledger [laughter]—"How many merits do you have? How many demerits do you have and where are you going to go, up or down?"

*[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]*

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Also, for example, they say that if you give to somebody imagining that that person's the Buddha, it's the same merit as actually giving to the Buddha. So I think whether we give to our parents or whether we give to our aunts and uncles, whether we give to this person with so many vows or that person without those vows, if we look at that person as the Buddha and think that we are giving to the Buddha, I think it really enriches the whole process.

*[Audience:] What are the four great days in the Buddhist year when the positive potential one accumulates is multiplied many times?*

One is the fifteenth of the first month. During the time of the Buddha, there was a group of people who didn't believe in the Buddha's teaching who challenged the Buddha to a competition of magical powers. The Buddha didn't want to do it. But in the end he did and, of course, the Buddha won, so these five hundred people converted to Buddhism. So that became one of the special days where merit is multiplied.

The second one is the full moon of the fourth month. That's the anniversary of the Buddha's birth, parinirvana and enlightenment. Many traditions, including some Tibetan traditions, say that the birth was on a different day, but all agree that the enlightenment day is the fifteenth of the fourth month.

Then seven weeks after that is the anniversary of the first teaching, when the Buddha taught the four Noble Truths, the first turning of the Dharma wheel. That, again, is a very potent time because of what happened.

The last one is when Buddha descended from the god realm of the thirty-three gods back to the earth. It was the practice in ancient India that during the three months of monsoon season, the monks and nuns did retreat. They weren't allowed to move around. One rainy season the Buddha went up to the god realm of the thirty-three where his mother had been reborn. He spent the whole summer giving her teachings to repay her kindness. Naturally people here missed him very

much, so when he came back down, it was a time of big celebration. That again is one of the special days. (That's why sometimes you see on certain Buddhist artwork some golden stairs and the Buddha's walking down the golden stairs. They say that's how he came down from the god realm of the thirty-three. The golden escalator.) [Laughter.]

Those are the four special days when the positive potential is multiplied.

## **2. GIVING PROTECTION FROM FEAR**

The second type of generosity is the protection from fear, giving protection from fear or giving protection from danger. If somebody is in trouble, helping them out, protecting them. It's curious that in the scriptures they always talk about freeing prisoners. I think this instantly tells us something about the prison system at the time of the Buddha. It's probably the case that a lot of people were mistreated and put in prison unfairly. I don't think that means that in our modern times that we should break into the jail and free everybody, because I don't think that would be particularly generous to the society. However, if somebody is in prison unjustly or something like that, if there is a way of freeing them, to do so would be giving protection from fear.

Another example would be helping people who are experiencing danger, harm, or threats against them. Helping those who are traveling, if they are afraid that they might lose their way, or that their things might get stolen, then protecting them, going along with them, accompanying them, giving them the things

they need or giving them the instructions that they need. If one kid is getting beaten up by another, protecting the kid that's getting beaten up. If two dogs are fighting or two cats are fighting, interfere. Protecting beings from danger. If you see a bug drowning in water, scoop it out. It doesn't take that much effort. Lots of times bugs are drowning in water. Just whenever there are situations where we can intervene and protect beings, be they insects or animals or people, from danger, from fear. But it's not particularly good to shelter those who would go out and harm somebody else again. Again, we have to conjoin wisdom with generosity.

### **3. GIVING THE DHARMA**

The third kind of generosity is the generosity of Dharma. This can be in a formal situation like actually teaching the Dharma, giving teachings on texts. It can be leading a meditation. It can be just giving counseling and talking over a problem. Your friend has a problem and you talk it over with them but in the light of the Dharma. You might give some kind of Dharma advice or Dharma remedies to help them with their problem. All that is giving the Dharma. If you encourage people in their practice; if you give encouragement so that they act virtuously, so that they do things that are constructive, that's giving of the Dharma. If you say your prayers out loud where other beings can hear, that's the giving of the Dharma. Lots of times when I feed Achala [the kitten], I say mantra. Lots of times when I chase him around the house I say mantras [laughter], or when he chases me

around the house, I say mantras. I think that it's very good that other beings hear the words.

## **Saying mantras to animals**

Lama Zopa used to have a bunch of dogs. There was one nun who was in charge of these dogs. I think these dogs went to more initiations than I did, because Rinpoche felt very much that this was the giving of the Dharma. He didn't give the initiation just to the dogs, there were people there; but he was insistent that the dogs went. One summer a few of us nuns went every evening to chant certain prayers to the dogs. Rinpoche wanted them to get the imprint of hearing the Buddha's words, because they say that hearing chants makes a positive imprint on the animals' mindstreams. It will help them in their future rebirths.

One time I was with Rinpoche in Singapore and we were doing animal liberation. We went to get birds. We went in the pet store and there was a parrot that was all chained up. We got the parrot, put it in the cage and took it to this park. Rinpoche spent about fifteen minutes looking at the parrot and saying prayers, and the parrot just kept looking at Rinpoche. At the end he opened the door and the parrot wouldn't fly out. He opened the cage and the parrot didn't want to go. We had to take him out of the cage and urge him to fly.

The whole idea is, it got this imprint of hearing some of the teachings and the prayers in the mindstream. So, likewise, we can say mantras out loud and other people or animals or insects can hear.

Even if you don't say things out loud, if you imagine that there're other people around you and that they hear, this is giving the Dharma. Obviously you can't be walking around Green Lake chanting mantras at the top of your voice, although I did it once. [Laughter.] You can still visualize that there are people hearing it, so it becomes the generosity of the Dharma.

### **Making Dharma books available**

What our group did in sending Dharma books overseas is practicing generosity in giving the Dharma. We sent all those books in Terry's name to places in the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Africa and South America. (By the way, we have gotten some replies from the people who have received the books. I leave them in the green folder there for people to read. We got one from Estonia recently and another one from Uday a few days ago. There were also letters from South America and other places. People write to say thank you. It's something so simple; all we did was send books. But they have a hard time getting books there, so what we do becomes the generosity of the Dharma.

There was another time Greg collected Dharma books to send to prisons because we saw an ad in the Buddhist Peace Fellowship about the Dharma prison network asking for Dharma books that people didn't use. He collected them and sent them out. This is the giving of the Dharma, making Dharma available for people. Organizing the conference that we are having is also the giving of the Dharma, isn't it? All these

people who would probably never come to Buddhist teachings are going to spend a whole day listening to something that's going to have some spiritual content and talk of loving kindness in it. It's making the teachings available; it's the giving of the Dharma. To think of all the ways to share the Dharma with people besides standing with leaflets on street corners. Tactful ways of giving the Dharma.

### **How to share the Dharma with family and friends**

What I usually advice people is when you are explaining Dharma to your family or people at work, talk about the aspects of Dharma that you know these people already agree with. For example, I went to give a talk at an evangelical Lutheran church. I dressed up as a Buddhist nun for Halloween. [Laughter.] I went to give this talk and what did I do? I talked about ethics. I talked about love and compassion. I talked about patience. Then these people said, "Hmm, Buddhism is pretty good. This makes sense." Then I left it open to question and answer. I let them ask the question, "Do Buddhists believe in God?" and get into other topics like that. I find that that usually works well. If we say things that are very general that are basic common sense and nothing particularly religious, then it becomes easy for people to listen. We don't have to use fancy words and talk about samsara and nirvana and bliss and void. There is no need to use all the Sanskrit and Pali and Tibetan words all over the place that make us seem blown up and important. Just be a regular human being.



If you watch the public talks that His Holiness gives when he is talking to a general group, or read some of his interviews, or see things that he has done with journalists, you can see the giving of the Dharma, just how astute he is in doing it. He gives all the incredibly profound meanings in very simple terms. He makes them laugh and they really listen. It's important to remember that.

Those are the three specific ways of giving: giving material aid, giving protection from fear and giving of the Dharma. There are some more things about giving, but I think I will go into them next time.

Any questions about this? Debates?

## Questions and answers

*[Audience:] What mantra do you use for cats?*

I usually do *Om Mani Padme Hung* or the Vajrasattva mantra. Sometimes Vajrayogini. Various things, it depends on what I happen to be doing at the moment. That's what the kitty hears. [Laughter.]

*[Audience: Question about the book covers Ven. Chodron gave to Rinpoche]*

I think it's because I got too lazy, but I am sure he could use the cover some later time. Just because the person gives it away doesn't mean that we don't give to them again.

*[Audience:] But how do you deal with the mind that's reluctant? I see it in myself.*

One way to think about giving is if you give something to another person, it's theirs; you are not involved with what they do with it. Second of all, if you give it to them and they give it away, that's really nice because then the thing is going to get used in a very good way. If you give to somebody whom you trust as a spiritual person, then you can be sure that person is going to use it in a very wise way.

For example, you make offerings to some Lamas and they take the money back to build up their monastery, buy texts for their monks, or get tutors for their monks. They don't spend the money on themselves, but they use it in ways that are helpful for other people. You don't have to think, "This is my gift to them personally," but, "It's my gift to them and they can give it to others, and I trust them." They get more pleasure out of using it for others than they would out of keeping it for themselves, so why are we so attached to it? If it made Rinpoche happier to give the book covers to somebody else than to keep them for himself, why shouldn't I rejoice? The whole purpose was to make Rinpoche happy. But all of a sudden it's, "I am sorry, Rinpoche, you can't be happy that way. You have to be happy the way I want you to be happy."

*[Audience: inaudible]*

The purpose was to give, and if he received more joy from giving it away because the things were actually more useful to somebody else than to him, why not? Very often it's the same with giving to my teachers. I am sure my teachers don't need the money

themselves—what do they need it for? But I know they use it in very wise ways.

*[Audience:] When we try very hard to help somebody but they refuse our help, then we get very upset and angry with them. This is not a healthy attitude, is it?*

That's a very good point. When you are really trying to help somebody, to protect them from fear and give them the Dharma, but they don't want the help, then we tend to take it personally, don't we? It's like something against *me*. Actually where does *me* fit into this at all? You can't make a phone call if somebody doesn't pick up the receiver. If I make the phone call and they don't pick up the receiver, it's not that there is something wrong with me.

The thing is to recognize that this is that person's own limitation; but if we can keep the door open, then later on they might be more open and pick up the receiver. I think that's the thing: to try hard, to keep that door open when relationships aren't going well, because we tend to say, "I am giving you this. I am doing so much for you. You don't appreciate it. Ciao, buddy!" [Laughter.] But then, what about the fact that people change? What about the fact that your teenager might actually grow up and might someday actually seek your advice? Why throw them out of the house? Why break the relationship? Give them some space. They might come back. Same thing with our parents—big teenagers. Same thing with us—we're medium sized teenagers. [Laughter.] Recognize that people change, and try and keep that door open so that even though they can't receive it right now, some

time later they might be able to. To recognize that there is this tendency when we give: “You are going to get this whether you want it or not!” We start force-feeding others our generosity.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

It doesn't mean that you need to keep giving even though they don't want it. That might just waste your time or waste the material. Again, you need to use your wisdom. But it is good to have that fresh mind that you were talking about so that we think, “Well, here is this opportunity. It may not work again for the fiftieth time, but I am going to give it the space that it actually might work this time, instead of telling myself beforehand that it isn't going to work.” That's hard. It's an interesting thing to think about. If this client you mention shouts at some other mental health care worker, it doesn't bother you particularly. If they shout at you, it's a big deal.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Well, do you necessarily need to tell her? Can you just get rid of it, and later if it comes up, say, “Well, it was in storage. I was paying all this money to keep this stuff and I wasn't going to use it. I thought it was good if somebody else used it so I gave it away.” But you don't need to announce it to her beforehand. If it comes up ten years from now, maybe you can say that, but you don't need to bring it up if she doesn't.

I think you brought up a very good point. Lots of times people want to give and it makes them very

happy to give, and if we refuse the gift it hurts them. We went over this in the sessions on bodhisattva vows. If we are feeling ill-will, arrogance, pride, or something like that and we refuse a gift because of that, then that goes against the bodhisattva vows. If you are afraid that somebody's going to be rock bottom broke if they give it to you, then don't accept it. Otherwise, if they really want to give it and it makes them happy, I think it's nice to accept. Look at that mind that feels, "Oh no, I am obliged to them." Why do we have to feel that? Or the mind that says "But I am so wonderful, I don't need to accept charity. I am an adult now. I am not going to take anything from my parents." Look at that mind that says that.

*[Audience:] I don't wish the taxes that I pay to go towards military purposes. How can it be done?*

There are different ways. One way is the portion that goes for military things, deduct that from your taxes and give it to a charity instead, and just write that in when you send your taxes in. Another way is to write on your check, "Please use this money for social services and not for military things."

*[Audience:] But it doesn't really happen.*

It doesn't happen from their side, but it happens from your side. In your motivation you are not backing the military, because even if we deduct that portion—if I don't pay \$100 in taxes—it's not going to hurt the military at all. It's not so much that this is my way of

stopping the military, but it's my way of staying free from getting involved in their trip.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Well, it's the same thing when you offer an apple and in your mind you are offering the whole space full of beautiful things. There are no real beautiful things that you are giving to the Buddha; you are just imagining them.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

That's why I say if we say, "Do not use this money for military things," we are, from our side, un-implicating ourselves, because there's that clarity in our mind. We are not giving that money for that purpose. If they take it and misuse it for another purpose, that's their trip.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

But you are alive and I think you are mentally extricating yourself, which is all you can do, because where are you going to go live on this planet where you are not going to be involved in other people's samsara? You can live on top of Everest; you will still be involved in other people's samsara. The main thing is that enlightenment is attained by purifying our own mind.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

But from my side I am not saying, “Well, I am telling the government to use it for other things but they are going to use it for the military”, because I don’t know, maybe my check does go for something. I mentally am directing it for something specific. It gets all mixed in with everybody else’s. I don’t know what happens to it.

Anyway, we all have our own way of dealing with it. What do other people think? Do you think you get negative karma because you pay taxes even if you disagree with the purpose of the taxes?

*[Audience: inaudible]*

But what do you do to get out of samsara? Is it by changing the external world or by changing your mind?

*[Audience: inaudible]*

How do you change that? What do you need to change?

*[Audience:] Well, you think that ten dollars is going to the military. You really regret that and purify that, because to be realistic, it is going to that.*

Okay, then do it that way. [Laughter.] I don’t agree, but do it that way. But you see, in this case, in your mind, you are giving it to the military. You are saying that this ten dollars is going to the military.

*[Audience:] It’s like saying, “Well, in my mind I*

*didn't kill this man so I don't have to purify killing that man. But if you killed a man you still have to recognize what you have done wrong.*

But if you didn't give your money for that ...

*[Audience:] But you knew where it was going realistically.*

I once read an article in Buddhist Peace Fellowship Journal and it was right after they executed somebody in California. This one guy wrote, "I killed (whatever his name was)." He was saying that because he was a taxpayer in California; therefore, he is guilty of this person getting the death penalty and being executed, and he felt very lousy about it. I felt, "Wow, this is American guilt tripping!" How we guilt trip ourselves, because if you don't support the system that does the capital punishment and they do that without your permission, I don't see how you are implicated. If you think that is a good thing or if you are just apathetic about what they do, then I think there is some karma created. But if you don't back it then ...

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I would think that if you voted for that person knowing that they believed in capital punishment and you agreed with that, it is one thing. But if you voted for them and you didn't know that they believed in capital punishment, it would be different.

*[Audience: inaudible]*



That's why it is always important to be very clear in our own mind about what we advocate and what we don't, what we rejoice about and what we don't.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

It would depend a lot on the situation. Ignorance in this case doesn't just mean you don't have the information. Ignorance is thinking that a wrong action is okay. That's the ignorance that you create karma with.

In the last session, we talked about the far-reaching attitude of generosity. Generosity is the wish to give. There are three kinds of generosity:

1. Material generosity—giving our body, possessions, money.
2. Generosity of giving protection to those who are in danger, or stressed, or freaked out.
3. Generosity of Dharma—teaching the Dharma, counseling or giving advice to people, helping them out using Dharma methods.

### **The Giving of Body, Possessions or Root of Virtue in Terms of the Four Points**

We covered these three basic subdivisions of the far-reaching attitude of generosity. In this session, I want to talk a little more about the giving of the body, possessions and our root of virtue or positive potential. Shantideva, in his text called *Larbdo* (not *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life*), discussed each of

these in terms of the four points: giving, protecting, keeping pure and enhancing. I will go through each of these.

## **Generosity of body**

### ***a. Giving***

This refers to giving the body. There is a famous story from the Jataka tales regarding the giving of body. The Buddha was a prince in a previous life. One day while he was walking in the forest, he saw a mother tiger who had four cubs. The cubs were starving because the mother herself was starving and couldn't feed them. The prince donated his body for the mother tiger to eat so that she would have milk to feed her cubs. This is said to happen in a place that is now called *Namo Buddha*, not too far from Katmandu in Nepal. Many people visit this place to pray. We can all go there on a pilgrimage one day.

Nowadays we can donate parts of our body. We can give our blood. We can give a kidney. We can give corneas. We can give various parts of our body and it doesn't necessitate giving up our life. We can do these kinds of giving. The actual giving of the body that entails giving up our life—we are only allowed to do this when we are *arya bodhisattvas*. In other words, only when we are *bodhisattvas* on the path of seeing and have a direct perception of emptiness can we do it. When we have the direct perception of emptiness, we will be able to control our rebirth. You will have sufficient wisdom so that giving up your life will not be harmful for your practice.

Until we get to that level, what we should do is generate the wish to give our body. We can also do the *tonglen* meditation, which involves taking on the suffering of others and giving our body, possessions and positive potential to them. By cultivating our mind in this way and generating the wisdom aspect of our mind, then one day we'll actually be able to do it.

The arya bodhisattvas who can actually give their body are completely delighted to do so. In fact they say that a bodhisattva is very excited when they hear that somebody needs something, because they get to practice generosity. For us, the opposite happens. [Laughter.] When we hear somebody needs something, we go, "Oh no, I have to do something." The practice of giving the body which entails giving up one's life is only appropriate for people who are at that level of mind to do it safely. If we have not reached that level of mind, we should not do it. In the meantime we can donate our blood, or kidney, or other things like that. It can still be very helpful for other people.

### ***b. Protecting***

Unless we are at the level where we can give our body without harming our practice, we should protect our body. In other words, do not abuse the body. We should make sure that we only give it when it is beneficial and when our mind is ready to give. We should protect our body from harm and keep it safe and healthy, because it is on the basis of this human body that we can practice the path and attain enlightenment. Even though we are trying to lessen

our attachment to our body and not cling to the body, we should not go to the extreme of torturing the body and hating the body. This is not beneficial for our spiritual path at all. We have to take care of our body with a proper motivation—not with a motivation of attachment, but with a motivation to use it for our spiritual practice so that we can gain the realizations and be of greater service to others.

This is an important motivation to keep in mind when you are getting dressed, combing your hair or putting on your clothes. Instead of thinking, “Oh I hope I look good. I hope I smell good,” we think that we want to take care of our body because we are using it for the benefit of others.

It is helpful to have this attitude too when you go to the doctor. Instead of going to the doctor with a mind overcome with fear, thinking, “Oh God something is wrong with me,” we see it as, “My body actually belongs to other sentient beings because I am using it for their welfare. I have a responsibility to take care of it for their benefit. Therefore I am going to do the best I can.” If you focus on this kind of motivation, then all the fear and nervousness goes away. We are not grasping on to this body as ours. We are seeing ourselves as a caretaker of something that is used to benefit others. We don’t often think of our body as a vehicle for benefiting others, do we? We usually think of our body in terms of how we can get the most pleasure from it. It involves a complete change of motivation, but if we can habituate ourselves with that attitude, it would be very good.

### *c. Keeping it pure*

Whether we give our body to others or whether we use our body for the benefit of others, we should keep it pure. This means that we do all our actions with a proper attitude, with the motivation of bodhicitta. We do not use or give our body with pride or with the expectation of receiving something from it. We use or give our body only for the benefit of others. We use it to engage in virtue and not engage in any harmful actions.

#### *d. Enhancing or Increasing*

This means to do virtuous actions so that in our next life, we can have a precious human rebirth, especially one with the eight qualities. Remember we went through these eight qualities a long time ago—having good social position, economic means, power and respect in society. We want to have these eight qualities not because they are desirable in a worldly way, but because then we can use them to benefit others. They enhance our precious human life. Here, we use our body to create merit and then dedicate the merit to have a precious human life in the future to use for the benefit of others and to practice the path. Also, we dedicate for the long term goal of being able to practice the generosity of the body to become enlightened in order to be able to benefit sentient beings. In that way we rejoice and never regret when we give, and consistently dedicate the merit for the benefit of others.

Is it clear to you how those four things—giving, protecting, keeping pure and enhancing—are different aspects of the generosity of the body?

## Generosity of material possessions

### *a. Giving*

The generosity of material possessions includes giving money or things that you have around the house. ‘Giving’ here means giving our possessions, increasing the wish to give and especially giving things we like. Don’t give things because you want to buy more. Don’t give the things you don’t like. Try and train your mind to give the things that you like. I was reading an article in *Turning Wheel* by one woman not too long ago. She was talking about how she makes it a point every week or every two weeks to give away something of hers that she likes. I thought deeply about that. How about making a conscious effort every week or every two weeks to look around your house for something you like and give it to somebody? Is this pushing some buttons?

I thought what a wonderful practice it would be to train the mind not to be attached to things and to take delight in giving. If there are things around our house that we really enjoy, wouldn’t it be nice to share that happiness with somebody else by giving it to them? Consistently training ourselves to give in that way and sharing the happiness with somebody. Shall we try it out for a month? Try giving something that is yours that you like. As you give it, try to let the mind be happy to give. Instead of trying to *make* the mind happy to give and getting all tied up in knots, *allow* the mind to be happy to give.

### *b. Protecting*

‘Protecting’ here refers to protecting our possessions and not giving them when doing so would be harmful. We do not give our possessions away if doing so would hurt somebody else or if our possessions would be wasted. If the person we are giving the thing to wouldn’t appreciate it or wouldn’t value it, then don’t give. We protect the possessions until a time when the giving can be really valuable. For example, you wanted to give away five hundred dollars. You wouldn’t give it to a three-year-old, because they wouldn’t know how to use it. They would probably drool on it. The money would be destroyed and go to waste. In that case it’s better to protect the money and give it at a later time when it could be used by someone in a wise way and wouldn’t be wasted.

### *c. Keeping it pure*

When we use our possessions or give them away, we make sure that we do it with the bodhicitta motivation, the altruistic intention. Again, we do it without pride and without expectation. Also, when we give our possessions, we make sure that they are not going to be misused. We don’t engage in destructive actions when we give our possessions. Therefore we keep the possessions pure whether we are giving them away or keeping them, not involving them in any kind of destructive actions. For example, we do not give money to somebody who is going to use it to buy firearms. We also do not keep the money for ourselves in order to buy firearms. We use the money or give it to others for something that is beneficial.

By the way, along this line, many people

appreciated our making the conference tickets available to people with low income and students. This is one way for our group to practice the giving of possessions. Another way is when we offer retreat scholarships to people who cannot afford it, to come on retreats. Then we as a group accumulate that karma of the giving of possessions.

#### *d. Enhancing*

When we give our possessions or when we use them with the attitude of bodhicitta, dedicate the positive potential from this so in the future we will have possessions to support us in our Dharma practice. If you are born in a lifetime where you don't have enough possessions it becomes an obstacle to Dharma practice. If you don't have enough food and you don't have a place to live, it is difficult to practice.

Here with our generosity of Dharma we dedicate for the benefit of all sentient beings, for the enlightenment of all sentient beings, for future lives so that we will have the possessions to support us in our Dharma practice and to make charity to Dharma friends on the path. I think it is very important that those of us who live in a society with so much abundance, share our wealth with other Dharma practitioners who don't have that kind of abundance. An example is when our group sent Dharma books to more than seventy different places in Africa, ex-Soviet Union and Latin America. This is the generosity of the Dharma. We give to the people who don't have the resources to have Dharma books. By the way, we have received some letters from these



places saying how happy they are. Really try to share your resources with other Dharma practitioners. It might include helping the Tibetans or helping people who want to study or go for retreats, or whatever.

## **Generosity of root of virtue**

### ***a. Giving***

Our root virtue refers to the positive potential or the good karma we have accumulated from the virtuous actions that we do. ‘Giving’ means to be generous with our root virtue. Instead of dedicating, “Please may I meet this incredible person and have a great relationship,” we give our root of virtue to other people so that it becomes something beneficial for all sentient beings.

‘Giving’ refers to dedicating or giving our positive potential from the depth of our heart. It means having an attitude that is completely willing to give the positive potential that I have accumulated to others, even if it means I don’t experience the result of it. That is actually impossible. We can never transfer karma. Karma isn’t like money. I can’t make out a bank draft and transfer the money from my account to your account. We will experience the result of our karma nonetheless, but it’s important not to be attached to the good karma that we have.

I stress this because sometimes you can see this happening in Asian countries. The people are very aware of the importance of creating good karma. The good karma almost becomes spiritual money to them and they get very, very attached to it. Everybody

eagerly lines up to make food offering to the monastics to try to accumulate a lot of good karma. They may even elbow somebody else out of the way, “I am going to offer the tea because I want the good karma of offering the tea. You can’t do that.” There is some kind of unhealthy competition and people are seeing the good karma as spiritual money. The ‘giving’ here is really to protect us from having the attitude of seeing the creation of good karma as the creation of spiritual money. Is that clear? Is that making sense?

*[Audience: inaudible]*

If we go out of our way to create good karma either with powerful objects or on special [merit-multiplying] days, and then we dedicate all that good karma for the benefit of others, then it’s extremely beneficial. If we give with a very selfish mind, with the attitude of wanting to have the most good karma with the least amount of effort, then we are being extremely limited. That’s why the giving of the roots of virtue is very important. It frees us from thinking, “Well, I am going to do this for the benefit of my own future life.” It is an interesting situation with Westerners. Westerners often don’t believe in future lives. It’s easier for them to say, “I am doing this for the enlightenment of all sentient beings”. [Laughter.]

*[Audience:] How does dedication of merit benefit others if we can’t transfer it to their account?*

Well, there are several ways. First of all, when we are making the dedication, it creates a good energy that

can act as a support for other people's virtuous karma to ripen. A second way: somebody may be reborn, say, as a spirit or some other being. They know that we are dedicating for them and they rejoice at it. When they rejoice, they get some positive energy and that helps them create some positive potential as well.

*[Audience:] If the beings know that the karma is not transferable, why would they rejoice at our dedicating the merit to them?*

Someone did a kind action or generated a good attitude and he said, "I want to give my positive karma to somebody else. I want it to ripen with them." You heard that and you felt happy about them generating that attitude. You rejoiced at their virtuous action. By rejoicing, you create good karma.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

If they know that you are dedicating for them it makes their mind happy, and that helps them to get through a difficult situation. For example, I got a thank-you note from Cindy today. When Owen's father died, they [Cindy and Owen] called me. I did some puja and I told them about this. And Cindy wrote and said, "Losing your parent is really difficult, but it's easier when you know that other people are making prayers for them." It helped them with the grieving process. It is the same with Lorie. I talked with her tonight and I told her we would make a dedication for her. She said, "Oh, thank you very much!" It gave her a sense of support and the energy

of the spiritual community behind her. Such actions do help people. It doesn't mean that we go around bragging to people, "Oh I dedicated for you." Only in situations where it's helpful for them to know, do we do so.

### ***b. Protecting***

We have to protect the root of our virtue so that it isn't destroyed by anger and wrong views. If we get angry and we haven't dedicated the positive potential, then our merit can be destroyed. Even if we have dedicated the merit, getting angry subsequently can lessen the intensity of the result or postpone the ripening of the result. We have to try to protect it. By knowing that, it gives us some energy not to get angry. Somebody did something to you and it's driving you nuts. You started to get angry but the thought suddenly pops into your mind, "Hey if I get angry, I am going to be destroying all this positive potential that I worked so hard to create in the first place. Is getting mad at this idiot worth it? Well, no! I am not going to let it harm me twice." [Laughter.] It becomes double trouble because not only is somebody hurting us, if we get angry at them, we are also making a big problem for ourselves. It's not worth getting angry. Protecting my positive potential and rejoicing at that is much more important. In that way we shift our attention to something else.

### ***c. Keeping it pure***

Then we keep it pure by continuously doing virtuous

actions. We make sure that our virtuous actions are unsullied by bad motivations such as wishing for the happiness of this life. Since we are doing a bodhisattva practice here, doing virtuous actions simply with the motivation of benefiting future lives is also not appropriate. We want to keep our virtuous actions pure by making sure that the motivation behind them is pure.

That is why it is so important that the first thing to do in the morning when we wake up is to generate a broad, general virtuous motivation: “I am doing everything today for the benefit of sentient beings”. That will cover all the actions for the day, and it is also good to pay special attention to generate it again and again as you do different actions during the day. But at the least, if you had set your motivation clear in the morning like that and dedicated it at night, then there is always something underlying it. Not only do we generate this good motivation on a day-by-day basis, in some ways we can also do it on an action-by-action basis. It’s also helpful, especially if we have taken the bodhisattva vows, to make the determination that I want everything I do in my whole lifetime to be for the benefit of others. In other words I dedicate my whole lifetime to benefiting others in whatever way I can through my practice and my actions.

That’s how we keep the root of virtue pure. If we do virtuous actions simply for the happiness of this life then the result we get is only the happiness of this life. With that, the karma is finished. It’s over and done with. When I lived in Singapore people would come and make offerings at the temple, and they

would pray, “Please may my son marry a nice girl.” “Please help us to win the lottery.” I’ve had people stopping me and asking me for lottery numbers. [Laughter.] I said, “I don’t give lottery numbers. I don’t know anything about this.” “Oh, but you are a ‘Venerable’. You should have special ability. Tell me what number or ticket I should buy.” [Laughter.]

Making offerings creates virtue. But if we make offerings with this kind of motivation then it’s wasting the opportunity.

#### ***d. Enhancing or Increasing***

Increasing the root of virtue is to dedicate all the virtuous actions for the temporal and ultimate benefit of sentient beings. The ultimate benefit for sentient beings is their liberation and enlightenment. The temporal benefit is to have food, clothing, medicine, shelter, friends, education and all those things that make for a happy life.

*[Audience:] How does imagining someone purifying help that person?*

Well like I said before, it sets up a good energy and this can help their good karma to ripen. You can’t purify their bad karma. Only they themselves can purify it, but by your imagining this, it sets up a kind of positive energy whereby their good karma can ripen. If they are in a state where they can see you doing this, they might say, “Well, she is purifying my negative karma. I should think about it.”

## **How to Enhance the Practice of the Far-Reaching Attitudes**

There are also some tips for how to enhance the practice of the far-reaching attitudes. Now we are getting to the tips. [Laughter.] They didn't use that word in the scriptures but it's what it boils down to.

### **SET A PROPER MOTIVATION**

When you are practicing generosity, make sure that the motivation is correct. That is why before we make offerings on the altar, we generate a positive motivation. Before you do any action, whether you are handing somebody something or doing a small favor, continuously generate that motivation so that your action is imbued with compassion. If you do an action for the benefit of one person, it creates that much positive potential. If you do it for the benefit of all sentient beings, it creates a much greater magnitude of positive potential. Thus generating the bodhicitta motivation enhances the power of the action. This is how the bodhicitta helps to purify and accumulate positive potential quickly. Since the action is aimed at all sentient beings, not merely at one sentient being, any action that we do with bodhicitta becomes a very powerful force.

*[Audience:] They say it is good to imagine specific people when we make dedication. Why is that?*

We do that because it makes the dedication much more powerful for ourselves. Just saying "I dedicate

for all sentient beings” can, in some way, become a little trite to our minds. If we think of specific sentient beings, for example, our friends, but don't stop with them and go on to different categories of sentient beings, then it makes it more specific and much more real. It's the same when we are doing the *tonglen*. We don't just say, “Well I take on the negative karma of all sentient beings.” Rather, we go group by group, person by person. This makes it very vivid and real so that what we are doing really sinks into us. It becomes very personal.

To relate this to my experience in China: I handed out Buddha pictures to people who were visiting the temple. As a result, the police bothered me and some people I was traveling with got upset with me. This experience had had a strong impact on me. Now when I do purification, I think very specifically about those people—the police who bothered me, the people who got upset with me, the bureaucrats who bothered others who handed out Buddha pictures. I dedicate specifically for them. They really stand out as a group for me now. It has made my practice much more real than just thinking ‘all sentient beings’. It is like, “I am dedicating even to all these specific people who have done harmful actions.” I also think of all these people who, before and during the cultural revolution, destroyed the Dharma, burned scriptures, made monks and nuns disrobe, imprisoned people for practicing, etc. I have been thinking very specifically about those people, purifying them and dedicating to them.

If you have a negative experience in your daily life, for example, somebody crashes into your car or



scolds you, it's really good to dedicate specifically to those people. Then you can see why it becomes a bodhisattva practice. You get a taste of what bodhisattva practice is because it basically involves not holding grudges and being unbiased. It's a good training for us.

*[Audience:] How do we make the connection between giving a box of raisins to homeless person and all sentient beings?*

Before we give the box of raisins, we say to ourselves, "I am giving this to create the positive potential that I can then dedicate to the attainment of enlightenment. By my getting closer to enlightenment, I will have much more ability to benefit others than giving a box of raisins." You think, "Right now, I am just giving a box of raisins to this person. But one day I would like to be able to give everything that anyone could possibly need to all sentient beings." Right now we don't have the capability, so we imagine doing it. We are making the prayer and aspiration to be able to do it in a much broader way. It will ripen in that way and one day we will be able to do it.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

It is good to imagine specific people and things when we are dedicating, but think of as many specific people and things as possible. That makes things much more alive for us. When you make dedication, dedicate first for the enlightenment of all sentient beings before you dedicate for the specific people and

things. If you make dedication only for certain things to happen and you did not make dedication for enlightenment, then it won't go towards your enlightenment.

For example, I offer an apple to the Buddha and I say, "I offer this apple to the Buddha so that Carrie can live in a nice house." I am dedicating it for Carrie. I create merit by offering that apple and I dedicate it so Carrie can live in a nice house. By the power of my motivation and my dedication, the best result we are ever going to get for that offering is Carrie living in a nice house.

Alternatively, I give the apple to the Buddha and I say (and I have also set the same motivation before I give the apple), "I give this apple to the Buddha and I dedicate it for the enlightenment of all sentient beings and for my enlightenment. In addition, I dedicate especially that Carrie can live in a nice house." In this case, the merit doesn't get exhausted since it's been dedicated to enlightenment. And then you dedicate for the subsidiary things too, which are like the steps in the process (of sentient beings becoming enlightened).

## **THE EMPTINESS OF THE CIRCLE OF THREE**

Some more tips on how to enhance our practice of the far-reaching attitudes. Specifically here, we are talking about enhancing our practice of the far-reaching attitude of generosity. This is to do what they call the meditation on the emptiness of the circle of three. Sometimes this is translated as 'the emptiness of the three circles'. That's a mistranslation. It's 'the

emptiness of the circle of three'. What is the 'circle of three'? In an action of giving, there are the giver, the recipient and the action of giving or the object that's given. There are these three things ....

*[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]*

*[Audience: inaudible]*

They are interdependent. To recognize that there is not this big *me* here that is doing this action, even though I feel like there is a *me* here. Why do I say that *I* am here? Why do I say *I* am giving? The mind is doing one action and the body is doing another action, and it's only on the basis of what the mind and body are doing, that I can say that *I* am giving, or even that I exist. We begin to realize the dependent nature of the self, the dependent nature of the function of what the body and mind are doing, that make us the giver.

## **INTELLIGENCE**

Another tip is to do the far-reaching attitudes with intelligence, which means:

- a. Having the correct motivation
- b. Do not cling to the action as inherently existent
- c. Do not expect to enjoy the result of your virtuous action, but rather dedicate it so that we are not clinging on to just getting good results for ourselves

This point is very important because otherwise we

become impatient in our Dharma practice, “I have been offering seven bowls of water on my altar for a whole year! How come I am not rich yet?” “When is the result of my positive karma coming?” “I have been going to Lamrim class for three weeks. How come I am not enlightened yet?” That happens on the fourth week. [Laughter.] Not to have this mind that is expecting results from the good karma, but to just be content to create the causes. One of my friends made a very good analogy. She said, “When you plant a flower seed in the ground you don’t stand over the seed in the ground and say, ‘Come on! When are you ripening?’” You simply plant the seed, create the circumstances and then wait. It will ripen when things are ready.

## Questions and answers

*[Audience:] Why do we offer the seven bowls of water?*

I don’t know why it’s seven. It could be one. It could be eight. Buddhists always like the number seven. Don’t ask me why. I have asked others but I haven’t found the answer yet. We offer water because it’s something that is generally plentifully available. Therefore, we are not terribly attached to it and we can give it with real bodhicitta. In other words, we can give it without any miserliness or clinging. It becomes a very pure offering. Also, it is easy for people to offer water because it is plentifully available. You don’t need to be rich to do it.

It’s a very nice habit to get into doing every

morning, offering the water in the morning and taking it down at night. It's one of the activities that frames your day, just like making three prostrations in the morning when you get up and three prostrations before you go to bed at night, and generating a good motivation in the morning and dedicating the merit in the evening. All these things frame your day's activities.

You offer the bowls of water in a certain way because you don't want to put empty bowls on your altar. When the bowls are empty, always put them upside down. When somebody invites you over to dinner, they will not give you an empty plate. In the same way, we don't put empty bowls [right side up] on the altar.

To make the water offering, first you clean your bowls out and stack them up. You pour a little bit of water into the top bowl. Pick up the [top] bowl and pour out almost all the water [into the next bowl in the stack], leaving just a little bit of water [in the top bowl], and you put that [top] bowl down on your shrine. Then you take the next one and pour out almost all the water, leaving just a little bit, and place it next to the first bowl. In this way, you set up all the bowls in line on the shrine, each with a little bit of water so they are not empty bowls. Then you go back to the first bowl and fill up each of the bowls in turn.

When you take down the water in the evening, you put it outside on the flowers or the bushes. You pour it into some place where people don't walk on it. Don't throw it down the toilet.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

The giving of love is included in the generosity of giving protecting from fear. We are putting them in a safe place and taking care of them. It is also the giving of love in the sense of encouraging people, giving them good feedback, giving them affection when they need it, giving them support, giving them love. These are different from being attached to them.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Definitely. You can see karma functioning very well here. When you are friendly to other people, people automatically respond in kind. It is the same with the giving of love. It becomes much easier to then be the recipient of love. But the important thing is not to expect anything in return when we give love, but to derive pleasure just from the very act of giving.

I think in many ways, parents' love for their children is this kind of giving. This is why they always use the example of the mother so much in the scriptures. (Now we have to make it gender neutral and include the kindness of the father too!) The parents just give and give and give and the kids don't know. Yeshe (Sarah's kid) doesn't know what sacrifices Sarah makes—she had to take leave to take care of Yeshe because she is crying. In some ways it's a very thankless job. A parent gives without thinking so much about the results. The parental love just needs to be purified of the attachment. That kind of generosity is really important.

I think in America, love has almost become like a property now. It's like, "Well I am in this relationship because I want my needs met. If my needs don't get

met, I am going to get out of this relationship. I am not going to love you anymore if I am not getting something in return.” You see this so much in the way people talk about relationships these days, as if love is a commodity and we are in a transaction, “You owe me so much love. If I am going to love you, your responsibility is this much, and you had better give it to me or the deal’s off.”

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I thought Mark Hart made an excellent point in his presentation on Saturday when he said, “Why is it when we go beyond some societal norms, people say it’s co-dependency?” I thought that was an excellent point. People are becoming quite miserly about their love, aren’t they? It is like, “I am not going to do this because then we are co-dependent.” I think somehow we have to be very careful with this movement that is going on in America about setting boundaries and things like that. We don’t want to use it as a way of becoming extremely self-centered and miserly.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

That’s why it is very important for us to attain enlightenment. If we attain enlightenment or if we get further along the bodhisattva path, then we will be able to teach the children, which will enable them to escape from samara and not be condemned to this whole cycle of death, rebirth and suffering.

In particular, if we have a very strong karmic relationship with somebody, then it is all the more

important to become a Buddha. The further advanced we are, the more we can help them because of the strength of that relationship. If we care about them and recognize our limitations, then it inspires us to practice for their benefit.

Let's sit quietly for a few minutes.



## **CHAPTER 7**

### **Ethics**

Now we are going to move on to the second far-reaching attitude, which is ethics. Sometimes ethics is translated as morality. Sometimes for Americans, morality becomes a difficult word. Sometimes ethics becomes a difficult word. Sometimes telling us not to do things that we want to do becomes difficult.

Sometimes anything that doesn't please the ego causes an earthquake. [Laughter.]

Ethics is abandoning the wish to cause harm to others. What makes it the far-reaching attitude of ethics is when we combine it with bodhicitta and the understanding of emptiness.

Ethics comes from generosity. First we practice generosity, and then ethics is the next practice. Ethics is a little bit more difficult to practice than generosity. If you practice generosity first, then the attachment to our possessions lessens, and so we are not so attached to our present possessions. We are not so greedy to get more possessions, and so as a result, we stop harming others in order to protect and procure possessions. That's how if you practice generosity, then it quite naturally leads into the practice of ethics. I think that's an interesting thing to contemplate. How lessening the attachment to things then automatically makes us more ethical.

### **Three Divisions of Ethics**

There are three divisions of ethics in this practice:

1. Abandoning acting negatively
2. Acting constructively or positively
3. The ethics of benefiting others

All of the Lamrim serves to increase these three ethics and all the bodhisattva practices are actually found within these three types of ethics. So we shouldn't see the six far-reaching attitudes as separate things; we should see how all of them fit together, how all of the bodhisattva practices, even if they're of the other far-reaching attitudes, (even if you're doing the beginning portion of Lamrim) all fit into ethics: abandoning harming others, and acting in ways that benefit them. The quote on the bottom of this thangka (from His Holiness) says: "Abandon negative things; do positive things; cultivate a kind heart—this is the teaching of the Buddha." So it's kind of putting it all together in one verse.

The practice of ethics is an extremely important one and you'll see that it comes very often throughout the entire Lamrim. It came at the very beginning, in the lower scope teachings in the practice of karma, and cause and effect and the ten negative actions. It came in the middle scope when we talked about the three higher trainings being the path out of samsara, and the first of the three higher trainings is ethics. It comes in the bodhisattva practice here, the far-reaching attitude of ethics. And even in the tantra, there's the ethics that goes with the tantric practice because there're different kinds of tantric initiations. For some of them, you take tantric vows and so that

becomes your practice of ethics there.

So people should not think—and this is a very common misconception in America—that once you get into tantric practice, you're beyond ethics. Actually it's exactly the opposite. There are very, very strict ethical regulations for tantric practice. If you practice those very acutely and sometimes not adhere to lower ethical vows literally, just by the fact of keeping the tantric vows very, very purely, it becomes a pure action. But some people say, "Well, tantra is the highest practice. You transform everything. We're all Buddhas. This is all a pure land. We don't need ethics. Good, bad—it's all empty."

That kind of idea to me indicates more of an empty head than real emptiness, because if you really understand emptiness, then ethics becomes even more important. This is because the more you understand emptiness, the more dependent arising makes sense. The more you understand dependent arising, the more the practice of ethics is really crucial, because we realize that things arise dependently, and so our actions influence what happens in the future. Therefore the practice of ethics and abandoning harming others becomes very, very important.

So the understanding of emptiness does not negate ethics. Rather it enhances one's practice of ethics, and similarly, engaging in tantric practice actually enhances one's practice of ethics. You get a whole new set of vows when you take the highest class tantric initiations. So it's not some kind of fuzzy thing of "You go into tantra, now you can have samsara and nirvana at the same time—oh goody!" It's not like that. This is a real, real common misconception and it

leads many people to a lot of difficulties this lifetime and future lifetimes.

## **ABANDONING ACTING NEGATIVELY**

What this means is if we have any of the pratimoksha vows, (the vows for self-liberation, including the monks' and nuns' vows, the five lay precepts and the eight one-day precepts) then this first kind of ethics means keeping those vows purely. Those of you who have taken refuge, you definitely have the vow to abandon killing, and then you may have taken actually, two, three, four, five of the lay precepts. Keeping those purely with an attitude of bodhicitta, becomes this first type of ethics.

If you don't have any of the vows of individual liberation or the pratimoksha vows, then what this refers to is abandoning the ten negative actions. Actually, if you have some of the vows of self-liberation, if you have the five lay precepts or whatever, this includes abandoning the ten negative actions. They are:

- Three that are done physically: killing, stealing, unwise sexual behavior
- Four that are done verbally: lying, slander, harsh words, idle talk
- Three mental ones: coveting, maliciousness, wrong views

We did this at the beginning of the path and it's back here reminding us again. It's really important when we go through this, to remember that these are not laws.

The Buddha described these ten negative actions as guidelines to help us, as a tool to help analyze and refer to our own behavior. The Buddha did not say “Thou shall not do this.” Buddha just said, “If you do this, you get this kind of result. Now check up. Do you want that kind of result? If you don’t want that kind of result, don’t create the cause.” It’s something that’s best left very much to our own wisdom and our own discretion. They’re not commandments which the Buddha created. The Buddha didn’t create the fact that if you kill others, you get a lower rebirth. Buddha didn’t create karma, the functioning of karma. Buddha simply described it. In the same way that Newton didn’t create gravity. He just described it.

This is a very different way of looking at ethics than what we grew up hearing about them when we were kids. It’s another example of how sometimes when we come to Buddhism and hear a teaching, we hear it through the ears of a six-year-old child in Sunday school and misinterpret it. It is important to be aware of this.

Ethics is something that we choose to do because we see how it makes our life happier, and how it makes our life more peaceful. And it’s true, because if we examine our lives, a lot of the conflicts with people or messy situations can very often be traced to one, two or ten of these ten negative actions.

When we start lying in our relationships, have extra marital affairs, steal things, or gossip, we can see from our own experience how it contributes to so much confusion and problems in our lives; not only external problems with other people, but also how we feel about ourselves. So sometimes we might act

unethically and get an advantage that acts temporarily in our own favor, but underneath it all we don't feel very good about ourselves. This whole build-up of guilt, self-hatred and confusion, even if we got away with it, and everybody else said, "Oh, that was really shrewd and smart," still underneath it all, we're the ones who live with ourselves. So a lot of psychological unease comes from negative actions.

And when we meditate, we begin to feel that when the mind is filled with anger, there is a certain kind of energy in the mind. Even though we rationalize, "Oh, this is good and yes, I should do this, and I need to tell this person off," and even if we build up a whole court case for what we're doing, the fact is the mind doesn't feel good when we sit there alone with ourselves. There's some kind of affliction in there that's giving rise to one of the ten negative actions and that doesn't go away no matter how logical of a court case we build in our own defense. In psychological terms, that's called denial and rationalization.

Don't expect it to go away quickly as perfecting and generating ethics is something that takes time, deep introspection and constantly coming up with new ways to not let the ego get around the whole thing. But as we explore it more and more, we learn a lot more about ourselves and our mind becomes more peaceful.

Lama Zopa once gave an example when he was talking about ethics that struck me deeply. He was saying that we talk a lot about world peace and how important world peace is, but yet we often don't see the necessity of ethics for world peace, less crime or a

more harmonious society. But if we look at our own lives, and make an individual effort to abandon just one of the ten negative actions, let's say just the first one—to abandon killing, then everybody else on this planet can feel safe at least around one person. And when you think about that, that's five billion human beings' safety that we're talking about when we abandon killing. If you go further and abandon also taking things that haven't been given to us or stealing, then that means every other living being's possessions are safe when they're around us.

So our keeping good ethical conduct is something that has a far-reaching effect on the planet. And sometimes we don't see this. We say, "World peace? How are we going to do it? There's just too much going on in society. Everything is screwed up!" But if we just stop and look at one person's conduct, we realize how much we can do if we get our own act together and how even keeping one or two precepts contributes to the safety and security of everybody on this planet.

Imagine if everybody on this planet were able to keep just the precept not to kill for one day—the newspapers wouldn't have anything to report on! What would they put in the six o'clock news? And that's just the impact of one precept! We shouldn't minimize the value of the force of our own ethical behavior and how much positive contribution that makes to society and to world peace.

## **ACTING CONSTRUCTIVELY OR VIRTUOUSLY**

This is doing virtuous things so that we can collect a

lot of positive potential or merit, which can then be dedicated to becoming a Buddha. Acting positively or constructively includes the practice of all six far-reaching attitudes in general, and that really includes any kind of positive action you do.

So just coming to teachings, contemplating, discussing, meditating, these are all the ethics of acting constructively. Or if you help print Dharma books, if you make prostrations, if you make offerings, if you offer service, if you organize a conference, or do a database, or anything with this kind of motivation, then it becomes acting constructively. So any kind of virtuous actions we do becomes this second form of ethics.

Although some of these virtuous actions are the more active ones that we integrate in our daily life, such as being kind to others or helping people, a lot of them are things that we do as part of a formal Dharma practice— like doing prostrations or making offerings, taking refuge.

I think that's very important because although we really want to integrate Dharma in our daily life, the force of taking the time out to engage in formal practice is important. Because if we just try and integrate in our daily life but don't give ourselves any quiet time to reflect on our life, then our energy very soon gets dispersed. It just goes out the window.

But if we take the time, and that's why I'm really emphasizing making a daily meditation practice for yourself and doing some practices. Really take the time, set some time in your schedule for some quiet time alone, where you can become friends with yourself and work on your mind in a more intense



way. I think that's very important. If we just try and integrate all day without any quiet time, we just get frazzled and out of whack.

In this way, some people may want to use their quiet time to read, do the analytic meditation, breathing meditation, or some of the purification meditation. Some people may want to do prostrations, or do mandala offerings. And all these practices are very good.

Those of you who have been coming to class for quite a while, I really encourage you to start doing prostrations to the thirty-five Buddhas on a very regular basis. If you like to count, you can start counting them. If you don't want to count, forget it. It doesn't matter. But if you feel that counting would give you some inspiration and direction, it's good to count some. It gives you something solid that you're doing day after day, really doing these prostrations every day as a way of purifying your mind. Or doing mandala offerings day after day as a way of accumulating positive potential.

*[Audience:] Can you describe the practice of prostrations to the thirty-five Buddhas?*

There're thirty-five Buddhas who took special vows to help us purify our negative karma, and so what we do is we bow down to them, recite their names, and at the same time imagine light coming from them into us, purifying and pushing out the negative energy. Then at the end, there's a whole confession prayer where we think of all the different things that we regret doing in this life and previous lives, and we rejoice at the

virtues that we and others have collected. Finally, we dedicate all of these for the benefit of all beings.

It's an extremely powerful practice and if you do it daily, you begin to see the difference in your mind. It acts as a very good method to help you reflect on your whole life and do this life review and ethical clean up. They say that when people die, sometimes they have a quick life review where your whole life flashes in front of you. I would advise not to wait until you die to have that happen, because you might not have so much time to reflect on it well. It's much better if we keep up with things, especially at the beginning, to go back and take a serious look at our life. Keep doing that as time goes on because when we understand more and more things, we begin to put our past in order and make some strong determination about the future. And that affects our spiritual practice and makes us psychologically much more healthy.

*[Audience:] What's the difference between the Vajrasattva practice and prostrations?*

The thirty-five Buddhas practice is particularly beneficial for purifying broken bodhisattva vows, but it also purifies other things as well.

The Vajrasattva practice is particularly helpful for purifying broken tantric vows in addition to other things as well. They're both very strong, and I would actually recommend doing both.

When I started out, Lama Yeshe had most of us do a three-month Vajrasattva retreat in India during the monsoons, when it's pouring rain. Even though you're

going crazy trying to recite the Vajrasattva mantra, there's no place else to go and nothing else to do because it's raining. So it's back to the meditation cushion. And it's very effective when you do that. He also had many others do the prostrations. I think it's very helpful.

*[Audience:] How do you remember all their names?*

Either you sit down and make yourself memorize them, or what you do is, you can put the book on a chair or table next to you, and say the name of one and bow, and keep repeating that name as you're doing that one bow, and then read the name of the second one and do another bow, and repeat that name constantly while you're doing that second bow. Or you can tape it and say it along with the tape.

*[Audience:] What do you visualize?*

There're different visualizations described by different lamas. One is the more complicated visualization that Lama Tsongkhapa had, where the thirty-five Buddhas all have different colors and different hand gestures. There's an easier one described in the book, 'Pearl of Wisdom Book I', which groups them according to the five Dhyani Buddhas. You can pick which one you want. Sometimes doing the more complicated one helps you personalize it more. Sometimes just doing the one where they're in the five rows is easier.

*[Audience:] How many prostrations should we do?*

When you're doing it, do all thirty-five. And then do the prayer at the end where you're thinking of all the things you've done in this life and previous lives. When I first did that confession prayer, I said, "I didn't do this. Why am I confessing this? I didn't do the five heinous actions. Why do I have to confess what I didn't do?" I was like a little kid saying, "Don't blame me mom."

But then I began to realize that it's not just this life we're talking about. We've had infinite beginningless lifetimes, so we've had lots of time to screw up. So it's good to do it anyway, because we have no idea what we've done. And even though we might feel real safe and secure in our life right now, anything could happen in the next moment and our life changes radically. When harmful things happen very quickly, we have to remember it's a ripening of negative karma that hasn't been purified yet.

*[Audience:] Why should we rejoice in the virtuous actions of all beings? Is it important to the practice?*

The rejoicing is very important so that we don't just look at the negative things. We're rejoicing not just at our own positive actions but what everybody has done. When we spend time doing that, it sets up a whole feeling of community and a feeling of good faith in others. Recognizing other people's potential and their positive actions can really counteract the feeling of despair. So we rejoice and then we dedicate.

*[Audience:] How does rejoicing help us accumulate positive potential?*

That's because it helps us see how one part of our mind just likes to criticize: "This person did this and this."

The practice of rejoicing at other people's positive things is taking that same picky mind but making us pick out other people's good qualities instead of their faults. "They did this good thing and they did that good thing and I feel happy about it."

So it's helping us to look at the positive qualities of people and society. And in that way, you accumulate a lot of positive potential. And then in terms of mandala offerings, people can do those as well.

There's also a very nice practice of doing the refuge and reciting the refuge 100,000 times. You just do the visualization of the refuge tree and recite this refuge either in Sanskrit: "Namo Gurubhya, Namo Buddhaya ... ", or you can do it in Tibetan, or in English: "I take refuge in the Gurus, I take refuge in the Buddhas, I take refuge in the Dharma, I take refuge in the Sangha". You just repeat it over and over again, while imagining the light coming and purifying your negative actions. So you see, there's a lot more teaching that can go into this practice. It's a very nice practice because it makes your connection with the Triple Gem very strong, and it gives you the feeling that, "Yes, there's something to rely on here. Yes, I have a very clear direction in my spiritual life. Yes, I can tap into the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha that I have inside of me too."

*[Audience:] Are there Ngondro (preliminary) practices in the Gelug tradition?*

Oh yes, there is. In the Gelugpa tradition, there's more emphasis on doing it gradually; you do a little bit each day. For instance, you might take three months out and do the Vajrasattva retreat. Or you might take three months out and do prostrations, or you might just do some prostrations every day.

The practice we have, called the Jorcho practice or the preliminary practices, contains the refuge, prostrations, mandala offering, the Vajrasattva practice, water bowls, etc.

*[Audience:] Do they have to be done in retreat?*

Not necessarily. You can do some of it in a retreat. But some of it you can just do a little bit every day. What's important, according to my teachers, is not that you just do 100,000 and you say, "OK, got that done. Forget that." But you should keep it up and continue that cleansing and collecting positive potential every day for your whole life. Some people may choose to do it in a retreat form, while others may do a little bit every day, but it's the same practice.

For example, I did the Vajrasattva practice in a retreat form, which was very good. I did the prostrations over a span of three years, a little bit every day because it wasn't possible to do a retreat. So I did it morning and evening every day for three years.

You have to do 100,000 prostrations, but then you do 10% more to cover up the times you messed up. So you actually end up doing 111,111 prostrations because you keep doing 10% more to cover up the

times you messed up.

I have very mixed feelings about counting, because for some people, counting can be very good. It gives you a cause to rejoice, “Oh, I did this many. This is good.” Or it gives you a goal to work for, so it keeps you working. If counting does that for you, count. But other people count, and it becomes more like doing a business inventory. “I did 100 prostrations, how many more do I have to do? If I do so many every day, how many days is it going to take me till I’m done?”

If you have that kind of attitude, then you get all nervous and neurotic about how many prostrations you have to do and how long it will take. In that case, it’s better not to count because it just becomes doing a business instead of doing prostrations.

## **THE ETHICS OF BENEFITING OTHERS**

This, again, can be the first four far-reaching attitudes that are really done for the benefit of others. It can also include what we call the four ways of gathering disciples or the four ways of gathering students:

1. Being generous: If you’re generous, then people want to come hear teachings from you or want to be influenced by you.
2. Speaking pleasantly: This means teaching other people the Dharma in a pleasant way and according to their culture and disposition.
3. Encouraging people in the Dharma practice: After you’ve taught them, encourage them to do it.
4. Practice what you preach: Be a good example

yourself.

The “Four Ways of Assembling Disciples” are four ways for us to be of positive influence to other people and creating a circumstance whereby you can teach them the Dharma.

Also, in the practice of the ethics of benefiting others, it lists eleven kinds of people we should look out for. This was also mentioned in the last section of the bodhisattva vows, which had to do with the ethics of benefiting others. In our practice of being of benefit to others, we have to pay special attention to the following groups of people:

1. To help people who have a lot of suffering, are sick, blind, have different physical deformities or problems.
2. To help people who are ignorant of the Dharma, who don't know the right method to practice and how to make their own lives peaceful.
3. To work for others' sake by benefiting them, by actually serving them and doing this by remembering their kindness.
4. To help people who are in danger, who feel threatened by something.
5. To help people who are afflicted with miseries, in other words, those who feel that 'the house is falling down all at once' (we go through that from time to time), or people who are bereaved, who have lost somebody very close to them, so they feel quite miserable.
6. To help people who are destitute or poor or who are deserted; they have nowhere else to turn.



7. To help the homeless, the people who are homeless because of poverty or homeless because they're travelers.
8. To help people who are depressed or people who lack a community of like-minded people. So people who feel estranged or alienated, who feel like they have no friends, or feel depressed.
9. To help people who are on the right path, which includes people who know Dharma and who are practicing, by encouraging them, and creating good conditions whereby they can practice.
10. To help people who are on the wrong path, who're acting completely opposite to an ethical or compassionate way of life, by encouraging them or setting a good example, or setting up situations whereby they can learn.
11. To help others through the use of miraculous powers, if it's necessary.

So those are eleven specific groups of people to look out for.

### **Material for meditation**

What we're teaching here is not just intellectual stuff—this is all for meditation. So for example, when you go home and meditate on the three types of ethics, you would take the first type of ethics (*the ethics of abandoning harmful actions*), sit there and think about the meaning of the various precepts you have taken and how well you keep them. If there're a few of them that you break very often, or a few of them that are very easy to keep, think about it so that you'll

understand what role they play in your life. Or do a review of the ten destructive actions—“Which ones do I need to work on? Which ones are easier and how can I enhance them?” So really think and contemplate about that, so this is all analytical meditation. Very clear outline there.

Or the second kind of ethics—*the ethics of benefiting others*. Think about all these positive actions of listening to teachings, contemplating and discussing them, meditating on them, offering service, doing prostrations or offerings, or reading Dharma books. Make yourself a list of those things and think, “Which ones are easier for me? Which ones am I most attracted to? How can I enhance my practice of these things? How can I help myself be joyful and have motivation to do them?” So reflect on these.

With *the ethics of being of service to others*, again you can go through the four ways of assembling disciples, or these eleven groups of people to look out for, and think, “In my life, who do I know who has fit these categories? When I have encountered people like this, have I benefited them? How can I continue to benefit these kinds of people? Are there people in my life right now that fall into these categories, but I’m spacing out and not paying attention and not benefiting them? How can I benefit them?”

There’s a lot of material here for reflection, and doing the analytic meditation. When you do it and apply it to your own life, you really begin to understand yourself. Americans are always saying, “I feel so out of touch with myself. I don’t understand who I am.” But if you do this kind of analytic meditation, it gives you a nice framework with which

to look at your own life, and you begin to understand yourself, and get some clarity about what's going on. It also includes reflecting on what you've been doing, what your potential is and what you want to do in the future. So it's extremely helpful to take the time out and do analytic meditation.

And then as you contemplate and reflect on these things, and questions come up, it helps to write your questions down and discuss it with your fellow Buddhist friends.

*[Audience:] What about miraculous powers, do those come from meditation and how can they help someone?*

In fact, when you develop samadhi, you get certain miraculous powers. You get clairvoyant powers where you can see what other people are doing. You can read other people's minds. You can understand people's past actions and their karma, and by that, get a feeling for what their present propensities and tendencies are, and so know how to help them in that way. Or you get clairaudience, where you can hear things at a far distance.

If you have these different kinds of clairvoyant powers, and you use them with bodhicitta, then they really help you to be of service to others. If you have clairvoyant powers, but no bodhicitta, then the powers can be used just basically to increase ignorance, pride and arrogance, and get yourself a lower rebirth. So that's why it's very important you have bodhicitta behind the clairvoyant powers.

If you know people who have some kind of

clairvoyant powers because of karma rather than because of spiritual realizations, you should help these people put their powers into the Dharma, so it becomes useful for others. By helping them learn about the bodhicitta and the loving compassionate thought, they'll be encouraged to use whatever capacities they have for the benefit of others.

And basically, whatever talents people have (even if they aren't miraculous powers) maybe as an acupuncturist or herbalist, if they can do that practice with bodhicitta, then the practice becomes quite powerful. It will benefit the people themselves more as well.

So you see how important it is to encourage and teach someone who is ignorant of the Dharma, but who has a lot of talent and possibility. They come under these eleven groups of people.

*[Audience:] What if you sacrifice your body to save others?*

It depends a lot on the particular person. If at that time you had really strong bodhicitta and felt very strongly, "I don't care if I go to the lower realm. I want to save these other people." And you do it. Then it's different because the power of your motivation at that time is very, very strong and what you're doing is directly very valuable to other people. But it's another story if you're just giving your body and it isn't so much of direct value to other people.

So it really depends on the person and their motivation at that time. In one situation, you could say, "Oh, I want to do that. That's compassionate,"

but perhaps your compassion isn't really that strong. And that's quite different from the time when you really feel compelled to do it because of the strong power of compassion.

So it's two different things. It is important to preserve our body so that we can practice the Dharma, and not give our body up superficially without a really good reason. But I think if your compassion is so strong that you feel there's no other way, then it's probably the right thing to do.

*[Audience:] So it's advisable to sacrifice this life of ours if it greatly benefits other sentient beings?*

I think it's something to be careful about too, because we can practice the Dharma on the basis of this body. So we don't want to just give up our life if it's not something really important. By prolonging life and using it to practice in a serious way, it may be more beneficial to others in the long run. So I think each individual situation has to be examined separately as well as our motivation at that particular time.

*[Audience:] What is "the root of virtue"?*

It means the positive potential that we have accumulated. Dedicating our roots of virtue means dedicating the merit or the positive potential that we have created.

## **Ethics in a Dharma group**

Since we're talking about ethics, there's one idea for

our group in general because ethics, especially teacher ethics and student ethics, has become a popular issue in various Buddhist circles. There's been some difficulty with teacher ethics and teachers abusing power, embezzling money or sleeping with students. The idea is to, within our group, set up some kind of system or channel so that if somebody has ethical questions about somebody else's ethical conduct, there's a channel or way to bring it up. For example, if any of you think somebody in the group is embezzling money out of the dana basket, or misusing the stamps to mail the fliers, it would be nice to have a procedure where you can feel free and open to bring those things up.

With such a mechanism and a channel set up, not for punitive reasons, people won't feel guilty or bad by raising questions. The community would then receive them in a compassionate way, and if anybody's messing up, the person can listen to other people's views and clean up their act. It's not a judicial body to kick somebody out. It's important that whatever procedure is set up is done with a compassionate aspect, knowing that we can all mess up. It's not about pointing fingers and making accusations.

The purpose is also not to make us mind everybody else's business. The basic thing in Dharma practice is to look at what we're doing. Not get into a whole big trip of, "Well, this one is too critical. This one ..." We're talking about pointing out really major kind of things that are unethical; things that if you just ignore, become harmful to the group.

## **Quotation from Lama Tsongkhapa on the far-reaching attitude of ethics**

There is a very beautiful quotation from Lama Tsongkhapa that pertains to the far-reaching attitude of ethics. I thought I would read it to you:

“Ethical discipline is water to clean away the stains  
of negativity,  
Moonlight to cool the heat of afflictions,  
Radiance towering like a mountain in the midst of  
sentient beings,  
The force peacefully to unite human kind.  
Knowing this, spiritual practitioners guard it as  
they would their very eyes.”

### ***Ethical discipline is water to clean away the stains of negativity***

You can see that in our life, we get involved in all sorts of garbage actions and manipulative behavior that weigh quite heavily on our mind, and that accumulate as we get older. You can see around you, people who have accumulated years of manipulative, dishonest behavior. They try to rationalize their behavior, but still, it burdens the mind.

Ethical discipline is the water that clears all that away, because when we start to engage in ethical discipline and clean up our act, we reverse all those old habitual behavior patterns. We stop the “Ferris wheel” of having our negative karma create more negative karma which again creates more negative karma, and so on.

This is true especially here where we are not just talking about ordinary ethics but the far-reaching attitude of ethics which is conjoined with the altruistic intention to become a Buddha for the benefit of others. This ethical discipline is done with a noble motivation that encompasses the welfare of all beings, and it is able to reverse the negativities in the mind.

***Ethics is like the moonlight that cools the heat of afflictions***

When we are burning with anger or jealousy, or heated up with attachment or greed, keeping ethical discipline is like the moonlight shining and cooling everything off. You can see that when the mind is very much in a passionate state and out of control with all the afflictions, just the remembrance of ethics—remembering very clearly what we want to do and what we do not want to do as well as what creates positive effects and what harms ourselves and others—automatically cools the out-of-control-mind that wants to act impulsively and get our own way.

***The radiance (of ethics) towers like a mountain in the midst of sentient beings***

So ethics is like Mount Meru or Mount Rainier—it is big, solid and firm. Somebody with ethical discipline becomes like that. There is a firmness about them. There is a constancy. There is a reliability and a trustworthiness. You feel that when you are around them. That kind of person also influences the environment and the minds of other people.



We can see if for ourselves. If our own mind is out of control, we send that energy off and it ripples and affects other people and sets off their alarms, and everybody gets out of control. On the other hand, if we have a firm mind and our ethics are quite clear, then that kind of steadiness, clarity and honesty also sends vibrations—to put it in a New Age way [laughter]—into the environment, and it affects the other people we share the space with.

There have been studies done on the people involved in the holocaust, in the Cultural Revolution, etc. The people who made it through are the people who have very clear ethical standards. Their minds are very clear, and these become a firm foundation in the sea of chaos, and the other people in the environment automatically gravitate towards them.

***Ethics is the force peacefully to unite human kind***

We were talking last time that if everybody kept ethical precepts, the newspapers would have to find something else to write about, because there would not be nearly as much war and devastation.

It is clear that a lot of harm that occurs is due to our out-of-control mind. When you think about it, natural disasters arise due to the force of our negative karma in previous lives, and those negative karma were a result of unethical actions. By keeping ethical discipline, it not only stops the human-made problems caused by our out-of-control mind, but it also stops the natural disasters which are caused by our afflictions and lack of ethical conduct in previous lives. It becomes “the force peacefully to unite human

kind.”

***Knowing this, spiritual practitioners guard it as they would their very eyes***

Seeing the benefits for self and others of keeping ethical discipline, we cherish it, appreciate it and guard it. This kind of attitude is so different from the mind that feels, “I should do this. I should not do that.” This is how we usually talk to ourselves when we are trying to make decisions. But real ethical discipline is really beyond the should’s and the obligation and guilt. It comes from a very kind heart and a very clear-sighted mind.

I really like that quote, so I thought to share it with you.

### **Practicing the Far-Reaching Attitude of Ethics with the Other Far-Reaching Attitudes**

The far-reaching attitude of ethics is also practiced together with the other far-reaching attitudes.

### **GENEROSITY OF ETHICS**

First, you have the generosity of ethics, which is sharing what ethical conduct is with other people, explaining it to other people, influencing them to keep ethical discipline.

### **PATIENCE OF ETHICS**

There is the patience of ethics, which is very important. This means remaining undisturbed even when confronted by the threat of being harmed when you are trying to keep ethical behavior. Sometimes there might be a situation where you refrain from harming somebody else, but they harm you in return. It is good to be able to be patient with that kind of circumstance, because you are very clear in what you want to do and what you do not want to do. Even though you might get hit or somebody might scold you, or whatever, you have the patience to bear with that kind of difficulty because it is for the higher reason of keeping your own ethical conduct pure.

To be able to do this, we have to really think of the long term benefit of ethics, because we always want to do what is expedient. We want the problem to go away as quickly as possible. That is how we usually make decisions and how we evaluate everything—we say to ourselves, “How can I make everything turn out okay for me right now?” There is no willingness to endure any kind of discomfort for a long term reason.

It is very important to work for the long term benefit. When we only look out for our own immediate gain, even if we get our way or we get some happiness, it is very short-lived. It lasts for a very short time and then we will have more problems. We also have to experience the karmic result of our negative action.

Whereas if we are able to endure a little bit of harm right now, what it does is, it purifies the negative karma that causes that harm and it prevents us from creating more negative karma that bring more problems in the future.

His Holiness always advises, that when we are trying to make ethical decisions, if it is for the long term benefit of yourself and the long term benefit of others, then it is definitely something worthwhile to do.

When we say long term benefit, it does not mean just five years or ten years; it also means future lifetimes. If it brings a good result in the long term and a bad result in the short term, it is still something that is good to do. Why? Because the long term effect is going to be something much greater than just the little bleep of what happens right now.

For example, in order to keep good ethical conduct, you might have to endure the pain of somebody criticizing you. This is harmful to your personal interest because you are not getting what you want. You do not have your way and you are losing your reputation. So there is harm in the short term. But by not retaliating or criticizing the person who harms you and ruining their reputation, by bearing the difficulty and abandoning the desire to speak harshly, slander and lie, then the karmic benefits in the long term become very good.

If it is something that brings short term benefit but long term harm, then it is something to avoid doing. If there is some short-term benefit but in future lives, there will be incredibly huge difficulties, then it is not worth it. If it brings a bad result, both in the short term and the long term, then definitely abandon it. This is something to seriously think about with a lot of our actions.

## **JOYOUS EFFORT OF ETHICS**

This is the mind that takes delight in ethics, that feels very happy and good about ethical behavior. When you wake up in the morning and think you have the five precepts, you go, “Yippy!” When you get the opportunity to take the eight precepts for one day, you say, “Wow! It’s fantastic!” instead of thinking, “Oh, it’s the day to take the eight Mahayana precepts. Oh God! I have to get up before sunrise.” [Laughter.] Instead of that mind, you have the mind that clearly sees the advantage of it and takes joy.

## **CONCENTRATION OF ETHICS**

The concentration of ethics is to be able to focus on it, to be able to be mindful of it. It is keeping our motivation, our altruistic intention pure and constant in a concentrated way when we are acting ethically.

## **WISDOM OF ETHICS**

The wisdom of ethics involves viewing the “circle of three” as interdependent: 1) the person who is keeping the ethical discipline, 2) the action of being ethical, and 3) the person or objects in the environment that we are relating to in an ethical way. None of these exists inherently. They each arise depending upon the other. Remembering this, is the wisdom of ethical conduct.

If we frame our ethics with compassion and altruism on the one hand, and the wisdom recognizing emptiness and dependent arising on the other, then it really becomes the far-reaching attitude of ethics. We

may not be full-fledged bodhisattvas right now, but we can try to practice it.

Even though we are talking about [the more advanced] topics that are found towards the end of the *lamrim*, we are not just talking about them in isolation. They are definitely things that we can train ourselves in right now. It isn't intellectual blah-blah, because practicing ethics is about how we make daily-life decisions, how we relate to people, how we relate to the environment. They are not some kind of intellectual conceptualization.

## Questions and answers

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I think that is a really good point. There is this feeling now in America to say whatever you feel and tell it as it is. But I think that is kind of foolish in many ways, because it is assuming that everything we think is true. It is assuming that whatever we feel at one moment, will continue to be experienced in the next moment. But we are so changeable and fickle, it may not happen this way. So, I don't think it is valid to say that everything that happens to pop into our mind is necessarily beneficial. Lots of times, we say things that harm others, but we change our mind later. Or, we say things that make the situation worse.

So I don't think that it is necessarily wise.

I think it is wise to try to be honest with other people, but in a caring and compassionate way. I think being honest very much involves having that care and compassion. Being honest doesn't mean just spilling

everything that comes to mind.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Each situation is quite different. If we constantly corrected those people who said something we disagreed with or didn't like, and constantly entered into a whole negotiation process, we would not be able to do anything. Because then every small thing anybody says becomes a huge mountain to us. So sometimes it is good to just wait. If it is something trivial, you just let it pass and forget it.

And then there are other things which are more serious, where there is a misunderstanding, and maybe you needed to keep quiet at the time it happened so as not to speak out of anger. But later, you could go back to the other person and discuss it and try and clarify, instead of brushing it under the rug and pretend it doesn't exist.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

We need to recognize that when we talk about ethics, it is not black and white rules that apply to every single situation on earth. Every single situation is a composite, a dependent arising of many factors. And so before we choose how to act in the situation, we have to examine all the various factors going on there.

I think what you brought up is a very good point, because when we try to frame issues in black and white terms, and get too intellectual about things, then what we do is, we use Buddhism to disengage with ourselves and disengage with the world. In reality, we

are just caught in our head and our ideas. It is very easy to do this. I did this for years. This happens. It is part of the process; you go through it and you realize your mistakes. [Laughter.]

*[Audience: inaudible]*

There is pride and arrogance in it. That is why when we take the eight Mahayana precepts, there is one verse that we say at the end: “By having the flawless ethics of the Dharma law, pure ethics and ethics without conceit, may I complete the perfection of ethics.” The *ethics without conceit* is really pointing out that ethics is not something that you use to make yourself more arrogant, more proud, more egotistical, more self-righteous, more condescending. That is not real ethics; that is just twisting the Dharma to increase the ego.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

But you see, sometimes we do not have clarity. I mean, we are sentient beings, and one of the things we can't buy at the supermarket is clarity. We lack that. There is a deficiency of that in the economy. But it is good to acknowledge that we lack clarity, that we are not perfect, that this is just the way things are. We do the best we can, and we have some kind of patient, open attitude about it, not only with ourselves, but also with others.

We have a very judgmental mind. We are so hung up about doing things right, as if ‘right’ were some external thing that we have to fit ourselves into and



second guess. ‘Right’ is not some kind of external thing at all. It really is this process of growing and learning and recognizing that we are sentient beings. If we can accept ourselves for our lack of clarity, it is going to be much easier to accept other people for their lack of clarity, because we realize that when somebody is doing this stupid thing that is bugging us to death, actually, they are just exactly like us, and it is no big deal.

I avoid using the words ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ because they appear to me as if they are external things, an external right and an external wrong. Whereas we are talking about things we create—whether we create benefit, whether we create harm.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

This is the value of doing reflection. For example, with the purification meditation that we did at the beginning of the session, you normally precede that by doing a reflection, “What did I do in my life or what did I do today that I feel good about doing, that brought benefit in the long term, that I can rejoice at?” “What things was I unclear about and what things did I make a mess of?”. Or, maybe we are still unclear about those things. It is not like every time we sit down at night to do the reflection, we are able to instantly tell what our motivations were and figure things out. But even that is beneficial, the process of being honest regarding what we are clear and unclear about.

And then you do this kind of purification where you imagine the light coming from the Buddha and

purifying either the negativity or the lack of clarity. This is why purification practices are done every night, because every day we make mistakes. This is what being a sentient being is. If we were Buddhas, it would be a different story, but we are not Buddhas yet.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

The purification practice involves four steps—1) generating regret; 2) taking refuge and having bodhicitta; 3) making a determination not to do the negative action again; and 4) some kind of remedial action, like, for example, doing this meditation. You can see that there is some kind of psychological effect from doing these four steps, that is counteracting the imprint in your mind.

When you do those four steps, or the four opponent powers, you are reducing the impact of negative actions. When we create karma, it is not like a paw print cast in concrete. It is not as though you did a negative action and now you have this indestructible block of negative junk in your mind. Remember that action is an impermanent, changing thing; the seed that is left in your mind is impermanent and changing. So that harmful seed can be destroyed. Or it can be mitigated, which then brings a different result.

*[Audience:] When we do the purification practice, is it absolutely essential to have specific actions in mind that we are purifying?*

Not necessarily. It can be helpful to think of specific actions, but there are many actions we did in our previous lives, or even in this lifetime, that we can't remember. But we can at least think in terms of categories of actions: all the times that I have killed in my past lives, or all the times that I have spoken harshly to other people. Even thinking in broad categories like that, helps us to develop the determination to at least not repeat that kind of behavior in the future. You are purifying. You are changing the way that imprint ripens in your mind.

There are times when you feel that your mind is really stuck in depression, or anger, or attachment, or anxiety, or whatever. Or you see certain things happening repeatedly, for example, we are often short-tempered or we constantly get ourselves into crazy relationships. In such cases, think specifically about purifying that attitude or action, and all the kinds of past karmic actions that gave rise to it.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

In ancient India, they had something called the thirty-two signs of great beings or holy beings. Some of these signs are like the crown protuberance, the hair growing a certain way, the long earlobes, the way the teeth are arranged, the length of the arms, etc. They were recognized in the Indian culture as being indications of a realized person. That was something in the Indian culture that was adopted into Buddhism.

The thing to note is that each one of those physical features is a result of having done a specific kind of practice or having accumulated specific kinds of

positive potential.

In the same way, the color of our hair is influenced by karma. What sex we are, our height, our health, etc., is influenced by our karma. The body we have is a result of past actions and an Enlightened body is also a product of previous causes.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

One of the results of karma is that we set a habit to do the same action again. For example, if we speak using harsh words, one of the results is the tendency to speak harsh words again. Making a very strong determination to avoid speaking harshly to others can counteract that tendency. It doesn't mean that making that determination one time is going to stop all of that energy, but it is definitely going to impede it.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

That is why, if you do this kind of reflection every night—rejoice at the instances where you had a positive attitude and acted well; develop regret at your negative actions and determine to change—you really do start to change, because there is this very direct, conscious kind of self-evaluation going on all the time that is done with kindness to oneself, not criticism.

## **Regret and guilt**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

In our culture, we're taught that when we make a mistake, we're supposed to feel guilty. We have the idea that somehow, the guiltier we feel, the more we are atoning for the evil we did. This guilt just keeps us totally stuck and immobilized. We don't move. We just sit there and feel guilty. I think it is so incredible that there is no Tibetan word for 'guilt'. Can you imagine that? There is no concept in Buddhism that equates to 'guilt'.

Regret is different from guilt. Regret comes from a wisdom attitude of discernment where we realize we made a mistake. For example, if I put my hand on top of the electric stove and I burn my hand, I have remorse or regret, because I did something really dumb. But I don't have to feel guilty and hate myself and tell myself how stupid and evil and hopeless I am.

Regret is just recognizing, "Wow, I did something that is going to generate harm and I regret that." But it doesn't mean that I am a bad person. I don't have to beat myself up. In our culture, we almost feel that if we make a mistake, and if we feel guilty about it, then somehow we're paying back for the mistake we've made. But in fact, we don't, because the more we feel guilty, the more we continue being dysfunctional.

This is why we have to be very attentive and to make sure that we are hearing Buddhism through fresh ears, not as a six-year-old child in Sunday School. We have to be attentive not to hear it through the ears of another religion, but to hear it in a fresh way.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

But the beauty of being an adult is, that we finally can take a look at our mind and decide if everything we believe is really true, or if we should throw out some of our wrong beliefs or unproductive beliefs. This is what being an adult means. We can change.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

One of the karmic results of our engaging in negative actions is that we experience harm in return, for example, taking a negative rebirth or experiencing harmful things happening to us. When we purify, we stop that kind of result from happening. If you do purification and then your car gets smashed, or somebody tells you off, it doesn't mean that your purification is a failure. We should not have a mind of, "I'm purifying, so nothing bad will happen to me."

We should realize that we have been collecting stuff since beginningless time. For some actions that we purify, the purification stops the results altogether. For other actions, it may just decrease the gravity or discomfort of the action, or it may shorten the duration of the harm that we receive as a result of doing the negative action. It doesn't necessarily mean that everything will be hunky-dory if we do purification for a week or a month or a year.

Actually, when we experience harmful things in our life and things don't go the way we want even though we have been doing purification practice, it is helpful to think, "Well, this is good. My negative actions could have ripened in a lot of suffering that lasted a long time. Instead of that, it is ripening now as this one particular problem that I am having. So, this

karma is now finishing.”

One time, a friend of mine was doing a retreat. When you do a retreat, you do very strong purification. During the retreat, a huge, painful boil grew on her cheek. This is in Nepal. She was walking around one day during her break time. Lama Zopa Rinpoche saw her and she complained to Rinpoche about the boil. Rinpoche went, “That’s wonderful! As a result of all this purification that you did, all that harm that would have resulted in really unhappy rebirths for eons and centuries of suffering has ripened in the form of this boil that is painful but will go away.” So he told her she should rejoice and pray to have more. [Laughter.]

You can see the kind of thought training, the thought transformation that’s involved in that.

*[Audience:] What are Jataka tales?*

The Jataka tales are specifically about the (previous) lives of the Buddha, and the different actions that he did when he was a bodhisattva. The purpose of these tales is to explain the kind of motivation and attitudes a bodhisattva has, and the actions of a bodhisattva. Here, you can also see the incredible things, the constructive deeds that he did as a way of purifying negative karma.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

The whole point is to see that it’s not as though the Buddha was always a Buddha and that somehow the Buddha’s Buddha nature is different from ours. The

Buddha was once exactly like us. We have the same Buddha nature in terms of the positive potential of the mind and the empty nature of the mind.

The Buddha became a Buddha but we didn't, even though he was once confused just like us and hanging out with us, because we continued to hang out while he went to practice the path. That is where the difference is. The Buddha had the same exact confusion, problems, all eighty-four thousand afflictions, and tons of negative karma. This is not just talking about Shakyamuni Buddha, the historical Buddha, but any being who has become a Buddha. There are many Buddhas. They have all gone through this same process.

You look at Milarepa. You read his biography. You think you've been naughty—Milarepa killed thirty-two people or something! He did black magic and killed relatives. He was quite vengeful. But he practiced the path and purified.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Actually, they say that the purification is stronger in the degenerate age, because the outside environment is so degenerate. It is like when society is really decaying, people's afflictions are really increasing, life spans are shorter, there is more war and turbulence and natural disasters.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

There are various ways you can look at it.

In the scriptures, they talk about things becoming



more degenerate. In many ways, it is true: it is more degenerate now than it was at the time of the Buddha.

Another way to look at it is, affliction is affliction and people are people, and it's basically the same all throughout history. So, it depends on which way you want to look at it.

It may be quite degenerate now, but the thing is, that within the degenerate age, you can purify quite strongly and gain realizations quickly if you practice. The effort that it takes to purify and gain realizations is so much greater than the effort it would take if you were in a less degenerate period of history, where it was very easy to practice. That is why they say that keeping one vow for a day in this age—like if you do the eight precepts or the five precepts—purifies more negative karma and creates more positive potential than keeping the entire monks' or nuns' ordination at the time of the Buddha. At that time, it was much easier to keep the ordination and do practice—you didn't have to overcome so much and change so much. Whereas in the degenerate time, just to get ourselves to practice is so directly confronting the ignorance, anger and attachment that it makes quite a strong imprint.

This is also why they say that the thought transformation practices are so important—doing the taking and giving meditation, rejoicing at getting the boil. There is so much confusion in our life, but all of it can become things that we use to enhance our practice and speed our way to enlightenment.

In the same way, in the tantra, there are particular deities that are specifically for times of degeneration, and they act quite strongly to help you get yourself

together. An example is Yamantaka. They say he's made for the degenerate times. He looks really wrathful. He is not an external god or deity or spirit, but he is symbolic of helping us get in touch with that wisdom that is so strong and so clear that you get it all together very quickly. The whole appearance of that specific Buddha is an appearance of wisdom in that really clear, cut-out-the-crap-and-practice way.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **Patience**

#### **The meaning of patience according to Buddhism**

Patience is the third of the six far-reaching attitudes. It is very important to have patience. It is important to understand the Buddhist definition because in America we usually think patience means repressing your anger and gluing on a plastic smile. That is not the meaning at all in Buddhism.

Rather, it is a mind that is able to remain undisturbed when facing harm or a mind that is able to bear pain or suffering without getting upset and angry. It is also a mind that is able to practice Dharma single-pointedly and bear the difficulties encountered in Dharma practice.

#### **The disadvantages of anger**

Patience counteracts anger. It is very important to counteract anger. Anger is one of the three poisons. It is called a 'poison' because it poisons others' and our own minds. Anger in some ways is very deadly. With attachment we may harm others, but we may also do things to make others happy out of attachment. With anger, we seldom do things to make others happy. While both attachment and anger poison our own mind, anger is very directly harmful to others. While attachment is not always directly harmful, it is sometimes more harmful indirectly.

Also, anger is what burns the roots of virtue or positive karma, the merit or positive potential that we have accumulated before. For this reason it is especially important to combat anger.

Attachment doesn't destroy the roots of virtue. It doesn't destroy the good karma.

What happens is we may generate good motivations, do good actions, accumulate good karma in our mindstream as a result of these actions, and dedicate it. But if we get angry later, the anger still impinges the ripening of the good karma. If we don't dedicate it, then the anger will really wreak havoc. If we do dedicate it, the anger will still make a mess but it is like the difference between being in a hurricane with your windows boarded up and being in a hurricane without your windows boarded up. There is damage in both cases but to different degrees.

We dedicate the positive potential we accumulate to protect our virtue and to steer it in a good direction. But this is not sufficient. It is very important to refrain from getting angry afterwards. If we get angry, for example, at a powerful object of karma like the Triple Gem, our teacher, our parents, or the poor and the needy, or we get into a very big anger, then the anger can really block the ripening of the good karma.

We may have spent time going on retreats and sitting cross-legged, enduring the pain and so on, but a big anger can just destroy the positive potential accumulated from that and doesn't let it ripen. If it's a medium kind of anger, what it can do is, it postpones the ripening of the good karma, or the good karma brings fewer positive results. Let's say the karma has the potential to bring many positive results, but with

the anger, it only brings a few, or the results don't last very long, or they are not quite as nice as they would normally have been. We get all these disadvantages from anger.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I think what you are talking about, is being able to identify your emotions. Sometimes we are feeling different emotions. It is not only anger; it could be jealousy or pride or attachment, and it's only later that we are able to identify them. Once we are able to identify them, then we know what to do with them. Is that what you are talking about? When you have that self-awareness: "I knew something wasn't right, but now I know what it is that wasn't right."

Often, we are unaware of what our motivations are. We are unaware of what our emotions are. We act out of them and we still create the negative karma even though we didn't have the name for whatever it was that was motivating us at that particular moment. When we realize what it was, the thing to do then is to immediately generate regret for what we did.

That makes the force of the negativity less strong. For example, you may not have known that you were angry. You were picky or irritable but then you wound up blowing up at somebody. When you blew up, it's like: "Oh God, I was really angry after all," but still the harsh words were said out of anger. So it's something to be purified.

But the thing is, if we are able to generate regret immediately afterwards or even during the time when we are out of control, then it cuts the force of the

negative karma. In addition, if we do the other three opponent powers as well, then that really helps to purify right away. I wish I could say it doesn't matter but ...

This is why the practice of mindfulness is so important. If we are mindful, we will be able to identify what is going on in our mind sooner rather than later. Not being mindful is a big problem. So often we are just not aware and we act, and half an hour later, or a day later, a year later, or ten years later, we finally figure out what it was that was motivating us. But if we fine-tune our mindfulness then it becomes easier.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

So you have been noticing those small angers and it is more in the form of being annoyed or irritation. It's like you are bugged and it comes and it goes. So the thing is, if we can take note of that and notice the kinds of situations that it comes in, then when we are in those situations, we pay attention, and it becomes easier to prevent it from arising in the future.

If you notice that you frequently get irritated when people brush against you, then, the next time you are about to enter into a crowded elevator, you say: "Okay, I am really going to try and generate love while I am standing in this elevator because I know otherwise I have the tendency to get irritated."

It's just becoming aware like that and making sure that those little annoyances don't keep growing and growing, because they do sometimes.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

It's very true. Some people have more problems with objects than with people. I have noticed in talking with people that some people find that they get angry more often at friends than at strangers. Other people find that they get angry more often at strangers than at friends. We are all different. Some people are going to be very hurt when a friend criticizes them but let it go when a stranger does, but for another person, it is going to be the exact opposite.

*[Audience:] You find that you are getting upset about something and you say: "Okay I am getting upset, but I am going to let it go." But something is still there, so you go to the person and you talk it over with them and work it out. Is it preferable to have that exchange where you go and talk to the person or to not be bugged in the first place?*

Well, I think for our own peace of mind, not getting bugged is the best thing. But the thing is, if something is sticking, then it is good to work with our mind or work with the other person, or do both and somehow resolve it.

But before you go and talk to the person, it's very important to just sit and be aware of exactly how angry we are and see if we can mellow our anger a little bit, so that at least the energy isn't too strong. If we make a firm determination that we don't want to explode over this before we go talk to the other person, then if they don't respond favorably, at least we are a little bit prepared for that. Whereas, if we

run to them while we are still angry, and if we are not careful with what we say and they are not careful with what they say then ...

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I think that is dependent on how people interpret different things. There could or could not be a big difference. I have noticed in a lot of my talking with various psychologists and mediators about this, that we definitely have a difference of opinion. There is definitely a difference of opinion and I have had them get quite angry with me about it. [Laughter.]

Whether you are a Buddhist or a psychologist, I think what is important is not to judge yourself as bad when you get angry. In other words, not getting angry with yourself for being angry, because as soon as we get judgmental with ourselves and mad at ourselves for being angry, then we just get stuck completely.

Then, not only do we not resolve the anger, but we also have this other muck on top of it and everything kind of makes a mess. I think that is an important point. From a Buddhist viewpoint, if you notice you are angry, think: “Okay, there is anger there. That doesn’t mean that I am a bad person. It doesn’t mean that I am evil. It doesn’t mean that mommy and daddy are going to hit me.” Just break that whole pattern of thought.

### **Is anger beneficial?**

And then where Buddhism differs from psychology is, a Buddhist would say: “Okay I am not going to feel



guilty about it, but is anger something that benefits me? Is it something that I want to cultivate?" A Buddhist would look at that and say: "Well, it makes me upset. I don't communicate well with other people. I have a lot of regret about what I say and what I do afterwards. I create negative karma that causes me to have a lower rebirth. Anger puts more obscurations on my mind so that I have more to purify and I am further away from liberation and enlightenment. It also increases the ego grasping." Having made the analysis, you say: "Well, no, there is no benefit in getting angry, so I don't want this to be something that I nurture and increase."

Now, a therapist or a mediator might look at anger and say: "Well, there is something very good about anger. It gives me lots of energy, and then I can correct wrongs. There are injustices in society. If I am angry, then I'll correct these injustices." Or "There is abuse in my family. If I am angry, I'll correct the abuse." Or "Somebody is taking advantage of me. If I am angry, then I will stop them from doing that."

Now what a Buddhist would say in reply to that is that anger isn't the only motivation that is necessary in order to correct things that are unfair, unjust or abusive. In other words, you can have other motivations that make you act and intercede in harmful situations. It doesn't need to be something like anger. It can be clarity. It can be wisdom. It can be compassion. They can be very powerful assertive things that make you act in an intervening way to stop a situation. Anger isn't necessary in those situations. That would be a Buddhist approach.

Somebody who is a sports fan will say that anger is

necessary because then it makes you beat the other team. In reply, a Buddhist would say: “What use is it beating the other team? So what?”

“Well I might get another \$2 million if I beat the other team.”

So what? From a Buddhist viewpoint does that help sentient beings? Does it give you a good rebirth? Does it get you closer to liberation and enlightenment? No! Then it’s useless.

So, there is definitely a difference here.

*[Audience:] But I have heard His Holiness mention before that anger can be beneficial.*

The first time I heard His Holiness say that, I thought: “Hmm, His Holiness has been talking with psychologists.” [Laughter.] I think maybe it was a result of talking to some people, but it was also giving anger a very specific meaning. When he said that anger might be okay, it wasn’t in the same sense as what the psychologist meant. What he meant was if you are a bodhisattva and out of bodhicitta, you do an action out of anger, like the story of the Buddha, who, in a previous life as a bodhisattva, saw that there was one person who was going to kill 499 other people. Out of compassion, he decided to take that one person’s life. But he had compassion for both the victims and the perpetrator.

Here, the causal motivation was compassion but the temporal motivation at the time the bodhisattva did the action was anger; it was to destroy that person. Because compassion is the causal motivation, as the general big motivation for the action, it

overrode the negative temporal motivation and it came out as something positive.

So I think when His Holiness is saying that anger can sometimes be good, it is in that kind of context that he is talking about. This is my interpretation.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

When we realize that we are sentient beings and that whole situation stinks, then we are going to try and do something about it. When we see that the sources of suffering are the ignorance, anger and attachment, then we are going to try and remedy them in some ways. The anger comes very spontaneously for us because we are so incredibly habituated with it. “I like this.” “I don’t want that.” “It should be this way. It shouldn’t be that way.” We are so habituated that these thoughts just come so naturally. It’s not something to feel guilty about. But, on the other hand, if we can change our mind so that we don’t always have to be like that, it sure would be nice. I would really like to be free of my mind that is like this: “I want this.” “I don’t want that.” “Why don’t you do it this way?” “Why don’t you do it that way?” It just drives me nuts!

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Let me answer this question in a broader way instead of just talking about the anger. When we talk about karma in general, there are different kinds of karma. When you have the motivation to do an action and you actually do it, then the karma is very heavy.

When you have the motivation but you haven't actually done it, then the karma is lighter. In a dream there is the anger and maybe the motivation, but even in a dream if you killed somebody, you didn't actually kill anybody, so there wasn't the action. You don't get the karma of killing because you didn't actually kill anybody in the dream. But I think the anger definitely makes an imprint. When you have a dream with a lot of anger, when you wake up, you can feel it; you are in a bad mood usually when you wake up. Or you feel, "Good, I got that guy!" [Laughter.] So, I think there is some imprint from it.

We are talking about whether anger has advantages. One thing that many psychologists say is that anger is good because it is how you heal yourself. They say that if there were some things that happened in your life, then it's good to get angry and good to let that anger out, like screaming in an empty field or beating pillows or something like that.

Again from a Buddhist point of view, we would say: "You can't heal your anger if you don't recognize it is there." If there is anger that has been suppressed or repressed, it is important to recognize it. But the way to release it isn't by beating the pillow or screaming in the field. That may release the physical energy and the adrenaline rush and it may prevent you from beating up a person at that particular time, so it's definitely better than beating somebody up. But from a Buddhist point of view, acting out the anger physically sets that habit. Then, you have to do it again when you get angry. You have to yell again and you have to beat the pillow again. The danger in that is what happens if you are not near an empty field or

you are not near your pillows? The habit of acting out the anger may be so entrenched that you may have to take it out on somebody.

I think it's important to understand that when we say that is not a good technique to release the anger, we are not saying that you should repress the anger and stuff it in. It is important to understand that because often in psychology, either you repress it or you express it and there is no middle ground between those two. Whereas in Buddhism what we are doing is, we don't want to repress it because it will still be there. If you express it, it will still be there too. The adrenaline may have gone away but the imprint of the anger is still there. What we really have to do, is try and transform that anger and look at the situation in a different way so that the anger just evaporates.

*[Audience:] What about dissipating anger through exercise?*

That releases the physical energy of the anger but again, it is not doing anything to counteract the habit of getting angry. It's definitely better than taking it out on a person and I think that exercise is very good, I am all for it. But what I am saying is that, that will not completely stop the anger. It's just a way to release the physical energy behind it at that particular moment. We still have to come back and work with our minds. We are stuck with it, folks! There is no pill to take to get rid of these things from the root.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

But again is anger the only motivation that you need to act in that situation? This is what I saw real clearly as a Vietnam-war protester. One time when I was sitting there protesting for peace, somebody picked up a brick and threw it at the other party, and I went: “Hold on!”

When you generate anger, your mind becomes so similar to the mind of the person whom you are protesting against, because it is based on this whole thing of “me.” There is a very strong feeling of me and the other party has to stop what they are doing. There is this me-them split in it.

I don’t think anger is necessarily the only emotion we can have to stop things like that. This is where I think we have to see the force of compassion. Compassion does not mean being wimpy. Here in the West, we often think that having love, compassion and patience means that you will be wimpy. We often think that not having attachment and ambition means that you are indecisive and you are just like a blob of jelly or something. But that is not the case at all.

My teachers, for example, are incredibly decisive. They know what they want and what they don’t want. They are very clear about their values and they will definitely stand up for what they think is right to do and discuss things with you. But the motivation for doing that is coming from a motivation of loving-kindness and compassion, not a motivation of wanting to destroy somebody else or their values, or something like that.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

You are supposed to do it with compassion. I think debating is a very skillful way to help young people to use their physical energy in a good direction. They can jump around and yell and scream, but it is all involved in the Dharma. Now, I am not saying that they never get angry or proud. If they are ordinary sentient beings, that surely may come up. Their debate teacher will remind them that they are not doing this just to win the debate, so that they can be master monk or something like that. But what any individual is doing, who knows?

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Well, especially in Dharma discussions and things, we have to be really careful, because it is so easy for ego to sneak in. Then it becomes not a thing of wanting to understand or help the other person. It becomes, “I want to win because I am me,” and then we are back where we started. You could be talking about politics; it’s the same as talking about Dharma at that point, in terms of the motivation.

## **The Three Kinds of Patience**

The first kind of patience is the patience of not retaliating. That’s when somebody harms us but we do not retaliate.

The second kind of patience is the patience of enduring suffering. When we are sick or we face misfortune, we avoid getting angry with that. We are able to be relaxed and patient through that. In other

words, we are not talking so much about a thing that is harming us, but we are talking about just a bad situation.

The third kind of patience is the patience to definitely practice the Dharma. This means being willing to go through the difficulties of practicing Dharma, like coming to teachings on nights when the roads are slippery. There is some difficulty, some problem, but there is patience to do it. This patience also includes having the courage to look at your own mind, being able to meditate on impermanence, being able to meditate on emptiness, being able to start to let go of some of your rigid concepts. It takes a lot of patience to do that because sometimes the mind recoils and says: “Uh-huh I am not going to do this.”

## **Patience of Not Retaliating to Harm**

I want to go back to the first kind of patience—the patience of not retaliating. That’s the big one. When things happen, when people harm us, we get upset. When I use the word ‘anger’ here, it covers a whole range of emotions. It can mean something small like being bugged or irritated or annoyed. It can also mean being judgmental or critical or outraged or hostile or holding grudges or out-and-out rage and hatred. When I use the word ‘anger’ I am using it in a generic way for this whole range of emotions.

They all have the common quality of exaggerating the bad qualities of something or projecting bad qualities that aren’t there. Due to the exaggeration, we want to either escape from it or strike back at it



because we can't endure the situation.

It may start out as irritation, but if we aren't careful then it may build up and we become critical and judgmental, and then it may build up further and we are outraged or enraged, which then results in us holding a grudge. So, there can be a continuum of emotions in any specific situation if we don't take care of what happens with the initial anger.

### **Another difference between Buddhism and psychology**

Before I go further into this, I want to highlight another difference between Buddhism and psychology. I think this is very important, or at least somehow for me it was quite meaningful. The Buddhist idea of personality is that we are a composite of many different mental factors. Some of these mental factors are constructive ones, like faith, concentration, wisdom and kindness. Some of the mental factors are more harmful ones, like jealousy, pride and anger.

We are a composite of an incredible number of different mental factors. At one moment, one mental factor may come up, and in the next moment another mental factor that completely contradicts the first one may come up with regard to the same object.

One moment we are loving, the next moment we are hating. One moment we rejoice, the next we are jealous. One moment we are humble, the next we are proud. So we are composed of all these different mental factors. They don't all agree with each other and they come up at different times. When they come

up, they are in manifest form. When they are not in manifest form, then we have the potential or what we say the seed of the affliction in our mind.

Right now, for example, I am not manifestly angry. But I could become angry soon. Why? Because the potential still exists in my mind. I have the seed of anger in my mind because I haven't removed that seed yet. I haven't realized emptiness. This view is slightly different from that in psychology. Psychology talks about a repressed emotion. It says the emotion is there. It is manifest. It is just repressed, but it's still there, very solid. Whereas from the Buddhist point of view, it is not manifest. There is just the potential. There is just the seed.

Of course, the seed can be quite dangerous. But it is not like you are angry twenty-four hours a day under the surface. Sometimes, it may be that some people have manifest anger but they are not aware that they have manifest anger. Like the situations that we were talking about, where you don't realize that you are upset until after you have said something. If you look back, you see that you have been upset for half an hour.

## **Blaming others versus taking responsibility**

*[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]*

... In our society, we take so much delight in blaming our problems on somebody else. Like what you said about all the lawsuits. We lack any kind of patience for the fact that other people might make mistakes. If you leave here tonight and you slip on the stairs, you

are going to sue me. [Laughter.] Our society has so little patience for anything.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Well it's hard to say because any situation is a dependently arising situation. I think that in our pop culture we have two extremes. One is to blame our problems on somebody else. The other is to blame the problem on ourselves in the name of taking responsibility for it.

A lot of people do not understand what taking responsibility means and when it becomes self-blame. I think any situation that happens is a dependently arising situation. It happens because of many different causes and conditions—some of it comes from this side and some of it comes from that side and so on. In a lawsuit, what we are trying to say is, one factor is more important than the others. Or that the other factors don't exist; only this one exists. But any situation arises in dependence on many different factors. The thing about taking responsibility is to recognize what our share of it was and not take more and not take less.

This is important, because when we take responsibility for things that are not our responsibility, then we start feeling guilty. And when we don't take responsibility for things that are our responsibility, then we will blame somebody else. Whenever there is a conflict, it's usually: "I did something. The other person did something." There might be a whole bunch of other things involved.

The more I think about it, the more I feel that we

really have to go beyond this whole blaming habit. As soon as our mind wants to find one factor to blame as the major cause, that it is due to just this factor and not any other factor, then we get so stuck and our mind becomes so tight. I think we really have to do something about this tendency to want to blame either somebody else or ourselves. We should replace it with: “Well, this is a dependently arising situation. Let us look at all the things that are happening here.”

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Except our legal system isn't usually done with a lot of compassion. I think it would be very different if you had people in the legal system who would deal with situations with a compassionate attitude. When you feel you have been victimized, you take it to court, you send the other guy to jail, and you feel you got your fair justice. But in actual fact it doesn't undo the harm you received.

What it is, is it is rejoicing in somebody else experiencing pain. This, from a Buddhist viewpoint, is a negative motivation—rejoicing in somebody else's pain. Whereas if it is done with an attitude of, “Well, somebody harmed me. I don't want this person to create more negative karma for themselves or harm somebody else by doing this, so I am going to activate the legal system to prevent these from happening.” It is a completely different thing when it is done out of compassion like this.

We have to be very careful. It is often so easy for us to rejoice in somebody else's harm, or to wish somebody harm, especially when we read the news.

It's very easy for that to happen. That is why I think compassion for the victim and the perpetrator is really the key, and not just putting the blame on one or the other. Really having compassion for both.

Thich Nhat Hanh exemplifies that so much especially when he does retreats of Vietnam vets. What he does is just so incredible.

## **Understanding the futility of praise and blame**

With the patience of not retaliating, there are many techniques for dealing with the anger. I am going to review a lot of the things from Working with Anger but before I get into that, I will read you this sentence that I found in my notes, because I think there is something really powerful about it:

“By understanding the futility of praise and blame in this and future lives, don't get angry when you are insulted.”

When I thought about it—‘the futility of praise and blame’—and really thought about it, to me this phrase is very powerful, because so much of our anger is revolving around praise and blame. We get angry when somebody blames us, but the blame is linked to the praise, because the more attached we are to the praise, the angrier we get when we don't get it, or the angrier we get when we get the blame instead.

If we want to get rid of the aversion to blame but want to remain attached to praise, then we are fighting a losing battle, because they are so closely linked. That mind that is just so attached to what others say and think about me: “What other people say about me and what other people think about me is

so important!” I think that is a real dilemma for us.

You could do a whole analytic meditation on this one sentence—‘the futility of praise and blame in this and future lives’. Think: “What good does praise do me? What benefit does praise give me? It doesn’t give me more money. It doesn’t give me a longer life. It doesn’t give me a good rebirth. It doesn’t give me more merit or more wisdom. It doesn’t make me closer to liberation and enlightenment.

Praise doesn’t really do a whole lot for me when I try to think about its concrete benefit. It makes me feel good, but in terms of bringing any concrete benefit, there isn’t any.” But then the mind says: “Well, if I get praised, I might get more money.” But then again, what good does the money do you in the long term?

*[Audience:] When others praise us, it reinforces our self-esteem.*

But then the question is, if it’s valid in the context of self-esteem, why are we giving the power of our self-esteem to somebody else to determine? Then it is not self-esteem anymore; it is other’s esteem, isn’t it?

If we are very attached to praise, then when somebody doesn’t give it to us when we are expecting it, what happens to us? Like those times when you are just waiting for somebody to tell you that you look good, or tell you ‘thank you’ for something that you did or tell you how kind and thoughtful you are, but they don’t give it. We will be so miserable. And in this case, they didn’t even criticize us; it is just that they didn’t give us what we thought we deserved. If they

had criticized us, then we will be off on the moon!  
[Laughter.]

## **Developing the ability to evaluate our own actions**

It is a difficult thing. I think that comes because we haven't developed the ability to evaluate our own actions. We are very dependent on what other people think to determine whether we are right or wrong or good or bad, or to determine whether our action is beneficial or not beneficial.

If we had more self-reflection and we were able to look at our own actions and say: "Yeah, that was a kind thing. I recognize that as kind. It doesn't matter to me whether other people recognize it. I recognize that was a kind thing, I rejoice in that and I dedicate the merit," then we can leave it at that. We are not waiting for the recognition.

Similarly, if we made a mistake, we can acknowledge our mistake. If somebody else points it out, we don't have to get so upset about it because we are able to acknowledge it ourselves and recognize that it's completely okay to make mistakes, in the sense that it doesn't mean that we are bad and evil people.

It is good if we improve, but we don't have to sit there feeling so guilty and getting into a lot of self-blame. We often lose this ability of self-reflection and then we get so confused, "Oh, did I do the right thing?" We get very confused about our actions if we don't get the kind of feedback that we expected. I think it's very important to do this meditation every evening where we look back at our actions and learn

to develop the ability to evaluate ourselves. And also develop some practice in feeling okay about making some mistakes. “Yes, other people noticed it. Yes, I made the mistake. But it’s not the end of the world.”

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Then I would say don’t wait until the evening. Do it a little bit earlier. Or you could even review periodically during the day—stop for a couple of minutes and kind of review what has happened. Take a census and check up what is going on.

Recognize that sometimes it is very hard to evaluate our own actions. We don’t know what our motivation is. We think we have one motivation but we realize later that we have another one. That’s going to happen, but develop some kind of gentleness with ourselves so that whether we praise or blame ourselves, we don’t take it so seriously, and whether others praise or blame us, we don’t take it so seriously.

That doesn’t mean that we disregard other people’s feedback. I think it’s good to listen to others’ feedback and deal with the situation, but what we are talking about here is to avoid being attached to the good feedback and averse to the bad feedback.

Let’s do some meditation on that.

## **Review**

We’ve been talking about the far-reaching attitude of patience or tolerance, which is one of the six bodhisattva practices.



First, we generate the determination to be free from cyclic existence by seeing that there is no possible way to find lasting happiness within cyclic existence. Then, we recognize that we are not the only ones in this situation. Everybody else is also in this situation. We see that freeing ourselves alone is really rather limited and self-centered.

So, we generate the altruistic intention, which is the wish to become a fully enlightened Buddha in order to be able to lead others on the path to enlightenment. Having that motivation, then we seek the method to practice to attain enlightenment. We practice the six far-reaching attitudes.

We have talked about the first two: generosity and ethics, which I am sure you have been practicing at Christmas time. [Laughter.] Purely or not purely, I don't know, you have to check that up, but there was lots of opportunity to practice it.

## **What is anger?**

Then we started talking about the third far-reaching attitude, which is patience or tolerance. We talked a little about what patience is. It is the mind that is undisturbed in facing harm or suffering. It is an antidote to anger, anger being an attitude or a mental factor that exaggerates the negative qualities of an object or projects negative qualities that aren't there, and then being unable to endure the situation, wants to strike at it or run away.

Anger covers the whole spectrum of motivation from irritation and annoyance to being critical and judgmental, to being hostile, holding grudges,

belligerence, rebellion, rage, and all these kinds of things.

Just from the definition of anger, we can see it's an unrealistic attitude because it exaggerates and it projects. But the problem is, when we are angry, we don't think we are being unrealistic. We are convinced it is the opposite, that we are being quite realistic and we are seeing the situation exactly as it is. We think the other person is wrong and we are right.

### **Can anger be beneficial?**

It's something to check up especially now because in many therapies, self-help groups and support groups, there is all this talk about anger being good, and people are encouraged to be angry.

It's quite interesting at the retreat at Southern Dharma that was attended by many therapists. When I talked about things like that I could see them in the back of the room looking at each other. At the very end, after we did the evaluation and everyone was very happy, one of them said: "Tell us something about your family background." [Laughter.] It was funny. It was like she couldn't feel like she knew me unless she knew my family background.

### **The Buddhist way: neither expressing nor suppressing the anger**

Because there is this certain take on anger now in our pop culture, I think it's very important that we think deeply about the teachings on the far-reaching

attitude of patience.

Buddhism doesn't see the issue as either expressing the anger or repressing or suppressing the anger. It's not either dumping it out or stuffing it in. The alternative that Buddhism wants to get at is to reframe the situation, looking at it in a different way so that there is no anger there to start with, or to finish with. If we stuff the anger in, then we are still angry. Expressing the anger, too, does not mean it is gone. We are still angry. We may have gotten rid of the physical energy—maybe the adrenaline level has gone down—but the propensity to become angry is still there. We really have to look much deeper to root it out.

## **The Disadvantages of Anger**

It is important that we think first of all about the disadvantages of anger and assess realistically, according to our own experience, whether anger is something beneficial or not. I say this because so many people say: "My therapist has been telling me I need to get angry." I think it is something to really look at.

We have to be real clear here, that I am not saying: "Don't get angry." It's not a question of we shouldn't get angry or we are not supposed to get angry or we are bad if we get angry. There is no value judgment involved in it. It is more a question of checking up whether it is advantageous for ourselves and others when we get angry. Does it bring about the kind of results that we want in this and future lives?

If we are angry, we are angry. We don't need to judge ourselves as right or wrong, good or bad, success or failure. We are angry—that's the reality of how we are feeling. But the question we need to pose next is: "Is anger beneficial?" Is it something that I want to cultivate inside myself? Or is it something that takes away all of my happiness and so I want to let go of it? That's the question we really need to ask.

### **Do we feel good when we are angry?**

The first question to ask ourselves: when I am angry, am I happy? Just look at our life. There is so much to meditate on. When we are angry, are we happy? Do we feel good? Does it make us happy to be angry? Think about it. Remember the times when we were angry and check up what our experience was.

### **Do we communicate well when we are angry?**

Secondly, check up: do we communicate well when we are angry, or do we just go blah, blah, blah when we are angry? Communication isn't just saying our piece. Communication is expressing ourselves in a way so that other people can understand it from their frame of reference, their reference point.

When we are angry, do we take the time to think about what the other's reference point is and explain the situation accordingly to them, or do we just say our piece and leave it to them to figure it out? When we are angry do we communicate well?

### **Do we harm others physically when we are angry?**

Another thing to examine is when we are angry, do we harm others physically, or do we act physically in ways that benefit others? I don't usually see angry people helping others. Usually when we are angry, what do we do? We pick on somebody or we hit somebody or something. There can be a lot of physical harm done to other people by the force of anger. Just look at that in our lives.

### **Are we proud about our behavior afterwards?**

After we have been angry and we have calmed down, when we look back at our behavior when we were angry—what we said and what we did—do we feel pleased with it? I don't know about you, but I suspect you may have situations that are similar to mine, where I looked back at what I have said and done when I was angry and felt really ashamed, really embarrassed, thinking: “How could I possibly have said that?”

### **Anger destroys trust and contributes to our sense of guilt and self-hatred**

Also, think about the amount of trust that has been destroyed. We have worked very hard at our relationships but in a moment of anger we say something very cruel and destroy the trust that has taken us weeks and months to build up.

Often, we ourselves feel really lousy afterwards. Rather than giving us more self-confidence, expressing our anger contributes to our sense of guilt and self-hatred. When we see what we say and do to

other people when we are uncontrolled, it makes us dislike ourselves and we go spiraling into low self-esteem. Again, something to look at in our life.

### **Anger destroys our positive potential**

With our Dharma practice we are trying very hard to build up a store of positive potential. This is like the fertilizer for the field of our mind so that when we listen to teachings and meditate on them, the teachings sink in, we get some experience, and the realizations grow. We really need this positive potential.

But in a moment of anger we can destroy a lot of that positive potential. When we work very hard on our practice and then we get angry, it is like vacuuming the floor and then having the child with muddy feet come and play in it. The anger works against everything that we have been trying very hard to do.

### **Anger leaves a negative imprint on our mind**

By getting angry and allowing the anger to grow instead of subduing it, we set a very powerful imprint in our mind so that in our next life, we again have this strong habit to be quick tempered, to be irascible, to lash out at people.

Any kind of anger should be directly counteracted. If we get into the habit, then we will keep acting it out not only in this life, but also in future lives. Some children are difficult to please. They are always getting into quarrels. Other children are very easy

going and nothing much bothers them. It shows who has cultivated anger and who has cultivated patience in the previous lives.

If we realize that a lot of our current habit of anger that makes us so miserable came about because in previous lives we didn't practice patience, or we didn't practice it sufficiently, then that might give us some energy to counteract it. Especially when we recognize that we have a precious human life right now to work with our anger. Then at least in the next life, we won't be in the same dysfunctional pattern of behavior again, again and again.

This is, I think, the beauty of being a human being—we have the opportunity to look at ourselves and do some house cleaning. Especially when we are not kids but adults right now and have the opportunity to take charge of our own conditioning to some extent. When we were kids we didn't have that much option; we don't know so much. We are very much conditioned by our environment.

But, now, as an adult we can stop and look at the situations that made us angry and ask ourselves whether we were justified to get angry and what was happening in our mind, and do some work on that. Instead of just acting or reacting in some kind of perpetual way of "I am right and they are wrong", we examine a situation closely.

In our culture, not only is the anger directed at others, but a lot of the anger is also directed at ourselves. This is because as kids, we were sometimes taught that it's not so nice to get angry with other people. So what we do instead, is we think: "Well if I can't blame them, then I have got to blame myself."

And so in our culture, we have a big problem with self-anger or self-hatred. The same antidote applies here. We are adults now. We don't need to keep doing this. We really need to look at the situation and check up what's going on.

### **Anger destroys relationships**

When we are angry it destroys our relationships. It makes it very difficult for other people to be nice to us. It is funny, because when we are angry, what we really want is happiness. That is what we are trying to say when we are angry, which is "I want to be happy."

But then we act in ways that make other people distrust or dislike us, and so the anger, even though it is motivated by the wish to be happy, actually brings about the exact opposite result. Nobody likes an angry person, a short-tempered person or a person who screams and yells and blames.

Also don't think that anger is just shown by screaming, yelling and blaming. A lot of our anger is shown by withdrawing from the situation. We just withdraw. We shut down. We won't talk. We won't communicate. We turn the anger in. It becomes depression or it becomes self-hatred.

The mind that causes us to withdraw or be very passive is the same as that when we are acting out and expressing it. Anger is the internal emotion, and with it we can either act passively or aggressively. Neither one of those behaviors bring about the state of happiness that we want, although we think that we are trying to bring ourselves to a state of happiness when we get angry.



Whether we withdraw and shut down, or whether we lash out and strike back, neither one of these behaviors endear other people to us. We can see this very clearly, because we certainly aren't endeared to people who are like that. So the anger doesn't bring about the result that we want in this lifetime.

### **Anger brings harm**

In addition, through what we say and what we do and all the plans we create about how to get our revenge and how to stop somebody from harming us—through all the verbal, physical and mental actions—we create so much more negative karma. So, in future lifetimes, we find ourselves in more problematic situations with other people harming us.

This is something to remember. As long as we have anger in us, we are going to have enemies and we are going to have people harming us. First, we conceptualize other people as enemies and as being harmful. In addition, when we are angry, we harm other people. This creates the negative karma that causes us to be in situations where we are threatened and harmed by other people.

### **Anger creates fear and obscures the mind**

When we are angry, we create a lot of fear in other people. Through what we say and do, we make other people fearful. It creates the karmic cause for ourselves to experience a lot of fear in future lives. This is very interesting to think about. In this lifetime when we feel fearful or suspicious or insecure, it is

good to recognize that a lot of that is the result of having acted in angry ways in previous lifetimes.

Thinking like this helps us to get some energy to work with the anger instead of stuffing it or expressing it. We see that anger doesn't bring happiness in both this and future lifetimes. It just puts more and more obscuration on our mind.

To become Buddhas, we need to purify the negative karma and all the afflictions on our mind. When we get angry or act out of anger, what we are doing is the exact opposite—we are putting more garbage on top of the clear light nature of our mind, making it harder for us to touch our Buddha nature, harder for us to develop our loving-kindness.

It becomes a super big obstacle on the path. This is important to remember. When we are angry, instead of getting mad with the other person, recognize that it is not so much the other person but the anger that is harming us. The other person doesn't send us to the lower realm. Our own anger does. The other person doesn't obscure our mind. Our own anger does.

I once lived at a Dharma center in Italy and I was working with this Italian man. We didn't get along very well together, and I remember thinking: "He's making me create so much negative karma! It's all his fault that I am creating this negative karma. Why doesn't he stop and be nice to me instead!" And then I realized: "No, it's not him that's making me create the negative karma. It's my own anger that's doing it. I have to take responsibility for my feelings." (Although I still think it was his fault!) [Laughter.]

## **Reflecting on disadvantages of anger**

Do some reflection in this way on the disadvantages of anger, making many examples from our life about it so that we become convinced about the disadvantages of anger. It is very important to be convinced of that. If we are not convinced about the disadvantages of anger, then when we get angry, we will think it is wonderful. We will think we are right and that we are seeing the situation accurately, so we are back to exactly where we started.

### **Can anger be beneficial?**

It is very interesting. The people who get most upset with me when I talk about anger and its advantages, are firstly, the psychotherapists and secondly, the mediators. The two professions that work most with human interaction and human harmony are the ones that get the most upset when I talk about the disadvantages of anger.

One of the common things they say is: “But anger is good! It tells me when something is wrong. If I didn’t get angry, I wouldn’t know something was wrong.” My question to that is: “If you know something is wrong, why do you need to get angry about it?” Or “Is anger the only emotion that can let us know that something is wrong?”

Is anger the only thing that is going to make us change when there is a bad situation? What about compassion? What about wisdom? What about clear-sightedness?

I don’t think we can say that anger is wonderful because it lets us know something is wrong, because lots of times, it is just so subjective. If our friend does

one behavior and a person we don't like does the exact same behavior, we like our friend when they do it, but we dislike the other person when they do it. When the person we dislike does it, we say: "Well, I got angry at him and that lets me know that what he is doing is wrong." But when our friend does the exact same thing, we don't bat an eyelash. It's completely okay. So it is not that anger lets us know that something is wrong. It is just that at that moment, our mind is being quite subjective and judgmental.

Another thing the psychotherapists and mediators say is that anger is very important for correcting social injustice. That without anger, we wouldn't have the civil rights movement. Without anger, we wouldn't be against child abuse. But again do we need to be angry in order to correct societal injustice? Is that the only motivation that can bring that about? I don't think so.

I think compassion is a much stronger motivation to bring about change and intervention in bad situations. Why? Because when we are angry, we are not thinking clearly. We don't take the opportunity to think whether we are communicating well. So often when we see that there is an injustice and get angry at it, the actions that we do to combat that injustice perpetuate more conflict. So, I don't think that anger is the solution to societal injustice.

I really saw this when I was protesting in the seventies with the Vietnam issue. We were all out there protesting against sending soldiers to kill people. Then at one point, one of the protestors picked up a brick and started throwing it, and I went: "Wait a minute here!" It became very clear to me at that time, that if you have that kind of mind, then your mind and

the mind of the people you are protesting against, are exactly the same. This side of the people might be pacifists, but by being aggressive towards the other side, both sides are locked into the position of: “I am right and you are wrong.”

Similarly, an environmentalist who gets angry at the loggers or somebody who gets angry at the KKK—anger in the name of societal justice and stopping bad practices—I think they perpetuate hostility and conflict rather than solve it. Now I am not saying to not do anything. If somebody is harming somebody else, we definitely need to intervene, but we intervene with a compassionate attitude. It doesn’t have to be an angry one.

Please do spend some time thinking whether anger is beneficial or not in your own life. When we are able to come to a firm conclusion about the disadvantages of anger through looking at our life, then it becomes much easier to let go of the anger.

But when we aren’t convinced yet, then when anger comes, we usually think: “Anger is good because I am protecting myself. I am protecting my interests. This is a good motivation, a good feeling and it’s right that I have this, because if I am not angry, all these people are going to step all over me! I have to stop them from stepping all over me. This is a hostile, nasty world; I have to protect myself!”

Where is our loving-kindness? Where is the bodhicitta? Look at that mentality we lock ourselves into when we start thinking like that.

## **The Antidotes to Anger**

Now, there are three different kinds of patience. One is the patience of not retaliating. This refers to the situations that I have just been describing—when somebody harms us. The second is the patience of enduring undesirable experiences or being tolerant of undesirable experiences. The third is the patience of practicing the Dharma.

The Buddha taught many different techniques we can use when we face hostility from other people and problematic situations. The thing that is so wonderful about these techniques is that instead of saying to ourselves: “I shouldn’t be angry” (which doesn’t do anything because it only makes us feel worse for not feeling that way), we have a way to transform the anger into something different.

### **The ‘nose and horns’ technique**

This first technique comes in very useful when we face criticism, because criticism, I think, is one of the things that we get most angry about. We are very attached to others’ praise and approval and their good opinion of us, so when we get criticized, anger arises very easily. I call it the “nose and horns” technique.

The idea is that when somebody criticizes us, we think: “Okay, forget about the tone of voice they said it in and all this other stuff. Is what they say true or not true? Did I make this mistake? Did I do this action?”

If we look and we find out: “Yes I did do that!”, then it is similar to somebody telling you that you have a nose on your face. We don’t get angry about it because it’s there, it’s the truth, everybody saw it, so

why get angry?

Similarly, if we made a mistake and somebody saw it, why do we need to get so defensive? It's like somebody coming and saying, "Hi, you have a nose on your face!" You don't go around like this [hiding your nose with your hand]. We have to admit it ...

*[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]*

## **Practice changing the way we look at a situation**

*[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]*

... in our meditation, we apply this new way of looking at the situation that happened to us before, and in this way change our attitude towards it. That gives us practice in changing our attitude towards situations that we have actually experienced, so that in the future when we come up against similar situations, we have some training in how to deal with it.

## **Be realistic**

His Holiness likes this one. He chuckles so much when he teaches this one. He says: "Well, ask yourself, 'Can I do something about it?'" Some situation happens. You can't stand it. It's a disaster. Everything is falling apart. Ask ourselves: "Can I do something about it?" If the answer is 'yes', then why get angry? If we can do something to change it, it is of no use to get angry. On the other hand, if we check up and we can't do anything to change it, then what use

is getting angry? It doesn't do anything.

This one sounds so simple, but it is actually incredibly difficult. It is very good to think about it. When you are sitting there in a traffic jam going totally nuts, just think: "Can I do something about it? If I can, do it—turn off on this other street. If I can't, then what use is it getting angry? I am going to sit in this traffic jam anyway whether I am angry or not, so I might as well sit back and relax."

This technique is also very useful if you are a worrier. If you have a lot of anxiety and worry, then think, "Is this a situation I can do something about?" If so, do something, then you don't need to worry. If you check up: "I can't do anything about it", then again why worry? Of what use is the worry? It is very effective to pose these questions to ourselves instead of just acting out our habitual worry or our habitual anger.

## **Look at how we got involved**

Another technique is to look at how we got involved in the situation. This one has two parts. First, look at the causes and conditions this life that got us in this situation that we find so disturbing. Second, look at the causes and conditions in previous lives that got us in this situation. Now this is one of those techniques that the therapists just bristle at because they say: "You are blaming the victim! You are telling the victim to ask themselves how they got themselves into this situation, telling them that it's their fault!"

## **Not blaming the victim**



This is not at all what we are saying. We are not blaming the victim. What we are doing is that when we are in a situation where we are receiving harm, instead of getting angry at it, we try and look at how we got ourselves in that situation. Because that might help us learn how not to get ourselves in that same situation in the future.

It doesn't mean we deserve what is happening to us. It doesn't mean that we are bad people. If a woman nags her husband and her husband beats her to a pulp, it is not the woman's fault that the husband beats her. He has to deal with his anger and his aggression, but she has to deal with her nagging.

It is helpful to recognize: "Oh yeah, when I act in a certain way to somebody, I irritate them. Then they get angry at me and harm me back." It doesn't mean that we deserve the anger and the harm and that as a victim we are getting blamed. It is just to look at what we do. If we look closely at our behavior, sometimes when somebody harms us, we feel: "Who? Me? What did I do? I am just little old me minding my own business and here is this horrible person being so incredibly, outrageously nasty to me."

I don't know about you, but I find that if I look closely at the situation and the evolution of the situation just in this lifetime, very often there was a lot of hostility on my part that got acted out in very subtle ways. I mean sometimes somebody just hit us from left field and we are thinking: "Huh? I didn't know there was a problem there." But sometimes if we look, it might be that we were, as they say, subconsciously pushing somebody else's buttons.

I would say sometimes it's quite conscious, but we

are not aware of it. We do things that we know is just the thing that is going to bug that person, or we act in not very nice ways to that person, but we look on the outside like it is all okay, and then we say: “Why are you getting so upset? Why are you getting so angry at me?”

Sometimes, out of attachment, we get ourselves into situations where we are harmed. A classic example—why does the woman continue to stay with the man in many of the wife beating cases? Because there is a lot of attachment, either to him or to the position, to the financial security, to her image, to many different things.

The attachment is making the person stay in a situation that is quite harmful. Again we are not blaming the victim. We are looking at what was our share of it when we get harmed. How did we find ourselves in this situation? How did we get into this kind of relationship with this person, the dynamics of which worked out like this?

This is not an attempt to blame ourselves rather than blame the other person. In fact, I think the whole thing of blame has to be thrown out of the window altogether. It’s not a question of: “If I can’t blame the other person because then I am going to be angry at them, then I am going blame myself and be angry at myself.” That’s not it. That’s not a healthy way to look at it.

The other person did do certain things that are their responsibility, but we have certain attitudes as manifested in our behavior, that are our responsibility. It is important to recognize that, because if the situation is a dependent arising, then if you change

one of the factors involved, the whole dynamics is going to change. Even if the other person has not harmed us much more, still we can look at how we find ourselves in that situation and maybe change it so that we will not be in that kind of situation in the future.

## **Not helpful to put blame on childhood**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

First of all I am not describing this as a technique that we use with other people. I am not saying this is a technique that you go and tell somebody who is getting beaten by her husband. This is a technique for us to use when we are in situations where we feel we are being taken advantage of, and to look in our own mind about what it is that got us in that situation. “Why am I still there? What attracted me to that and why am I still there?” They are techniques to use on our own mind.

I am not trying to simplify the complexities of a wife-battering situation. I recognize that it is very complex, but even if you trace things back to childhood, you can see patterns of attachment. And, again,

I don’t think we can blame childhood. Childhood is childhood. The problem isn’t the childhood. The problem is the patterns of thinking, the patterns of emotion that we have in reaction to events.

Is that making some sense? I think it is a prevalent belief among people these days that our childhood is to blame for everything that happens to us and think:

“I’ve got to remember everything that happened to me in my childhood and relive it”. I don’t agree. None of my teachers have said that to get rid of your anger, go and remember everything that happened in your childhood. Neither did the Buddha, and Buddha got rid of his anger and became a fully enlightened being.

I am not negating the fact that there were harms and things that happened in childhood, but there are also harms that happened when we are adults. I mean this is samsara. There is harm all the time no matter what we do, no matter where we are.

The thing to do is to look at the patterns of our reaction so that we don’t perpetuate them. And when we see that certain patterns got cultivated, instead of blaming the people who were in the situation, look at our pattern and recognize that mental attitude as an unhealthy mental attitude. Otherwise, we will go through our whole life thinking: “I am in this habit of stuffing my anger because when I was little, my parents didn’t let me get angry. So my whole problem with not being able to deal with my anger is my parents’ fault.”

If we think like that, we are never going to be able to deal with our anger, because we are putting the responsibility outside of ourselves. We are making ourselves victims. We are giving ourselves no power in the situation because we are saying that the problem is due to what somebody else did. First, since it is somebody else who is responsible and we can’t control what they do, we can’t change it. And second, since it is something that happened in the past, we definitely can’t change that. So this kind of attitude leads to a certain dead end.

So, I think it's really a thing of looking at our own patterns. I think this habit of blaming everybody else is making our whole society neurotic. Everybody is going around saying, "It's this person's fault. It's that person's fault." "It's the government's fault." "It's the bureaucrat's fault." "It's my parents' fault." "It's my husband's fault." And then we are so unhappy as a result of it.

We should just look at our own patterns of behavior and see what's going on there. It's true that certain patterns did get cultivated in childhood, but they aren't our parents' fault. We had these patterns in previous lives, and we didn't do anything about them then, so they came up very easily in this life too.

That's not to deny the conditioning we received. We did get conditioned a lot by our environment, but we can't say everything is due to the fault of the environment. It is this habit of blaming that I really object to. Why do we have to blame anybody when there is a problem? Why can't we see that it is a dependently arising situation? The environment contributed to it. So did my past habits. There are all these different things that were going on. It's dependently arising. Some of these things I have some control over and some of them I don't. Instead of getting into judgment and blame, just look at what factors we have some control over, where we have some responsibility, and then work to change that.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I am not saying that the woman is nagging the man deliberately to push his buttons. But then the thing is,

if we are nagging somebody, ask ourselves why are we doing that? Or if we are hitting somebody, why are we doing that? What are we trying to get out of this situation? What are we clinging to here? So it is not like we are directly planning to get ourselves into that situation. It is just that sometimes we are attached to something or we want a certain outcome, but we are completely unskillful in bringing that about. So we just wind up using behaviors that bring about the opposite outcome.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

If you examine the family dynamics, for example, look at our relationship with our parents. We always say they know how to push our buttons. But we know how to push their buttons too. We might do all sorts of funny little things that on the surface look completely okay, but which irritates them or makes them angry. And one part of us knows that this is our way of exerting our power in a situation. So we need to check: “What am I getting out of it when I do that? What am I really trying to say when I do that behavior?”

Now, back to explaining the technique. Look at how we got ourselves into the situation now in this lifetime, and also look over a period of lifetimes and see what is the karmic cause for landing ourselves in the situation. “Why am I in this situation where I am powerless? Well, it would be quite reasonable to say that in previous lifetimes, I was probably rather condescending and I took away other people’s power

and abused them. So now I find myself in this situation.”

Again, instead of attacking the situation and the other person, recognize that it is because of negative actions that I have done in the past that I am now in this situation. Again, this is not blaming the victim. It’s not blaming ourselves but it’s just recognizing that when we act harmfully, we create the causes and conditions for ourselves to have certain experiences.

Cause and effect is infallible. If you plant apple seeds, you get apples, not peaches. Rather than blame ourselves, just say: “Okay. This is due to my own obnoxious behavior in the past. If I wish to avoid this kind of situation again in the future, then I have to clean up my act now and make sure I don’t perpetuate this same kind of behavior creating more and more causes for myself to have this experience.”

I’ll give you an example of how I use this. There was one situation that was quite painful for me. I always seem to have some difficulty seeing my teachers. Often, I am not able to see them as much as I want. When I was in Dharamsala a while back, I wanted to see one of my teachers. I tried to make an appointment with him but I couldn’t have the appointment. When I got one, he was sick and I was sick, and we didn’t have it. And when I went to say good-bye, there was no time to do so. And I was going back to the West, so I just felt like: “Why does this always happen to me? I can’t see my teacher and talk to him. And the stupid person who got in my way ...”

And then it just kind of hit me at one point: “Ah! I bet you that in a previous life, I acted in the same way as that ‘stupid person’ was acting. I bet you that I

interfered with people's relationships with their teachers, and did my little jealousy protection trip, and now I am getting the karmic result of my own actions."

And as soon as I thought like that, the anger, the upset went away. It was like, "Okay. Here is the result of my own actions. What am I complaining about? Now the thing is, how am I going to be in the future? Am I going to create more negative karma by getting angry or going on these jealousy trips, or am I just going to clean up my act?"

Again, in this practice of looking at the karmic cause, we are not blaming the victim. Rather, we are looking at the kinds of behavior that we ourselves could have done in previous lives that landed ourselves in these troubling situations.

Now the reason why people don't like to do this is because it means that we may have acted pretty horribly to other people in the past, and we like to think of ourselves as good guys. But how do we purify negative karma if we don't have some kind of humility that is willing to recognize our own potential for being obnoxious? If we think: "Oh, I am so wonderful. I can never act like that", with that kind of pride, how can we ever make any spiritual progress, thinking that we are somehow one notch up from everybody else?

Again, this doesn't mean that we think we are worms and we are low class, but it's just acknowledging our own potential to be idiots sometimes. [Laughter.] It doesn't mean that we are solid, concrete idiots but it is just acknowledging that potential. It's the potential. That's all.



*[Audience: inaudible]*

I think that is quite helpful because instead of saying: “Look at all these people. They are doing all these sinful, evil, horrible acts. Look at what Saddam Hussein is doing. Look at what Adolph Hitler is doing! But me? I would never hurt anybody else! Why is the world so awful to me?” There is a lot of pride and denial in that and we have to just recognize: “Well, actually, if you put me in that kind of situation, I could probably act just like Adolph Hitler. You put me in a particular situation, I could probably beat somebody up.”

To me, that was the whole teaching from the LA riots. I could just look at all the different people in the trials and say: “Oh yeah, if I had grown up like them, I would probably have done what they did.” Really acknowledging that potential within us. And if there is that potential within us, then is it any wonder that sometimes we find ourselves in situations where people aren’t treating us nicely? Even if we look at what we have done this lifetime to other people, is it any wonder that we get criticized and blamed for stuff? Who, among us, hasn’t criticized others?

When we start looking at it this way, then, instead of just dumping it all on others: “The world is unfair. This is an unjust place. How come everybody has something good, but I get everything nasty?” we say, “I am going to look at what kinds of actions I could have done in the past that cause this result. I am going to clean up my act, and I am not going to let my mind go under the influence of ignorance, anger and attachment. I am not going to let my body, speech and

mind create this kind of negative karma.”

## **Dependent arising**

Earlier we were talking about one technique that is included in the patience of not retaliating when others harm us. First of all, we examine what happened in this lifetime from a causal perspective, looking at conditions that led to our being in an unpleasant situation. In this way we recognize it as dependent arising and see our responsibility in it, which gives us some ability to change.

## **Reaping the fruits of karma**

The second way is understanding karma and that what we experience now is a result of actions done in the past. In doing this, it is really important to remember that we are not blaming the victim or ourselves. It is also very important to note that these techniques are not meant to be told to other people when they are angry, but are for us to apply to ourselves when we are angry. Similarly, when we talk about the disadvantages of anger, it is not the disadvantages of other people’s anger, but of our own. It makes a big difference when we frame it in this way. When we have an unpleasant situation, instead of getting angry and striking back at the other person, we recognize that we are in that situation because of our own negative actions that we committed in previous lives.

Many times people do not like to think like this because it involves acknowledging our negative actions. Coming from a Judeo-Christian culture we

don't like to admit that because then it means we are evil and sinful, and we are going to hell, and we have to feel guilty and hopeless! So we go from step one to step three in one leap. We must recognize that that way of thinking was not what the Buddha taught; it is the way a six-year-old kid in a Catechism class might think.

We can acknowledge our own negative actions from previous lives and learn from that experience, by recognizing that they bring about consequences that we don't like. And sometimes when we look at how we've acted towards other people even in this lifetime, the kind of predicaments that we find ourselves in are no big surprise. Every time somebody criticizes us, we feel, "This is unfair, why do they criticize me?" and yet we have all criticized other people numerous times. Remember when we were teenagers, remember things we said today. We criticize others a lot, so is it any wonder that sometimes we're the recipient, rather than the giver? When we look at it this way, admitting that our present uncomfortable situations are due to past negative actions, it's no big deal. It follows quite naturally when we look at our actions and experiences. In fact, it's a wonder why we don't meet with more unfortunate experiences considering how we've acted towards others.

Maintaining this view helps us avoid being angry in a situation because we don't blame the other person for our difficulties; instead we recognize that we do have a measure of control over what we experience.

In that way we can make a stronger determination about how we want to act or not act in the future.

That is what is called learning from our experience.

This is quite a powerful technique taught in the thought-training texts, especially in “The Wheel of Sharp Weapons”. The first section addresses these horrendous problems; and instead of blaming others for our current negative situation, we see our past karmic action as being the cause. We trace all of that to the self-centered attitude, which is the ultimate enemy. Actually, the whole text really hammers away at that, and if we understand that perspective, it is really effective for subduing anger. This is because all of a sudden, this bad situation seems to make some sense: “Oh yes, of course this is going to happen to me,” “Yes, I can make it through and I don’t need to freak out about it,” and “It’s going to help me learn and grow for the future.” In the “Guide to a Bodhisattva’s way of Life” there is a whole chapter full of techniques related to working with anger and difficulties.

### **Kindness of “enemies”**

The next technique is to remember the kindness of the person who harms us. When I say “enemy”, it just refers to the person who harms us, not to someone like Saddam Hussein. It could mean your best friend who is at this particular moment harming you, it could be your boss or your dog, whatever. So “enemy” does not fall into a hard and fast category, but just whoever is bugging us. This technique involves remembering the kindness of the “enemy”, those people who bother us.

One way they are kind is that they show us the

things that we need to work on. Many times when people give us negative feedback they are directly mirroring the stuff that we are throwing out to them. This gives us a really good look at what we need to improve. Also, they very often notice our faults clearly and state them at very high decibel levels and sometimes in a slightly exaggerated manner. If we can distil the essence and see what truth there is, maybe we can learn something. That is not saying every criticism we receive is accurate, but that sometimes there is some truth in it and we need to listen. So that is one way in which our “enemies” can be kind.

The second way in which they are kind is that they give us opportunities to practice patience. To become a Buddha, one of the chief ‘far-reaching attitudes’ is patience. The practice of patience is essential; you never hear of an angry or impatient Buddha! So developing this quality is very, very important! We can’t practice with the people who are kind to us. How can you be patient with somebody who is nice to you? You can’t! So we definitely need the people who harm us in order to practice patience.

There is one story I’ve told before that illustrates this practice. In the past, I spent several years working at a Dharma center in Europe as the spiritual director. The Dharma center was wonderful except the director whom I didn’t get along with for a very long time. I remember writing to Lama Yeshe saying, “Please Lama, can I leave this place?” This was in the spring and he wrote back and said, “Yes, dear, we’ll talk about it, I will be there in the autumn.” I would think, “Oh! How am I going to make it? This guy is such a \_\_\_!” Finally autumn rolled around, Lama came and

we decided that I could leave and go back to Nepal.

I returned to Nepal and met with Lama Zopa, sitting with him on the roof of his house. It was so peaceful, overlooking the countryside, the fields, with dogs barking in the distance, away from this person who was driving me nuts. When I lived at the Dharma center in Europe, I studied chapter six of Shantideva's text very diligently every morning. Then during the day I found myself getting furiously angry with this person. At night I would come back home and study this text again. It was very hard to put what I was reading into practice because I was so convinced that I was right and he was wrong. I wondered how I could practice these techniques on patience.

So when I was with Lama Zopa on his rooftop at one point in the discussion, he asked me "Who is kinder to you, this person (let's call him Sam) or the Buddha?" I was very puzzled, and said, "Rinpoche, the Buddha has been very, very kind to me. The Buddha teaches the path." I just didn't understand the question and then Rinpoche looked at me, as if to say, "Still didn't get it, did you?" And then he went on to explain that actually Sam was much kinder to me than the Buddha because I couldn't practice patience with the Buddha. The Buddha is very compassionate and therefore it is impossible to practice patience with him. So Sam could do something for me on the path that even the Buddha couldn't do, and I actually really needed him.

Of course this was not what I wanted to hear. I desperately wanted Rinpoche simply to confirm that in these quarrels Sam was really wrong, and I was really right. Rinpoche just told me to practice patience

and I didn't want to hear that. But when I went away and thought about it (and I am still thinking about it), I began to see that what he said made sense.

So we can recognize those situations when somebody is harming us and say "This is a precious opportunity for me to develop qualities that in other situations I can't develop." Instead of focusing on "I don't like this, I needed that ... blah, blah, blah" we can view it as a way for us to examine and transform our own anger. Not "This is an opportunity to practice patience which means stuff my anger down and ignore it". Not that! But it's an opportunity for us to investigate our anger, look at what our buttons are and really work with it. If we can hold that view then something positive emerges so that we can transform a bad circumstance into a path to enlightenment. Since we are living in a world with many bad circumstances, it is important to be able to make this kind of transformation. Of course it is easier to look at a situation from hindsight, isn't it? To look back at the quarrels we've had with people and say "That was a very good opportunity for me. I grew a lot and had the opportunity to practice patience." This reflection is useful but we should also try to apply it to our current situations as well.

### **Giving the pain to the self-cherishing attitude**

There is another technique to apply to calm our anger. That is to give the pain that we are receiving to our selfish attitude. It is quite a difficult technique that you might not understand in the beginning; I certainly didn't. What this is based on is recognizing that who

we are and our self-centered attitude are not the same thing. The self-centered attitude is like the thief in the house who pretends to live there and says, “Oh, listen to me, I will take care of you; if I don’t take care of you, nobody else will ...” We are deceived by the self-centered attitude and follow it along.

But from the Buddhist view, the self-centered attitude and we as people are two different things. For example, when somebody is harming us, instead of taking the harm ourselves and saying, “I don’t want this, therefore I’m going to get angry at this person who’s giving it!” we decide, “I am taking this harm but I’m giving it to the self-centered attitude which is the real cause for me to receive this harm.”

As we discussed before, we suffer in the present due to our negative actions from previous lives, which were done under the influence of the self-centered attitude. So now when we are experiencing the result of those negative actions, instead of taking the pain ourselves, feeling upset about it, that it is unfair, we take that pain and give it to the self-centered attitude by saying, “You self-centered attitude, you are the one who has been harming me this whole time, now you can take all these problems!” Try doing this on the spot when another person is criticizing you (or whatever they are doing to you). Sit there and say, “Yeah, keep on criticizing, it’s fine, this is great!” Give all the criticism to the self-centered attitude, which is our real enemy because it controls so much of our lives.

So we give the difficulty to the self-centered attitude. Doing this involves recognizing that we are **not** our self-centered attitude. It is crucial to



contemplate this because we identify so much with the self-centered attitude. This self-cherishing is one of those clouds in the open clear sky; it is not “us”. It’s something that can be removed.

The first few times I heard about this technique, I didn’t get it. Then one time due to the kindness of another “enemy” I had the opportunity to practice it.

It’s a really funny thing because this person whom I spoke of earlier had once been a friend of mine, and then for some reason, he didn’t want to talk to me anymore, which still continues to this day. But we happened to be in a situation when we were on pilgrimage to Tibet with some other people. We were going by horse to the lake in which auspicious visions appear, like for the selection of the Dalai Lama. It was a tough journey to the lake and back, and there were five people in our group who were really dependent on each other.

On the third day, we approached the lake where we were going to camp for the night. It had turned out that this particular person had a really stubborn horse. It was totally incredible. At one point, the horse went half way across the stream and stopped with the man sitting on it. This horse wasn’t co-operating at all so the man had to get off and walk. My horse was pretty good and I had some energy so I offered him mine. For some reason that I still don’t understand this made him furious, and he proceeded to tell me things from five years ago that I had done that had really bothered him, and then things that I had done that had harmed other people that he had heard through the grapevine.

So he just tore into me—in the middle of Tibet on pilgrimage to this holy lake which is gorgeous and

there is nobody around. This person was dumping years of stuff on me, and I was really taken aback —“Where did this come from?” For some reason I don’t understand, (and I think this is like the blessing of the pilgrimage—what pilgrimage means,) all of a sudden I had the idea “Ah! Let’s practice this technique!” So I started to do that, thinking, “OK! All these criticisms I’m giving to my self-cherishing thought.”

I just continued practicing in that way and let him go on. To all the stuff he directed at me I just kept saying to myself “OK! Self-cherishing, you take it, you take it, you take it ....” By the time we camped that evening, much to my surprise, I wasn’t upset, which was really something new for me because usually I’m quite sensitive about stuff like that. It just really hit me that this was a viable way to practice so that we don’t get angry.

Because I employed that technique I was able to listen to and learn from some of what the man said. However, a lot of the unfair accusations, the anger that he had held on to for so many years was clearly directed to the person whom I was no longer, so I just gave that to the self-cherishing attitude. I think a lot of times when people dump on us, they are basically saying more about their state of mind than they are about us, which is why a lot of stuff gets really exaggerated. So instead of reacting to it, just give it to the self-centeredness, recognizing that self-centeredness is our real enemy.

Also, in most circumstances we usually want to give problems to somebody that we don’t like. There’s something nasty in the office to do, pass the buck to

somebody else—it is this kind of thing. So let's give all the pain, all the criticism, and all the unfairness of the situation to the self-cherishing attitude.

Of course, with all these conflicts and mental disturbances, we have to practice repeatedly when we are sitting on our cushion. I think it is very helpful to think of situations that have happened in our life that we have not completely healed, where there is still some residue and apply the techniques so that we can really let go of that anger, grudge or hurt that we are holding on to. Practice it in that way in order to get some familiarity to use the technique now.

### **Basic nature: evil or just clouded over?**

Then another technique to use is to investigate the basic nature of the people who harm us. Is it their nature to be harmful, obnoxious, rude, inconsiderate and vicious, and everything else we happen to be attributing to them at that moment? Is it their nature to be like that or not?

If we decide that it is their basic nature, then why get angry? That would be like getting angry at fire, which has the nature to burn! So if we decide that it is this person's nature to be cruel and vicious or whatever, then why be angry? That's just the way the person is.

On the other hand if we decide that it's not their nature to be like that, then again, why get angry? That would be like getting angry at the sky because of the clouds in it. When there are clouds in the sky, we don't get angry because we recognize that the sky and the clouds are of different natures. They can be

separated. So in the same way, if we decide that the person's attitude and behavior is not their nature, then it is like clouds in the sky. It isn't the person's nature, so let it go and recognize that there is something positive underneath all of the afflictions.

So when you are sitting there contemplating the person's nature, there are a few different things to consider. I remember one time being with somebody who was obnoxious and I began thinking, "Is it in this person's nature to be like this?" In one way it is because this person is in samsara just like me, and the nature of being in samsara is to be overwhelmed by afflictions and to dump it outwards. So if I look at this person as somebody in samsara, then of course it is his nature. What am I supposed to expect from him? He's not a Buddha. Because of his negative mind, he's going to do things that I find disturbing. So why be surprised? Why expect otherwise? Why be angry with him?

But then another time when I thought about it, I thought, "Actually no!" That's not his nature because his real nature is Buddha nature. The real nature of his mind is something that is clear and knowing, and all the negative attributes are like clouds in the sky or dirt on the mirror. These are just temporary obscurations, not his basic nature. So why be angry? His basic nature is clouded over, making him behave in this way. The person is in samsara, cyclic existence, getting a body and mind that are under the control of afflictions and karma.

So it's a really interesting way to analyze situations. It shows us how we expect people to be continuously kind and reasonable. We ignore the fact

that they, just like us, happen to be overwhelmed by afflictions and karma. So why get angry?

When you practice these methods and let them sink into your mind, then your anger goes away. Of course when we first start practicing them, they sound quite intellectual. We go through this nice intellectual gymnastic thing about the situation in which we feel so much passion, and we can't put these two things together.

I went to do retreat one time after I had left this particular situation that I was referring to. Thank goodness it was a long retreat because the first two weeks I spent just being completely angry. If it had been a shorter retreat I wouldn't have gotten anywhere! I remember practicing this technique and the mind would say "Yes, but ..." which is often what our mind does when we practice these antidotes to the afflictions. We say, "Yes" because we understand them intellectually, but our deeply entrenched attitude comes out with "Yes, but really it is their fault because blah, blah, blah ..." and we present our case. But then being Dharma practitioners, that doesn't get us anywhere. We're still stuck with the fact that anger is an affliction that creates negative karma, which in turn creates samsara. So if I am right and they are wrong, why am I angry? Anger is a defilement. We keep on having to look our own anger in the face.

So we must continue practicing these techniques. As you do more purification, collect more positive potential, and practice these techniques, they kind of sink into the mind. At first they are very intellectual, but if you go over them repeatedly, your mind begins to change. This is especially true if you are working

with a grudge or hurt that you've held on to for a long time, or something that you get a lot of mileage out of. We hold on to our hurt and pain a lot. The remedies for both are the same because there is a connection between them. We have a lot vested in holding on to our pain and the past situation, but we just have to keep using these methods. It becomes like peeling layers off an onion: over a period of years we let go of this little bit of hostility, and let go of that, and let go of that ... Sometimes it all comes back again but then we can dismantle it much more quickly. But it really takes a lot of time and effort to work with anger and pain.

However, there will be times when we are contemplating a situation in our life and we just feel that we are not going anywhere; then it is better to put it aside. Also, we can look back sometimes at problems that we had with our friends when we were sixteen and think, "Oh, my goodness! How long did I spend crying over that, and for what?" It is so easy to look back and wonder, "Why did I get upset?" So those are things that, with time, give us a whole different perspective.

### **Disadvantages of anger and holding a grudge**

Another antidote is to think of the disadvantages of anger and holding a grudge. We hold grudges because we are holding onto pain. We create this real solid thing about how somebody harmed us in the past and we just can't forget it. We have this grudge and we want to retaliate in some way although of course we're much too polite to say that (As 'good

Buddhists', we don't want to retaliate).

First of all, we need to recognize that holding the grudge hurts us more than it hurts the other person. Really think about that, because that gives us the ability to later apply one of these other techniques. But initially, we have to be willing to question that grudge instead of just holding on to it, making it the center of our identity. We have to be willing just to say "Wow! This grudge hurts me much more than it hurts the other person because the other person hurt me one time or five times or however many times it was, but every time I think about what he did, I hurt myself again."

We really project this incredibly solid image of how some people behaved towards us and we envision them as solid characters, not seeing any other aspects of their personality except this particular quality that they happened to have when they harmed us. So we focus on certain instances and qualities and think this is the person and this is the only relationship we have.

We need to recognize that this way of thinking harms us much more than the other person because, regardless of what they did, they're living their life now or they may even be dead. They are certainly not thinking about it right now. But we can't let go of that situation and daily harm comes to us by our continually dwelling on it.

So just acknowledging that gives us some ability to say "Well! Maybe I'm going to have to let go of this anger because it's not getting me anywhere." We admit that the problem at this present moment is not what somebody did to us in the past but our current

clinging to our anger and our inability to let go. We do that so much in this country, this culture—very much!

If you have difficulty applying this technique then you can use one of the others and question, “Was it this person’s nature or not?” Or you can think this was the kindness of the person harming me by giving me the opportunity to generate patience. Or, you can recognize that the person who harmed you is somebody who is suffering and unhappy himself. If you really see that person as a suffering, unhappy human being, you can let go of so much anger.

Somebody recently told me a story that was quite moving. His childhood had been very very difficult; his mother committed suicide and his father had been involved in alcohol. He had a lot of resentment and anger towards his father that originated from everything that happened when he was young. One day he went out sailing with his father. During the course of the day his father proceeded to tell him about what it was like for him when the mother killed herself and the kids were growing up; he described his own problems and torment. My friend told me that after hearing that, he recognized how desperately unhappy and confused his father had been. So much of his anger at that point just faded away and he felt compassion for his father. Instead of viewing his father as a hostile person who hated him, he saw him as someone who wanted to be happy but who was in a lot of pain. I thought it was really moving how he came to see his father in a completely different light.

**Walking in the other person’s samsara**



So this application of one of the techniques to look at the situation differently, allows our feelings to become transformed. Actually, that's the next technique here, that of recognizing the other person's unhappiness. So instead of just locking ourselves in the position, "I am unhappy because they did X, Y and Z", we investigate, "Wow, why are they doing X, Y and Z?" We then realize it's because they are unhappy. What does it feel like to be them and be unhappy? What does it feel like to really put ourselves in the shoes of the other person? This would be an excellent meditation for George Bush and Saddam Hussein, for them to think of the suffering the other one is going through. We know what it feels like to be unhappy. If we can recognize it in others, it makes it harder for us to be angry with them.

### **Buttons, buttons. what are our buttons?**

Another technique, which I personally find incredibly beneficial, is recognizing what all our buttons are, in a particular situation. When we get angry, it's because someone is hitting on that thing that we are sensitive about. We usually say, "You're pushing my button. It is your fault. Stop!" But our buttons are our responsibility. Nobody can push our buttons if we did not have them.

So we have to look at our buttons, which are usually the things that we're attached to. In doing so, we really come to see the whole relationship between attachment and anger because the more attached we are to something, the angrier we get when things don't happen the way we want or if we get the opposite of

what we desire.

Let's say somebody criticizes me. (I use this example because we all get criticized—even though we feel like we're the only ones who get unfairly dumped on, it's actually a universal phenomenon.) When we get criticized it is useful to respond by asking, "Well, what's my button here? Why am I so sensitive to this person's criticism?" and to really investigate our sensitivity to the criticism.

We might find many different reasons. One is we really like them and we want them to think well of us. Or, it might be because we think what we did was good and want other people to acknowledge that, revealing our attachment to praise, approval or recognition. Or it might be because if they don't like us, then they are going to tell somebody else whom we do like, and that person won't like us anymore. So then it is attachment to another person. Or because they are criticizing us, we might get docked in pay and that's attachment to money.

So to really look when we are getting criticized or when we have any kind of harmful event, what is it in our mind that says, "I'm sorry, but this is not permitted." We must examine that which we cling to, how we want things to be and ask why we are so very attached and see if there is space in the mind where things can be another way. We need to recognize what our buttons are, especially our attachment to possessions.

Another thing we are super attached to is our sense of justice. This one is so hard because you don't even recognize it until you live in another culture where there are different concepts about what justice means.

We grow up from the time we're little with our own idea of what is and isn't fair, and since then our notions of fairness have been a source of conflict. When my brother got something I didn't, "Sorry, mum and dad, that is not fair! I want it too!" In school, "That's not fair. You can't let that kid do it and not me!" Look at how we relate politically. In this country, we are always proclaiming, "It is not fair! It is not fair!" and this is how we relate to so many situations and conflicts. Things that we don't like we claim as being unfair. So we have our idea of what fairness is and what justice is, and basically, the world doesn't operate that way and we get really, really upset.

I'm not saying that we shouldn't be concerned when things are unfair. We can still say a situation is unjust but why become angry? That's the question. Why cling so strongly to the way we want things to be and why retaliate with anger?

### **Stopping the cause for future unhappiness**

So acknowledging our buttons is really helpful. Another way to help us subdue our anger is to recognize that if we just go along with our patterned behavior and retaliate, then we are in fact creating the cause to have more of this unpleasant situation. When we say or do things out of anger we're creating negative karma, which is the principal reason why we are having this unpleasant situation to start with. So come back to this notion of, "I want myself to be happy, therefore I'm not going to strike back at other people with anger." That's a completely different way

of thinking from our usual mind. Usually we think, “I want myself to be happy, therefore I am going to beat up whoever bothers me.”

### **Buddha atoms**

Yet another thing that sometimes is quite useful is that when the image of the person who harmed you comes into your mind, have him exploded into molecules with each molecule transforming into a Buddha. Instead of seeing him as this rigid, solid person, you just look at every little atom of his body and imagine it is a Buddha. So the image of this devilish person just kind of disappears! We’ve watched Walt Disney enough, we can make this happen ...Really, Walt Disney is very good for visualization. Just imagine something, and it goes poof—all these Buddhas kind of radiate out. You don’t need to be afraid of the image because it is only a thought with nothing substantial to it. It is like watching cartoons—there is nothing real in the image or thought in our mind. It’s kind of fun to do.

### **Remembering the past kindness of the people who harmed us**

Because often the person we hate most is also the person we care about a lot, it is helpful to remember the kindness that person showed us in the past. Some people get angrier with people they know well than they do with strangers. Others are more sensitive and get angrier with strangers. I had an interesting conversation with somebody one day about this, and

he was saying if a friend thinks something bad about him, he doesn't care so much because he just figures that with a friend, things can be worked out. But when there is some kind of prejudice in society against whatever kind of group people belong to, that makes him really, really angry.

For me, it's the exact opposite. Although I care about the prejudices that exist in society, I don't get angry about them. But if a friend pushes my button ... So we are all quite different in these ways.

One technique that can be applied in both situations is to remember the kindness of the person who harmed us, so that we release this attitude of him being this solid evil person. We recognize that this person has a lot of different qualities, and that we've related to them in many different ways. So we know, for example, in previous lives, everybody has been our parents, our lover, somebody who rescued us, or fed us and protected us. Remember that. In this lifetime maybe there are some bumps in the relationship, but in previous lifetimes this person was kind to us. So again that prevents us from making things super solid—"This is who this person is, therefore I am going to hate him forever"—by recognizing that actually in the previous lives, he had been very kind.

Sometimes we don't even have to look at previous lives, we can just look at this lifetime. We can even do this with our families of origin and transform the anger, resentment we hold towards our family members. We can recognize that those very same people were incredibly kind to us in other situations. They are the people who kept us alive and enabled us

to be adults right now. If it wasn't for our family who took care of us when we were babies by feeding, clothing and protecting us, we wouldn't be alive right now. Instead of the harm we try to look at the whole picture. I think that it's really important to view it this way because it gives us a much more balanced perspective, even though sometimes it's hard to do.

## **Recalling the essence of taking refuge**

Also, when the mind arises that wants to retaliate, then it is really important to remember why we are taking refuge in the Buddha. Why would we want to harm other sentient beings?! We might usually think "I take refuge in the Buddha because the Buddha is good; He will protect me from this jerk." Remember the whole essence of taking refuge is in not harming other sentient beings. So if our refuge is something we cherish and protect in our heart, then remember that if we really have that kind of trust, faith and confidence in the Buddha, we must examine the desire to retaliate and harm somebody else. Recognize that it's not something that would make the Buddha happy.

Anger can also arise when people criticize Buddhism and it's tempting sometimes to get really defensive. "How can you say that? That's my religion!" Remember again that the Buddha is the one we trust, have faith in and take as our example and guide. The Buddhas cherish other sentient beings more than they cherish themselves. If we harm those very sentient beings that the Buddhas cherish so much, somehow we're not being true to our own refuge. Thinking in this way can sometimes ground us

a little bit and help us to sit down and say, “Wow! I really have to look at this.”

So all these are techniques for practice—it’s like peeling away layers of an onion; we really have to go over it again and again.

Patience is the attitude that enables us to remain undisturbed in the face of harm or disagreeable situations. There are three kinds of patience:

1. Patience of not retaliating
2. Patience of voluntarily enduring suffering
3. Patience of practicing the Dharma

Since we have already discussed the patience of not retaliating, we will now focus on the remaining two.

### **Patience of Voluntarily Enduring Suffering**

The second one, the patience of voluntarily enduring suffering, is when we meet unpleasant situations in our life, when things don’t turn out the way we want, like getting sick, or being in a car accident, and we are able to just live with them.

How do we do that? One way is to remember the nature of cyclic existence and really let it sink into our heart. Usually we say, “OK, yeah, yeah, suffering is the nature of cyclic existence ... (but I wonder how you get out of it?)” We have not really accepted the first of the four facts that the noble ones have seen as true—that there are a lot of undesirable experiences that constitute the very nature of our existence. As

long as we are under the influence of afflictions (ignorance, anger and attachment) and we create actions of karma by means of those, we are going to experience unpleasant results repeatedly.

However, every time a difficult situation arises, we get really upset because we feel, “This shouldn’t happen!” I notice this particularly in the West. I wonder if it is because we grew up in a Judeo-Christian culture influenced by the myth of the Garden of Eden, where everything was hunky-dory. Then somebody screwed up, and as a result, we have all of our problems. This might lead to the thinking, “Hold on! Suffering is a goof-up. It shouldn’t be like this.”

Buddhism takes the “should” out of it and says, as long as there is the cause, there is the result. This is the definition of what cyclic existence is—undesirable experiences. So as long as we still have the causes, such as ignorance and karma in our mindstream, then to expect anything else than this result is fanciful thinking.

Our tendency, when confronted with suffering, is to rebel and reject. We get into our American mentality of “We have to fix it.” We are a culture of “fix-its.” It is just incredible, especially when you live overseas and you experience how other people react to problems in the society or family. It is not like here; every time something goes wrong, we have to immediately step in and fix it! We do not reflect, “Let’s survey the situation, look at its deep causes and really understand before we act.” We do not have that very much in our culture. Our foreign policy reflects this, like in Vietnam and Somalia; we just



jump in, send some soldiers and try to fix it. There is something in that attitude that rejects accepting the reality of things as they are.

This is not to say that we need to be discouraged or fatalistic. Instead we can develop the kind of mind that looks at the situation and acknowledges, “Well, it is like that. What’s happening right now is what’s happening right now.” We often confuse acceptance with fatalism. Acceptance is when you accept what is happening right now. Fatalism is when you dream up a future and think that that is going to happen.

Accepting reality also does not necessarily mean being passive. We must examine each situation and act accordingly. But often we do one of two things: sometimes we can influence a situation but we just roll over and don’t; at other times we cannot influence a situation and we knock our head against the wall trying to. This is where a lot of wisdom needs to be developed, through trial and error, standing back and assessing situations instead of immediately jumping in and reacting. I personally find this way of thinking very helpful. Rather than getting discouraged in the face of pain and suffering, we acknowledge and accept them. “We’re in cyclic existence. To expect anything different is ignorant and hallucination.”

## **Determination to be free**

To take that one step further—this is precisely why the Buddha talked about the determination to be free. When we hear all these teachings about the determination to be free, and the different kinds of undesirable samsaric experiences, we say, “Oh, yes!

There are eight sufferings and six sufferings and three sufferings,” listing them all out. But then when one of those comes into play in our life, we say “But this can’t happen; it is not supposed to be like this.”

This is precisely the time when we begin to see that those lists we studied are not mere intellectual things. They are descriptions of what our life experiences are. The Buddha pointed those things out because by noticing them, it helps us develop a very strong effort to free ourselves from them. There is no other way to achieve liberation except by developing the determination to be free. This is not possible without understanding the suffering nature of cyclic existence.

So when we encounter unpleasant situations, we say, “This is exactly what the Buddha referred to in the First Noble Truth. This suffering does not happen by accident nor is it due to some injustice. I have to look at it because this is what I want to be free of.” This is a really different way of looking at things. I think this is something that as Westerners, maybe Easterners too, we really have to wrestle with a lot.

It was interesting that at a teachers’ conference I was at, many of the teachers were talking in depth about their own personal pain and abusive situations, trying to work it all out psychologically. At one point, one of the teachers said, “Isn’t this the First Noble Truth?” It is exactly what the Buddha was talking about. Why we go to therapy or support groups, why we go to this plan and that plan. All these turmoil in our life, are exactly the nature of samsara. Buddha instructed us to examine it in order for us to develop the determination to be free from it. So this is a very different attitude.

That is why regarding therapy, I think it is good to look back at childhood but I do not think that it is always necessary because anyway we had unlimited numbers of childhoods. It is impossible to work out every single thing that happened in every single childhood we ever had—or even everything that happened in one childhood! But if we could just look at the nature of cyclic existence, this is what it is about. Our parents are not perfect. We are forty-five and we are still trying to come to terms with this. It would be better to simply recognize “Yeah, this is the nature of samsara. There is affliction and karma. This pain I am having right now is why I am practicing Dharma. Because if I could practice Dharma and realize emptiness and develop bodhicitta, it would free me of this kind of pain.”

Constantly lamenting and thinking life is unfair is not going to set us free. We are going to stay quite stuck. I have never heard the term “justice” discussed in Buddhism. Karma has nothing to do with justice. Suffering has nothing to do with justice and yet so often, when we encounter suffering, we think, “It is not fair! It is not just! The world should be different!”, as if somebody is banging the gavel and handing out the terms to everybody.

Fully contemplating the First Noble Truth as it unfolds in our life leads us to the practice of the patience of enduring suffering, which in turn allows us to transform our sufferings and do something about them.

But how is this wish to abandon samsaric suffering different from rejection and denial of regular suffering? The first wish is grounded in an attitude of

openness that allows for examination and acceptance. The second one involves reacting to suffering out of fear and aversion. If we confront suffering with an understanding of the Third and Forth Noble Truths, that there is a state of cessation and also a way to actualize it, then we can develop the confidence and skillful means to transform it.

## **Developing compassion**

Just to be healthy and balanced people, we need to be able to look at the garbage in our life. In order to be able to benefit others, we have to be able to face suffering. Suffering provides the impetus to develop the determination to be free as well as very strong compassion towards others. Compassion is not some intellectual thing that we do on Sunday mornings. It is something very earthy and rooted in really being able to touch suffering.

So when we are enduring a painful situation, it is helpful to reflect, “First of all this is created by my own ignorance and karma, what else do I expect? Second, this is exactly what I’m determining to be free from. And third, what about everybody else who is in this situation? This is sensitizing me to understand other people’s suffering.” So often it is easy to give advice to people about their problems. But when we face the same problems, we falter. It is important then to recognize every time we have a problem, “Well, this is helping me learn a skill so that I can also help other people who are in the same situation.” By doing this, we transform painful situations to help us develop compassion for others.

Here is a story that relates to this. When I was at Kopan monastery in Nepal, I got a really wanton case of hepatitis. It was so bad that going to the bathroom was like asking me to climb Mt Everest for the amount of strength it took. It was the first year of my practice and being very enthusiastic, I would say, “I should practice; Dharma is a good thing. I know the alarm clock is going off and I should get out of bed and practice.” You know that kind of mind—all the “shoulds” about what I should do. Then I got hepatitis and someone gave me this book “Wheel of Sharp Weapons” which talks about karma. I began to see that this illness was the result of my own negative actions due to my self-cherishing. All of a sudden, the “I *should* practice the Dharma” turned into “I *want* to practice Dharma.” In this way, the situation, which was actually quite horrible, became quite beneficial for my practice and good in the long run.

Also, in situations where you have a serious illness you can think, “This is what other people are going through too. I now understand their experience”. Then when we help, we can do it from this deep understanding of what they are going through—real deep compassion. It doesn’t have to be that if I have cancer, I am only going to have compassion for people who have cancer. We can have compassion for people who have stomach-aches too or other ailments because we comprehend the common nature of suffering. Therefore, it is really important for the development of compassion to have a courageous way of dealing with our own suffering. If we cannot deal with our own suffering, how are we going to deal with anybody else’s?

## **Decreasing pride**

Another advantage of suffering is that it decreases our pride. We take everything in our life for granted. We have all the good circumstances but then all of a sudden, we get sick. Our pride just goes like that. Again, we've touched a basic human condition related to the nature of the body and that makes us appreciate things in a much deeper way. We can use these situations to deplete our pride and our taking things for granted. I remember watching these incredible lamas—Serkong Rinpoche or Ling Rinpoche—when they were really old, doing prostrations before they were to teach. Their bodies being old, you could just tell how much effort making three prostrations took. That really stuck in my mind so that sometimes when I make prostrations, I think, “Wow! I'm so fortunate to be healthy and be able to do this.”

So you see, getting sick or having unpleasant situations can bring about a strong appreciation of what we do have when we are well, or when we do not have any pressing problems. It also depletes the pride that makes us think, “My life, everything is wonderful!” So these ways of thinking are extremely important to remember, practice and use when you have problems.

## **Taking and giving**

Another way to cultivate this patience when you're suffering, is to do the “taking and giving” meditation. We imagine voluntarily taking on the suffering of others and voluntarily giving them our happiness. This

is a meditation to develop love and compassion. Also, to remember that if we train ourselves to endure small inconveniences and miseries, then through practice, we would be able to endure bigger ones. So do not get discouraged when unpleasant things happen, just think, “OK. If I can cope with this, then it’s going to help me in future when bigger things happen.” Through familiarity, we learn to deal with problems.

However, what I am talking about has nothing to do with martyrdom, which involves a lot of ego —“Look how much I’m suffering! Isn’t my suffering wonderful? Shouldn’t I get more attention than everybody else?” That is not what we are getting at in Buddhism. We are trying to transcend the ego, not to develop it. In martyrdom, there is a certain kind of tightness. In Buddhism, there is none. What we are trying to develop in Buddhism is a complete letting go. In other words, we are really transforming the situation, accepting it for what it is and using it to develop compassion and the determination to be free. We are not using it to develop ego, self-importance or self-pity.

## **Patience of Definitely Practicing the Dharma**

### **Helping others**

Next is the patience of practicing the Dharma. One example of this relates to the patience you need when trying to help people. This is a good one, “How do you help people when they don’t do what you want them to do? How do you keep helping them when

they do not appreciate you? And when they aren't what you want them to be, and when they act just the opposite, how do we keep ourselves from getting so angry that we throw in the towel and walk off?" We have to really protect our bodhicitta. It is so easy to get fed up and say, "I'm trying to help. I know the way to help and this person doesn't get it. They don't want to listen."

So what can we do in those situations? We have very strong ideas of what they should do and how they should do it. One thing is to say, "This is samsara, isn't it? This is samsara in that they aren't what I want them to be. This is samsara because they are confused."

To illustrate, here is another story. A young person with a brain tumor came to me and said, "Please, I had surgery because of a brain tumor, give me a purification practice so that it doesn't come back." So I called Lama Zopa and finally got him a specially tailored practice. When I called him up and said, "Come on over. I'll teach you how to do this meditation," his reply was, "I'm working overtime and can't come." After I had gone through all that to get him these special practices and he does not even appreciate it!!! I just had to acknowledge, "Well, this is samsara!" I know very clearly that when his tumor came back, he was going to call and ask for help. I knew I wouldn't be able to help at that point in time because by then, the tumor would have been deadly. We kept in touch over the months. The tumor recurred and he got really sick again. I went to visit him at the hospital. It was clear that I could not do anything. His whole physical appearance changed; he



could not focus on things due to the drugs he was on.

It is never too late to practice the Dharma. But why wait until three weeks before you die to start? That is not the time. This is what they mean when they talk about confusion and affliction! But this situation made me reflect on how many times my teachers had tried to help me and I walked in the other direction. How often my teachers had offered me help or instruction and I said, “This doesn’t interest me. I don’t have time.” It is not just how many times I have done it in *this* lifetime but I can imagine having done this in many past lifetimes too. And so now I think, “Look at the bodhisattvas! They hang in there lifetime after lifetime with somebody like me, who messes up a lot. The least I can do is hang in there for somebody else.”

But the problem is that when we help people, we always have an idea of what exactly they should do with our help. They should appreciate and put it into practice. They should acknowledge us and say “Thank you”. They should help us in return. We have a little checklist of how the perfect recipient should act. But very few people get the honor of that job. If we wait to help somebody until we can be sure that he fulfils every qualification we have for a perfect recipient of our help, when will we ever help anybody?

Actually, isn’t helping others all about helping people who are under the influence of ignorance, anger, attachment and karma? Isn’t that what helping people is about? People under the influence of afflictions and karma are not going to do what we want them to do as perfect recipients of the great and

glorious gift of OUR HELP. If I wait for them to be the perfect recipients, am I really helping them or am I just increasing my own ego?

Here again is when I remember the bodhisattvas—what they are doing and what they put up with ... I think of all the things people have put up with that I have done in my life. I have made so many mistakes in my life and so many people have put up with them again and again. So okay, maybe I need to be a bit patient then.

One way to keep our motivation pure is to think that our help is a gift. The important thing is that we give it. What they do with it is their choice as long as they are not abusing it such as using money for drugs. Whether they say “Thank you” or not, we have to let go of the expectations. But it’s hard, isn’t it?

## **Enduring physical hardship**

Some other things that are included in this third kind of patience—the patience of practicing the Dharma—involves having appreciation for positive actions and for the Buddha’s qualities, thereby generating the wish to gain those qualities. This gives us the patience to endure whatever is necessary to do our practice such as getting up early in the morning even if we feel tired. When you go to Dharamsala to listen to teachings, you develop patience by hearing the teachings in close quarters, unable to move your legs, everyone crowded in a tent outside. Here, it is so easy—just jump in your car and go. Sometimes it takes a bit of effort and endurance to get to the place where the teachings are, even if it is in the city or another

country. So this type of patience allows us to go through that, to endure sitting in teachings with your back hurting, your knees aching and the teacher talking too long—“Why doesn’t she shut up. Can’t she see that I am tired!”—enduring all of that, even when your mind just doesn’t want to hear another word of Dharma.

Having this kind of patience and courage (to really stick it out) is so important because our mind goes up and down like yo-yos all the time. It is full of hindrances. If at the first hindrance, we get discouraged and say, “It is too difficult, too upsetting!” and split, we are never going to get anywhere in our practice. We actually have pretty cushy circumstances here. When I think about how I learned the Dharma in Nepal sitting on a stone floor in a building without electricity with this incredible Geshe and a translator who barely knew English ... I listened day after day writing down what the translator said, word for word, even though it did not make a whole sentence. Later I would sit with my friends trying to figure out what the sentences were and what the Geshe was saying. This was just trying to get the words, let alone the meaning. We lived in a place with no tap water. Coolies carried water up for us. We had to drive to town to do shopping once a week. Between India and Nepal, I lived this way for several years. There was no heating in the rooms during the cold winters and everybody was crammed together. But we stuck it out and learned.

You have it easier—there is carpeting and heat, your teacher speaks English—doesn’t know so much, but she cracks a few jokes. When you go to hear His

Holiness in Dharamsala, not everybody can fit in the main temple, so everybody sits outside, and inevitably it rains. We sit outside and are not allowed to cover our arm due to tradition. But it is raining, hailing, and the wind is howling through. We endure because we want to hear the teachings. When you go to His Holiness' teaching in this country, you sit in a nice fold-down chair that is padded and comfortable. There is acoustics and His Holiness pauses while the translator talks in English instead of the translator doing it on the radio.

Enduring suffering to hear teachings is actually the patience of practicing the Dharma, and it's also (the second patience,) the patience of enduring suffering. Nyung Nay is a good example of cultivating not only the patience of practicing Dharma, but also the patience of undergoing suffering. Nyung Nay is a practice that involves doing a lot of prayers, prostrations and mantras with Chenrezig. Participants take the Eight Mahayana precepts both days, eating only one meal the first day and not eating, drinking or speaking on the second day. The benefits, as described in the prayer, are: "During this fast, if the FORTUNATE person feels hot, cold or tired, may the karma which through the power of hatred would cause one's rebirth in the hellish realm be purified and may the gate to rebirth in the hellish realm be closed." This refers to transforming bad circumstances into the path and developing both kinds of patience.

So when you are hot, cold, or tired while doing the practice, you think, "This is my karma that would ordinarily ripen in me having a hellish rebirth, and now it's ripening in this temporary discomfort." That

gives you the ability to go through it, because you are doing it for a purpose.

“Because of the difficulty of not eating and drinking during this fast, if the miseries of hunger and thirst arise, may the karma, which through miserliness, would cause one to be reborn amongst the hungry ghost be purified, and may the gate to rebirth among the hungry ghosts be closed.” During these two days it is very easy to get hungry or thirsty, but instead of sneaking in a meal when no one is looking and breaking the precept, you can contemplate—“This is my own karma created through the force of miserliness that would normally ripen in me being born as a hungry ghost, and now it’s ripening in this relatively minor discomfort.” So you cultivate the patience to endure that circumstance.

“During the fast, if through not letting the mind wander about, it becomes maddened by agitation, drowsiness, sleepiness and dullness”—you are sitting there trying to say mantra, and you’re falling asleep, and your mind is completely wild—“may the karma which through stupidity would cause one to be reborn amongst animals be purified. And may the gate to rebirth in the animal realm be closed.” So again, instead of getting discouraged or just falling asleep in the middle of a session, you make an effort to stay awake to do the practice. By exerting effort in this way you purify the karma (created through stupidity) which would have caused you to be reborn as an animal. In this way you are developing both kinds of patience.

So it says “In general, at all times during this fast, with our mind bent towards the benefit and happiness

of others, and by thinking that whatever misery of body and mind arises is the suffering of all sentient beings, may we take it upon ourselves.” This is the essence of the whole thing. Instead of feeling sorry for ourselves when we have a problem, we say, “May this suffice for the misery of all others. I’m going through this, it’s not changing; may it suffice for the misery of all others.” And you do the taking and giving meditation which allows for the whole thing to become transformed. When you do the Nyung Nay, you’re specifically developing these two kinds of patience.

There are some other verses too that describe how to transform difficult circumstances. The whole point is, that to get anywhere in our Dharma practice, we need to have patience with discomfort. If we always want our mind to be happy and our body to be comfortable when we are doing Dharma practice, it is going to be extremely difficult to do any practice at all. The whole reason we are practicing is because we have a body and mind which are by nature uncomfortable. So if we’re going to wait for them to be comfortable before we practice, we’re never going to get there. So we have to develop some kind of patience to willingly endure discomfort for the sake of the Dharma. Our mind isn’t just aimed at whether we feel okay right now (eight worldly concerns). It’s okay for us to endure some discomfort because where we’re going is some place really beneficial. Again, this isn’t masochism. We’re not wishing ourselves to suffer and we’re not thinking that it’s virtuous to suffer, but we’re just saying that there’s no way to escape suffering, so we might as well transform it into

the path.

## **Enduring afflictions**

Another point in this patience of practicing the Dharma is dealing with the mind and body that are out of control and voluntarily enduring the suffering of that. Sometimes when we think about death, or impermanence, it causes anxiety. Sometimes when we think about emptiness, because our understanding isn't completely correct or because our self-grasping is so strong, we feel anxious. Sometimes we hear teachings about karma or the eight worldly concerns and we feel anxious. We must learn to bear the fact that the Dharma and our spiritual teacher continually beat up on our egos. So we have to have the stamina to cope with emotional disturbances.

Once I was reading a book by a psychologist discussing some of the things he found that made people most anxious. The first thing was death. The second was thinking about freedom and responsibility for your own life. Third was isolation and aloneness and fourth was thinking about the meaning of life.

These are all things that we think about in the course of Dharma practice too, aren't they? We're thinking about them in a different way, but still they're the same things. Initially it can produce some anxiety but as we face our afflictions instead of back away, we leave some space around it.

It is so interesting sometimes to hear about other people's experiences when they go to teachings, or to look at our own experiences. Have you ever gotten furiously angry in the middle of teachings? You get so

angry; you can barely sit in your seat—angry with the teacher, the teaching, the situation, at everybody else sitting in the room? Your mind just becomes enraged! I am talking about developing the patience to endure when your mind is going bonkers, fighting and resisting the teachings, and when your mind cannot stand anybody in the room, just all the stuff—you know how the mind gets sometimes. Very difficult to please.

It is also important to practice this when living the ordained life. For example, when people say, “What a pity somebody like you is celibate. Really you should get married!” Or having someone say “Isn’t being ordained escaping from society and responsibility?” People who are not Buddhists usually say that.

What is even worse is when Buddhists say, “By being ordained, aren’t you escaping relationships? Aren’t you denying your sexuality?” I think they are saying more about themselves than about ordained people. Or people say, “Oh! When you wore lay clothes, I could really relate to you. You were my friend. But now you are wearing these funny clothes and have a funny name, you are not my friend anymore. I can’t relate to you.”

There are many things that people say when you are ordained. Or the people who say, “Oh, you’re just leeching off of society, why don’t you go out and get a job? Why do you want a free lunch for?” Bob Thurman, for those of you who know him, was a monk at one point and then he gave his ordination back. He talks very much in favor of a monastic life and says it is very good for society to have a group of people that gets free lunches [laughter]. He says this



group of people should not be put down—the free lunch club is very important! These are some of the nicer comments people have made. A lot of things get thrown at ordained people, especially in the West. It is much more difficult here.

## **Generating effort**

At the heart of developing the patience of practicing the Dharma is to have a far range goal in mind, because then there is a willingness in the short term to endure all types of discomfort. It also involves the patience to enrich our conviction in cause and effect, enrich our refuge. We develop the patience of looking at our own life, of meditating on impermanence and death, of meditating on suffering, of not forgetting what you heard in Dharma class and trying to put it into practice, even though the mind has great resistance and denial. These are all included in the patience of practicing the Dharma.

Finally, we also need patience when we have happy circumstances because if we don't, then we are likely, because of the good fortune, to get arrogant, complacent, or be completely overwhelmed by all the pleasure and comfort of the situation. We maintain some kind of patience with that too instead of just jumping into it. Actually, in some ways, it is much harder. It is really interesting because they say when we have a lot of suffering, we do not practice because we are overwhelmed, but also when we have a lot of happiness, we don't practice, because we are also overwhelmed. When things are going super deluxe in our life, it is very difficult to recall the determination

to be free because now we finally have praise and approval. We have a great reputation. We are very famous. People finally appreciate us. We have a nice house and car. We have a fantastic boyfriend or girlfriend. Why do I need Dharma? So we really need a lot of patience with good circumstances in order to not get sucked up because we know that it is impermanent and that samsaric perfections cannot be trusted.

## CHAPTER 9

### Joyous Effort

Tonight we are going to begin talking about the fourth far-reaching attitude which has a couple of translations; one is 'joyous effort' and another translation is 'enthusiastic perseverance'. These terms refer to the enthusiastic mind that takes delight in doing what is constructive. This is the joyful mind that has the necessary effort and ability to persevere. It is not going to poop out in the middle, sludge along at the beginning and fizzle at the end; it is going to have some life and buoyancy to it so that our whole practice is done with joy and not with "shoulds," "oughts," "supposed-tos," obligation, guilt and all those other 'wonderful' things that we bring along with us.

This, instead, is a joyous attitude and it is very important to cultivate because this is the attitude that makes us want to practice the Dharma. If we do not have much joyous effort then there is no real aspiration, no delight in the practice and pretty soon everything just goes the way of all the other projects that we have started and never finished. Our practice becomes like all those half-done macramé kits from the 70's in your basement. Without joyous effort the Dharma will be on a shelf in the basement with all the other half-done things. [Laughter.] To avoid that happening, to really be able to complete our spiritual path and progress, you need this factor of joyous effort.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

There's a clarity of motivation and a real strength of the mind, so that it is free of the "shoulds," "oughts" and "supposed tos". It arises from really seeing the advantages of the practice, the advantages of following the path. It takes delight in doing what is positive or constructive. When we have this it is because we have seen the advantages of the bodhisattva path and therefore have delight in practicing what is virtuous, what is constructive. As a result of this joyous effort all the realizations come. It is a direct cause for actualizing the entire path and it gives whatever we do some kind of strength, purpose and liveliness.

### **Why are Lamas happy?**

People sometimes say, "These Tibetan lamas are such happy people. Why is that?" If you think that you are busy, just look at His Holiness the Dalai Lama's schedule. His Holiness is jetting from here to there, through all these different time zones with different languages and strange food and all these people going, "Oh bless me, your Holiness." What is it that gives him the kind of strength and joy to sit down with thousands of people week after week and teach and do all these different things? It is this far-reaching attitude, because for him there is a delight and a joy in doing the path. You immediately sense it when you are around somebody like him.

Or look at Lama Zopa, he meditates day and night. We joke that he carries his cave with him. He does not

need to move to one; it just comes with him to New York, Chicago or Tokyo, wherever he is. Nobody has ever seen him lie down and go to sleep. It is not that he stays awake all night doing some kind of ascetic trip saying, “Oh I’ve got to force myself to stay awake because all these sentient beings are suffering and I had better help them.” It is not that kind of attitude at all, instead it is an attitude of joyous effort and a delight in wanting to work for the benefit of others, wanting to create the cause for enlightenment and wanting to do the practice. So, therefore, it becomes real easy for him to stay up all night and meditate, whereas for us eight o’clock at night is too late to start a session. [Laughter.]

Once we have this delight the practice becomes much easier and that is why at the beginning of our practice sometimes things are so difficult. We cannot get ourselves to the cushion. We open up a Dharma book and think. “Well, I really have to answer these letters and read the junk mail because there might be an important sale I am missing.” [Laughter.] We think of all these other things that we have to do instead. We are so easily distracted, whereas joyous effort keeps us really in line and the mind wants to practice. So Monday or Wednesday night comes along and we think, “Oh good I get to go to class” instead of, “Oh I have to sit there with this cat again.” [Laughter.] With joyous effort the mind wants to come to class.

Perhaps there is Nyung Nay and with joyous effort we think, “Oh I want to go and do this,” or there are other retreats, or the alarm clock goes off at five o’clock in the morning and it is time to do your meditation and with joyous effort you actually want to

get up and do it. Joyous effort gives us a real reversal in the attitude. At the beginning of the practice we do not have much joyous effort and that is why often the practice is quite difficult. But as we begin to practice, we see the results, we see the benefits of it, then automatically the mind takes more interest, becomes more joyful and one wants to engage in practice. That is why at the beginning of the practice sometimes it takes a little bit of effort, not joyous effort, but just plain old effort to keep ourselves going and to get ourselves going. After we begin to have some taste of the practice and what it brings, it really produces some good results.

I just got a letter from one of my students whom I met while in India. He came to some courses I was giving there at the end of 1990. I got a letter from him recently that said he did a retreat and he was just beginning now to get a taste of the thing that we call meditation. He said, "It's been three years now that I have been making myself meditate and attend teachings and do all these other retreats and practices. I felt like what I was doing had not been getting me anywhere." Then in this most recent retreat, he began to see that everything that he was doing before, where it was more just willpower that got him to do it, that it had actually helped to create the circumstance in building up the energy so that this last retreat he did was quite meaningful and deep for him.

So at the beginning you can see that it is just this willpower that kept him going and now, it is very much delight in the practice. He wrote in the letter that before he could not even sit and meditate for forty-five minutes. It was impossible for him. But in

this last retreat he was doing a couple of hours and wanted to do more each session.

## **The Three Types of Joyous Effort**

### **1. ARMOR-LIKE JOYOUS EFFORT**

There are different kinds of enthusiastic perseverance, three different classifications. The most common one is an armor-like joyous effort, or enthusiastic perseverance. This is the mind that is like armor, it has this strength to it. It has this brilliance. It has a shine to it and it really takes on the challenge of the Dharma practice. It is a courageous, buoyant mind that is interested in working for the benefit of sentient beings.

Armor-like joyous effort gives strength to the mind so that we can say, “Even if I have to remain in cyclic existence for eons and eons for the sake of sentient beings, it is okay with me. Even if I have to give up all these good movies to go to Dharma class, I am very happy to do it.” [Laughter.]

It is the mind that has the kind of courage that is not weak, that has buoyancy and strength and vibrancy to it. That is armor-like joyous effort.

### **2. JOYOUS EFFORT OF ACTING CONSTRUCTIVELY, OR GATHERING VIRTUES**

The second kind of joyous effort is acting

constructively. This is the joyous effort of throwing ourselves into the practice of doing constructive actions. With this kind of joyous effort, as we go through the day, we are really on the look-out for whatever we can do that is beneficial for others. We look for whatever we can do that creates the cause for enlightenment, that puts a good imprint on our mind, or on the mindstreams of others—this is the joyous effort of acting constructively.

### **3. JOYOUS EFFORT OF WORKING FOR THE BENEFIT OF OTHERS**

The third joyous effort is the joyous effort of working for the benefit of sentient beings. You will notice that this one of working for the benefit of sentient beings is one of the categories of ethics, one of the categories of patience and also one of the categories of joyous effort. It is going to come up in wisdom too. We have the ethics of working for sentient beings—being ethical while we are working for them. Also being patient while we are working for them and not getting angry when they do not appreciate everything that we do for them. And then there is the joyous effort of working for the benefit of others where the mind is light and lively, light-hearted, enthusiastic and wants to do things instead of being heavy, dragging, dull and unmotivated.

### **The Three Types of Laziness**

#### **Laziness: the principal obstacle**



The principal obstacle to generating joyous effort is laziness. There is this very nice technical definition of laziness and it reads, “Having grasped the object offering temporary happiness, either you don’t want to do anything virtuous or, although you wish to, you are weak-minded.” Does this ring any bells? [Laughter.]

‘Having grasped the object of temporary or temporal happiness’ means that we have one foot in samsara looking for pleasure in objects of the senses, what we call samsaric perfections and temporary things, and we are grasping to that. Then having grasped onto that, we lose our interest in the path and lose our interest in acting constructively, because we think the benefits of this temporary happiness are so much greater than the benefits of the Dharma practice. We think that chocolate ice cream brings much more happiness than meditation, so we go for it. We lose all interest in what is wholesome and positive. We grasp onto the object offering temporary happiness.

Or we have one foot in samara and also have one toe in nirvana and half of the mind is saying, “Yeah it would be really nice to do some practice now, but ...” We have the ‘yes, but’ mind. We think about how practice would be really good, but we have all these other things to do and are just too tired. We think, “She said I shouldn’t push myself, so I guess I shouldn’t push. I should take it easy and relax. I feel like I am getting a cold, so if I sit and meditate, that is too strenuous. I might get really sick.” [Laughter.] Laziness is the mind that, although it wants to do something, is weak, lacks energy and is very easily

distracted.

There are three specific kinds of laziness. I find this division of the three kinds of laziness incredibly interesting because it gives a whole different perspective to what the word 'laziness' means. When we say 'laziness' in English we think of lying around, being slothful, lethargic, sitting in front of the TV, spacing out, lying on the beach and getting suntanned, going to sleep and sleeping for twelve hours, getting up at noon—that is what we think of as lazy. Now, all that is included in the Buddhist definition of laziness, but there are also other kinds of laziness.

The first kind of laziness is the laziness of procrastination, or the laziness of sloth and indolence. That is the one that we usually call laziness.

The second kind of laziness is the attraction to being very busy and attachment to worldly activities. In worldly language we call this being enthusiastic, being intelligent, having a lot of energy, being a go-getter and being successful. But according to Buddhist interpretation, all that effort put into samsaric pleasure and success is a form of laziness because we have lost interest in the Dharma and our mind is weak when it comes to the Dharma. Isn't that interesting? What we usually would associate with being very busy and with being a workaholic, becomes being lazy in Buddhism.

The third kind of laziness is the laziness of discouragement and of putting ourselves down. We don't need to talk much about that one because we Americans have lots of confidence, we don't ever put ourselves down. [Laughter.]

I want to explain each of these a little bit more in

depth and give you the antidotes to them. It becomes quite interesting when you start to think about this.

## **1. THE LAZINESS OF PROCRASTINATION**

The laziness of procrastination, or of sloth, is the mind that is attached to having a life of ease. It is the mind that just wants to be comfortable, hang out, rest, sleep, get that suntan, have a week of Sundays, not exert ourselves, sleep a lot, sleep in the middle of the day, take naps and go on long vacations at the beach—sounds great, huh? The reason that this is a form of laziness is because by being attached to lying around and sleeping and just having a life of ease, we never have time or energy for the Dharma.

### **Antidote: Meditating on impermanence, death and the disadvantages of cyclic existence**

So the antidote to this one is meditating on impermanence, doing the death meditations—either the nine-point death meditation or the death meditation. The nine-point death meditation is where we think about the fact that death is definite, the time of death is indefinite and that the only thing we take with us at the time of death is our habits, our karma and the attitudes we have developed—our body, our possessions, our relationships all stay here. The death meditation is where we imagine our death, imagine the scene of our death and think about what in our life has been valuable, what we rejoice in having done and what we regret having done.

So the antidotes to the laziness of procrastination

are remembering impermanence and death, imagining our death, meditating on the disadvantages of cyclic existence and all the wonderful lists which include the eight disadvantages of cyclic existence, six unsatisfactory conditions and three sufferings. This allows us to really see what our situation is, come face-to-face with the nature of cyclic existence and recognize very clearly that all is not hunky dory and it is not going to get any better. It is only going to get worse. Really facing that instead of distracting ourselves with movies and the like.

### **Changing the *mañana* mentality**

This laziness of procrastination is often what I call the *mañana* mentality. “I’ll meditate *mañana*. I’ll do this Dharma course later. I’ll go on a one-month retreat next year. I’ll still be alive then, I am sure. I’ll go do pilgrimage some other time. I’ll read this Dharma book later.” With this kind of procrastinating mind we never get anything done. I think what is so harmful about this mind is that when we do follow it, we then feel guilty because we follow it. So then we have two problems, we have the laziness of procrastination and then we cannot even enjoy being lazy because we also feel guilty about it.

Do you notice the mind that feels guilty a lot? We think, “I should be doing this” and we think the remedy is to get rid of the ‘should’ and keep doing what we want to do [laughter]. But maybe what we need to do is actually apply the antidote—this meditation on impermanence, on death and on the disadvantages of cyclic existence—so that we change

the behavior.

Applying the antidote wakes us up. It gives us some energy, and it takes away the “shoulds” and the “have tos” and the “oughts” because when we clearly think about death and reflect on what the meaning and purpose of our life is, things become very clear. Our thinking changes from, “I should practice Dharma” to, “I am going to die sometime and this is the only thing that is valuable to take with me and this is what I want to do and nothing is going to stop me and get in my way.”

It is not a pushing mind. It is not a mind that forces effort, but rather it is a mind that through understanding, through wisdom, has a joyous effort and energy. One way we might help this mind along, besides doing these meditations, is to try and cultivate good sleeping habits. Do not get into the habit of sleeping really late in the morning and do not get into the habit of taking naps in the afternoon. Once we get into either of those two habits, they are very difficult to break and then we spend a lot of time just sleeping unnecessarily.

### **Avoiding extremes**

On the other hand, do not go to the other extreme and do this big thing of, “I am going to meditate until two in the morning if it kills me!” This is really pushing the mind. We are not saying to go to that extreme either. This is another thing that we often do because we are very high achievers and come from a high achieving culture. We crammed all night in college. We are good at pushing ourselves. But joyous effort is not pushing.

Joyous effort comes from understanding. It comes from cultivating good habits, not from cramming and pushing and feeling guilty. So really check your mind, check the texture of your mind and try to transform it into an attitude that wants to do the practice.

Now that we know the meditations to do to counteract this kind of laziness, we just have to get ourselves to sit down and do them! But again, once you get into the habit of doing the death meditation and you really see the benefits of it and you see how peaceful and calm it makes your mind, meditating on death becomes quite nice to do. It helps us to see what is important and throw away what is not important.

## **2. ATTRACTION TO TRIVIAL MATTERS AND NEGATIVE BEHAVIOR**

The second kind of laziness is the attachment to ordinary activities or frivolous activities. This is the attachment to keeping ourselves very busy with entertainment, doing business, with being perfectionists, with being go-getters.

### **We like activity**

This laziness of attachment to worldly activities is caused by liking hustle and bustle. We love the vibrancy of the city with all the different kinds of people, all the different activities and so much going on. We love the media and all the excitement the media provides.

## **We like to talk**

This kind of laziness is also caused by attachment to frivolous talk. We love to hang out and jibber-jabber. We talk about sports and politics and economics. We talk about what this person's doing, what that person's doing, what this one's wearing, what kind of car that one bought, what kind of house this one wants to get, how to get the best loan, where to invest your money, how to get more money, how to pretend you didn't lose all your money. [Laughter.] We talk about everything and do ordinary work, ordinary jobs, just keeping ourselves real busy with things that do not have any meaning or any purpose. Look at your calendar and your diary, all the things that are marked in there that you *have* to do, all these incredible, crucial, important things that we *have* to do—how many of them do we really have to do? How many of them are meaningful?

## **Useless perfectionism**

Also, we have the mind that always wants to do everything perfect. All of our samsaric things have to be perfect. We have to make the bed perfectly. We have to make everything perfectly. Then we just spend a lot of time in quite useless perfectionist tendencies, not taking care of the thing that is really going to make us perfect, that is really going to make us a Buddha.

## **Checking your motivation**

Now, here is something that we have to be real clear about, because often it is not the activity itself that is meaningful or not meaningful, it is the motivation behind why we do what we do. So I am not saying that everybody's career is meaningless and you all have to quit your jobs tomorrow. Whether our profession, whether our job becomes something meaningful to others, whether it becomes a Dharma activity or not, depends not just on what kind of job we have, but also why we are doing it, our purpose for doing it and our motivation for doing it. We could be doing a job that is a social welfare job, but we are doing it because we want to make a lot of money.

We say that doctors have a very beneficial profession and that they help so many sentient beings, but I think most of them go to med school for the money. So it is not the work that you are doing, it is the motivation that counts. If the motivation is a worldly one, it becomes a worldly activity. Whereas if your motivation is to really provide service, then even if you are making widgets, you provide service because your motivation is to offer the benefits of widgets to the whole society and to help your colleagues create a harmonious workplace and that kind of thing.

This is a call to look at, not only the activities that we do, but also why we do them. We have to use discriminating awareness on both of these things and look at which activities we do are meaningful and which ones are not. What things are really necessary and what are not. Also, look at why we are doing the various activities and which things are done with a meaningful motivation and which things we do with



just the motivation to have a good name, to make a lot of money, to be popular, to feel successful or to prove ourselves to somebody else.

## **Homework assignment**

Really spend some time looking at this. It might be a good homework assignment to take a week on your calendar and really look at what you are doing. Look at it in terms of the benefit of the activity, then look at it in terms of the motivation and then really start making some choices about what is important and what is not.

## **Clear priorities**

This kind of meditation is going to tremendously clarify our lives and instead of feeling that we have to do this or that because we have so many obligations, it gives us the ability to assess what is valuable and what is not. Then we can set clear priorities in our life and once we have clear priorities, allocating our time is not a problem.

But when our priorities are not clear, or when our priority is doing what everybody else wants us to do because we want their approval, then our life really becomes mush because we cannot make wise decisions. We just do things because we think other people expect us to; they want us to do them; we are supposed to do them; we need their approval. Our priorities get real, real confused and very often we get engaged in a lot of unethical behavior because we are looking for other people's approval.

## **Antidote: Meditating on impermanence, death and the disadvantages of cyclic existence**

Again, to counteract this kind of attachment to worldly pleasures and worldly success, do the meditation on impermanence, the meditation on death and the meditation on the disadvantages of cyclic existence.

### **Nine-point death meditation**

Especially in the nine-point death meditation look at the last three points—that at the time of death the only thing that comes with us is our karma, our habits and our tendencies that we have created in our life; our body does not come with us, our friends and relatives do not come with us, our reputation does not come with us, our possessions do not come with us. Take a good solid look at that and recognize that although we feel so alive, so vibrant right now, our death could happen suddenly at any time and in that light, what really is of value to us?

This nine-point meditation is thinking about, “Here I am. I am dying. My body stays here. All those aerobic classes, all those beauty shop appointments, all the time trying on different kinds of clothes to see what I look good in, all the jewelry and the make-up, all the athletic this and that—well, my body is staying here now and it’s going to feed the worms. What did I really use my body for? Did I use my life and my body in a wise way while I had it? What about my material possessions? I spent my whole life trying to get more material possessions, making my house

really nice, getting a comfortable car, good clothes, going on nice vacations, collecting all the different stuff that I like to collect, having the things that made me look important in other people's eyes. And yet, I am going on without any of my possessions and somebody else will have to clean up all of my clutter.”

Then we think about our friends and relatives, all the people we are so attached to, the people we went out to the movies with, not because we were trying to lead our friends and relatives on the path to enlightenment, but basically we just wanted some pleasure and some happiness that was nice and fun. We have good times. They approve of us. They back us up. They praise us. They give us presents. They tell us we are far out and make us feel good. With attachment we often act against our own ethical principles, or just waste lots and lots of time doing this and that and the other thing, and the time we have allotted to practice the Dharma is just gone. The time is spent in front of the television set with a bag of popcorn, or a gallon of ice cream, or low-fat yogurt if you are heath-minded, and it is all of a sudden all gone.

### **Cultivating healthy attitudes**

I am not saying neglect the body, neglect our friends and relatives or neglect our possessions, because we need to deal with these things in life. We need to keep our body healthy. We need to have some possessions. We definitely need friends and relatives. We are going to have them whether we want them or not! But we need to learn how to cultivate healthy relationships

with these people and with these things. I am not saying trash all of them, but look at the motivation of attachment that just keeps us so busy spinning around these things for no long-lasting or meaningful purpose.

### **The pain of regret at time of dying**

When I think of it, I think one of the most painful things of dying would be to look back at our life and have a lot of regret. This is why the meditation of imagining our death is really effective because we imagine, “Okay. I am dying tonight and I look back on my life. How do I feel about the things that I did during my life? From the point of view of death, how does the way I spent my life appear? How does the way I spent my time and the activities I engaged in appear now that I am dying?”

This helps us to make things so clear. Your mind gets really clear and your priorities get very clear. Your mind becomes really firm so that you know how to say ‘yes’ and you know how to say ‘no’. This meditation on death is extremely effective. We may wind up seeing that we have a whole lot more time than we thought we had, because we realize that a lot of the things that kept us so busy were not very important or necessary at all.

### **Collecting merit**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

In Asia there is a big tendency to think of future life insurance, of wanting to do virtuous actions because it

is good insurance for future lives and you want to collect merit because it is like spiritual money. So then you do all these activities that are virtuous, but you do them to collect merit in order to have a good rebirth. Many people say that this is not a real good motivation because you are being very self-oriented and that you are not really doing the positive actions out of genuine concern for the people. You are doing them because you are caring about your own rebirth.

The thing is, for some people, the only thing that is going to motivate them to do something that is positive is that kind of outlook. So let them think like that. But if that kind of outlook does not work for you and it seems selfish to you, then I think that is good because it means that you are ready to go on to a more expanded motivation and think about doing positive actions for the benefit of others, not just for our own future rebirth.

I think in reaction to that some would then say, “Don’t think about your next rebirth, don’t think about death. Just think about how to make your life useful now.” What we have to do in all these things is have a very big mind that can look at the situation from many different perspectives and see that there is truth and validity in all the different ways of looking at it. If you do not think about death and future life and you only think about how to make your life meaningful now, you are not going to really generate a good motivation either. If we do not think of the consequences of our actions in future lives and we just think of the consequences now, then often we cannot discriminate between constructive actions and destructive actions.

I think it's important to realize that all these different explanations are said to different kinds of people who are at different points in their practice. What we want to do is have a big mind that can look at the situation from all the viewpoints so that we really understand what the teachings are getting at.

### **Awareness of death—good at the beginning, in the middle and at the end**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

They say that meditating on death is good at the beginning of your practice, in the middle of your practice, and at the end of the practice. And they say that if you do not meditate on death, it is very difficult to do anything constructive at the beginning, middle, or end. When we are beginners and meditate on death, it makes us look at what we are doing in our lives and makes us shift priorities and get ourselves on the right track.

But once we do that, what is it that keeps us on the right track? What keeps us from just slipping back, becoming complacent, smug and thinking that we are doing a lot of virtuous activity and therefore our practice is completely okay? It is the meditation on death that prevents that complacency, smugness and self-satisfaction.

Also, towards the end of the practice, the meditation on death is what keeps the practitioners going, even the high level practitioners who have very strong bodhicitta (the altruistic intention to work for the benefit of others). They want to become Buddhas

for the benefit of others and they recognize that they have a precious human life, that it is very temporary, easily lost and that they are not going to have it forever. So they really want to use their life now to attain enlightenment as quickly as possible. In this way the meditation on death helps even the high level bodhisattvas.

The meditation on impermanence and death was the first teaching that the Buddha gave when he turned the wheel of Dharma and taught the Four Noble Truths. Impermanence was the first thing he talked about and it was also his last teaching by the fact that he showed it himself by dying and leaving his body. It is an incredibly important meditation. Sometimes our minds have a lot of resistance to it. We get a little bit afraid, or nervous, or squeamish, or anxious about thinking of death and I think this is because we have never learned how to think about death in a healthy way, or how to think about it in a meaningful way.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I think the meaning of what the other traditions are teaching is contained in the nine-point death meditation. They are going to reflect on the same kind of things. They may not have it organized in this numerical fashion, but the reflection is the same.

What does it mean to be aware of death? It means to be aware that death is definite, that nobody lives forever, that we are constantly approaching the time of death and that we can die without having practiced Dharma. Well, that is part of the nine-point death

meditation. It is just that the Tibetans formalized it so that it is spelled out clearly. But other traditions would include the same kind of reflection in what they are doing.

The thing about meditating on death is that it makes you aware of death during other times. We have heard the teachings on death many times. How many of us are aware of death during our lives? We are not. We do not wake up in the morning and think that this could be the day we die. We have heard teachings on death so many times, but we never wake up in the morning and think about the teachings. Why not? Because we have not spent enough time deeply thinking about it. So the purpose of the meditation on death is to get ourselves to sit down and think deeply about it so that it becomes a very strong imprint on the mind.

A strong imprint on the mind is like when you have something important to do and it is the first thing you think about when you wake up in the morning. It haunts you the whole day and stays with you because there is a very deep imprint there. The purpose of doing the death meditation is to create that kind of deep awareness. Making an awareness is not just an intellectual thought of, “Oh yeah I could die today. What’s for breakfast?” It is not our usual intellectual blah blah, but we are making it a presence that really guides our life.

## **What is and is not Dharma**

This whole meditation on death is directed at the attachment to the happiness of this life. You keep



hearing this phrase coming up again and again, “attachment to the happiness of this life.” If you study with Lama Zopa long enough, you will start to even hear this in your dreams, because Rinpoche really emphasizes that this is the demarcation line between what is Dharma practice and what is not Dharma practice. If there is attachment to the happiness of this life then the action is not Dharma practice. If there is no attachment to the happiness of this life, it becomes Dharma practice. It’s a very clear line.

We would rather draw the line somewhere else. We would rather draw the line so that we can have the attachment to the happiness of this life and also have nirvana at the same time. We would much rather do it that way, because that way then we can practice samsara and nirvana in tandem. [Laughter.]

## **Mixed motivation**

The mind of attachment to the happiness of this life is the sneakiest mind that you could ever possibly have. This is the mind that turns Dharma actions into worldly actions. This is the mind that says, “I think I’ll go to the grocery store and buy something nice to offer to the Buddha so that afterwards I can eat it.” There is lots of sneaky motivation that gets in there with the mind that is attached to the happiness of this life.

Often a lot of our motivations are very mixed. Why do we spend time at the beginning of our sessions developing the altruistic intention? Why, right after the breathing meditation and before I start the talk, do I say to remember our motivation? It is

because at our level, or at least at my level (you may be more advanced), I need the impetus of consciously, with effort, generating a motivation that I know is positive, because if I do not do it that way, it is not going to happen.

Love and compassion for all limitless sentient beings does not arise spontaneously in my mind. What does arise spontaneously is that I want my happiness now as soon as possible, thank you very much. How we overcome that is by deliberately sitting and cultivating a good motivation. Even when we do that, sometimes there are still remnants of the old motivation there. It is sneaky because we have two motivations at the same time and if you have something with mixed motivation, then you get some positive result and also some negative result.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

We work so hard to get those things. We think that it is so wonderful and we hang on to the memory of it. And yet it is totally gone. What really was meaningful about it? It was all like last night's dream, both the suffering and the happiness. What lasting effect did it have? I think that is the question we have to put to ourselves. I think putting that question helps the motivation become much clearer and we will have less of this mixed motivation.

I don't think it's wrong to want to improve the quality of this life, if we want to just be a kinder person and a calmer person. But having a mixed motivation is more like when we seek fame, popularity, comfort and reputation from our practice.

When we do the Dharma practice and get some result that influences this life then it gives us a little bit of encouragement, “Oh yeah it brings some result. It feels good. I feel different. I am going to keep on doing it.” That is okay, but if we are just looking for that and that is the only reason we are practicing, then we are not going to be able to finish the practice, because we are going to get very easily discouraged.

### **Buddha’s skillful means**

*[Audience:] They always say that if you do this practice, you will surely attain such and such a pure land, such and such a result, and even in this life, success will come to you and so on.*

You are right. They do that because they know what we are like, because the Buddha knows what really motivates us. [Laughter.] I think Buddha is very skillful and Buddha just says all the results of something so that somewhere you will find in it a result that you like, and somehow by getting yourself motivated and doing the practice, hopefully your motivation will transform.

For example, they say one of the benefits of meditating on love is that you have more friends. “Well, that sounds great. I want to have more friends so I am going to meditate on love.” But if I just meditate on love to have more friends, I am going to do it in a most crooked, twisted way and I am really not going to end up with more friends after all. But if I follow instructions and have a good teacher who slowly puts in the other [expanded] motivation of why

we meditate on love, I might actually start meditating on it for the right motivation, or at least start balancing the two motivations, and then this mixed motivation might go more towards the positive side and I might actually get some good results from it.

## **Abandoning the wrong idea that suffering is holy and happiness is bad**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Then the trick is if you have a good teacher, or if you have some wisdom inside yourself, then you can begin to go beyond that motivation to a higher level one. But when we think of giving up the happiness of this life, often what we think of is, “Are you saying I can’t be happy? That I have to give up the happiness of this life? You mean I have to suffer this life? You mean suffering is what makes me holy?”

No, we are not saying that. We are not saying suffering is holy. We are not saying suffering is good. We are not saying that we should suffer. We are not saying that happiness is bad either. We are saying that there are different kinds of happiness. There is worldly happiness that comes and disappears and does not last long, and there is another kind of happiness that comes through spiritual development and transformation and that kind of happiness lasts a long time. It lasts because we really care about ourselves, we really respect ourselves, we have some love for ourselves and we want ourselves to be happy. If we have a choice between low-grade happiness and high-grade happiness, what are we going to choose? We are

good consumers, we want the high-grade happiness.  
[Laughter.]

What we are giving up is the clinging and the attachment to the low-grade happiness. What we are giving up is the mind that says, “Oh, if people criticize me I feel terrible. If nobody likes me it means I am a disaster. If I don’t have these possessions it means that I am not successful in my life. If I don’t go there on vacation I am never going to be happy. If I don’t have this relationship I won’t be able to live.” This is the mind that is so attached to things, to temporary happiness. That mind creates a big problem.

It is not that we cannot have temporary happiness. We are saying the mind that is attached to temporary happiness creates the problem. His Holiness, for example, certainly has a lot of temporary happiness. He stays at nice hotels. He travels on planes. He eats good food. He has a nice set of robes. [Laughter.] He has lots of happiness in this lifetime but the thing is, he is not attached to it. He is not clinging on to it saying, “Oh but I have to have this otherwise I will be miserable.”

There is a story about this one practitioner, that when he was working for his own benefit, for the happiness of this life, he could never find enough food to put in his mouth. He was stealing, cheating people and doing all these devious things to get food and money. But he could never get enough of it to keep himself fat and happy. But later when he gave up that attachment to the happiness of this life and started practicing Dharma, he said, “Now I get so much food, the food can’t find my mouth. There is so much of it I have to give it away.” So you do get some worldly

happiness as a result of Dharma practice, but that is not why you do it.

## **Having a courageous mind**

Sometimes you do not get worldly happiness as a result of Dharma practice because we have so much negative karma that our negative karma starts ripening. So even though we are practicing very hard, we still have all this negative karma that keeps coming in and interfering. For example, many great practitioners in Tibet had to become refugees, live in concentration camps, suffer the heat and exile and things like that because of previous karma that came and ripened. That was not a result of the Dharma practice, but the result of negative karma. To practice the Dharma we have to have the courageous mind that can endure those temporary inconveniences and suffering because of our long-range goal and because we know where we are going.

Let us sit quietly for a few minutes.

## **Review**

We have been talking about the fourth of the far-reaching attitudes: that of enthusiastic perseverance, or joyous effort. This is the attitude that takes joy, or takes delight in doing what is constructive or wholesome or positive.

## **Three kinds of joyous effort**

There are three kinds of joyous effort:

1. The first one is armor-like, and this is when we take joy in the challenge of working for sentient beings, the challenge of practicing the path, the challenge of remaining in samsara in order to have contact with and benefit sentient beings. When we take all of that with a sense of joy and happiness, that is the armor-like joyous effort.

2. The second kind is the joyous effort of acting constructively, so again taking joy in putting in effort and really discriminating well what to practice, what to abandon, and then actively practicing it.

3. The third kind of joyous effort is the joyous effort of helping sentient beings. And so here again, we have that whole list of sentient beings, when we talked about ethics, remember that? No? [Laughter.] That whole list of kinds of sentient beings to help—the poor, the sick and needy, those who were bereaved, those who were distressed, those who can't discriminate between what to practice and what to abandon, those who have been kind to us, remember that list? The third kind of joyous effort is the joyous effort in doing that. Really taking joy when there's an opportunity to help somebody instead of: "*Oh God, you mean I have to do something?*" So instead of that attitude, when hearing that somebody needs help, or somebody wants something, then we have a sense of joy and buoyancy and want to go out and do it. So you can really see the difference here.

### **The three kinds of laziness**

Joyous effort is the antidote to laziness, and laziness is the obstacle to joyous effort. So we talked about three kinds of laziness.

## 1. Laziness of procrastination.

One was our ordinary western conception of laziness, hanging out, sleeping, snoozing, lying on the bench, that kind of laziness in which we have, what I call, the *mañana* mentality. Dharma practice is *mañana*: “*Daily practice? I’ll do that tomorrow.*” We say that every day. Read a Dharma book? “*I’ll do it tomorrow!*” We say that every day. Go on retreat? “*I’ll do that next year!*” We say it every year. So that kind of laziness of procrastination, where we’re just very attached to sleeping and dreaming and being very laid back.

## 2. Laziness of being super-busy

The second kind of laziness is the laziness of being super-busy. We usually think of super-busy being the antidote to the laziness of procrastination. But here, being super-busy in a worldly way is another kind of laziness because we are still lazy in practicing the Dharma. We are extremely busy, and our calendars are filled with stuff to do. We go here, we go there, we are in this class and we are in that club, and we are into this, dah dah dah ... and we travel to all these places and we do all these stuff, but we don’t practice Dharma! Because we are too busy.

And then of course, the moment the evenings come free, we could totally freak out because we



don't know what to do with the free time. So we immediately call somebody up and fill it up. And then continue to complain about how we have no more time!

So this is the second kind of laziness. It's the story of modern America. [Laughter.] Like I said, it is called laziness because we don't practice. We keep ourselves extremely busy with everything but the Dharma.

### **Antidotes to the first and second kinds of laziness**

For the first one, the laziness of procrastination, we want to think about death, and impermanence, and recognize that death is certain, the time of death is uncertain. And so better not to procrastinate because death could very well come before we practice the Dharma.

For the second one, the laziness of being super-busy—actually both of these antidotes work for both of these two types of laziness, but especially for the second one—here we contemplate the disadvantages of cyclic existence. This second laziness of being very busy in a worldly way is seeing all the advantages of cyclic existence: *“I can get a new house, I can get some more clothes, I can get some new sports equipment, I can go here, I can meet this fantastic person, I can get this promotion, I can be famous here and do this and that ...”*—that kind of attitude sees cyclic existence as something like a pleasure ground, it's really fun, it's a playground, we can play and do all these things in it.

And so the antidote to that, is seeing the

disadvantages of cyclic existence: that no matter what we get, we are still not satisfied. That we work so hard to get stuff, and half the time we don't get it. And if you look, so often that's really true. Sometimes we get them, but then they don't meet our expectations, and sometimes they even bring more headaches. So really seeing, as it says in the "Foundation of All Good Qualities", that samsaric perfections are not to be trusted: because they don't bring us lasting happiness, they aren't stable. They are not always there for us when we need them. Recognizing this, and then seeing that the only real stability comes through the third noble truth: the truth of cessation, removing the ignorance, anger and attachment from our mind. Because we want happiness, then we work for liberation in that way, because that's a stable kind of happiness.

So we think of the disadvantages of cyclic existence. That's extremely important, because without seeing the disadvantages of cyclic existence, it becomes very difficult to practice Dharma, in fact virtually impossible. Because if we are not dissatisfied with cyclic existence, why try and get out of it? If we think it's great, the way we are living our lives, being busy and doing all these stuff, then why practice the Dharma? There's no sense to it, there's no purpose.

Dharma is meant to be more than a hobby. Although sometimes in America, Dharma is very much a hobby: You do pottery on Monday night, creative writing on Tuesday night, and swimming lessons on Wednesday night, Thursday night, you do Dharma and Friday night, you do something else. So it becomes like a hobby. Something more to talk about

at cocktail parties. You know, it is very fashionable in America to know Tibetans, have a Tibetan stay at your house, very fashionable [laughter]. Fifth Avenue cocktail parties, you can really brag about it. So Dharma becomes just like a hobby, no real practice, it's just something that's trendy for the 'in' people: "I met Richard Gere at a Dharma party!" [Laughter.]

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Mindfulness is something that we should have all the time, and doing practices are not some intellectual gymnastics that we do over here while we ignore our life. If our mind is, let's say being super, super busy and we meditate on the disadvantages of cyclic existence, then the mindfulness is what carries that understanding of the disadvantages of cyclic existence into the present situation that we are living in right now. So that when chocolate cake appears to distract you, you are mindful enough to recognize that it is not going to bring you any happiness.

We have to settle it into our mindstream, then how we look at the thing really changes. Because when you are still doing the gymnastic, it's like: "the chocolate cake is really good, no it doesn't bring me any lasting happiness, but it's really good, no it doesn't bring me any lasting happiness, I'm going to die one day, death is definite, time of death is indefinite, but I really want the chocolate cake, no it won't bring you any happiness, and you're going to die, oh but I want it!!" [Laughter.] And you wind up with it! But when you really sit with it, and you really think about death and it really goes into your mind, then you lose

interest in the chocolate cake. Then you're not having to remind yourself of something, and there's not this push and pull but you're just there with the understanding of impermanence and the chocolate cake by itself is just not so interesting.

### **3. LAZINESS OF DISCOURAGEMENT (LOW SELF-ESTEEM)**

And then the third kind of laziness, is the laziness of discouragement, or putting ourselves down. Or in modern language, low self-esteem. This is where we stopped last time, so I thought I would go into this one more in-depth because we tend to suffer from this so chronically [laughter], in our culture. You've heard me tell the story of how shocked His Holiness was to find out how prevalent this was. It's really true.

This low self-esteem, this discouragement, this putting ourselves down, is a tremendous obstacle on the path because when we put ourselves down, and when we are depressed, then of course we don't try and do anything, and if we don't do anything, we don't get any results. I had a discussion about this at one retreat that I led, and there was a woman named Martha, and she said that one afternoon she was sitting and saying Manjushri mantra, and she fell asleep in the middle of saying Manjushri mantra. When she woke up, she was so mad at herself for doing that that she started saying Martha's mantra: "I'm so terrible, I'm so lousy, I can't do anything right ..." [Laughter.] And that mantra, we don't even bother to count those because we say them so constantly!

## **Competitive society and prevalence of low self-esteem**

This inner talk that we do to ourselves—of constant self-criticism, constantly belittling ourselves—I think it comes a lot from our competitive society.

Last week, I was just down at Cloud Mountain. We had this retreat with the Chapman students. I co-led it with Inge Bell, who's a sociologist. We talked a lot about competition. She really brought that out in her discussion groups as a sociologist, on the effect that competition has on us, and how it really makes us feel very, very lousy about ourselves. Because, instead of doing things for the joy of doing them, we are always doing them with the motivation to be the best, and to be recognized as the best. And of course, as soon as one person's recognized as best, everybody else feels lousy.

But she brought out a really interesting thing in the discussions: it is that with a competitive system, it's not just the people who are on the lower end who lose out by not being the best who feel lousy; the people who get the laurels, they actually in some ways have more tension and more stress because they have to preserve it. So we had this whole discussion about grades—since that group consists of college students; for you people here it will be work evaluations. And the students who got 4.0s had incredible anxiety about maintaining it. It's amazing.

In this society, we're taught from the time we're this big, to compete with other people. Whether we are high on the scale or low on the scale, it's very anxiety producing, and very much leads to low self-

esteem, because we never feel we are quite good enough, or we never feel we'd be able to maintain that status.

But I think it's too easy just to blame the society. We do that all the time, that's old hat: "Let's blame the society." We should also recognize how much we buy into society's values, and how much we are conditioned and let ourselves be conditioned by society. And this is what was so remarkable co-teaching a course with a sociologist, because both disciplines talk about conditioning, and societal influence. I mean, Dharma conditioning is dependent arising, isn't it? And I think where Dharma really has the insight, is saying that we have a choice, since we have the intelligence to consider things in a deep way. We have a choice: whether we're going to let ourselves continue to be conditioned like that, or if we're going to re-condition ourselves with wisdom, to see things in a different way.

I think it's something to really think about: our whole relationship to competition. Really look in our hearts: how much do we really buy into it, how much do we compete? What is our feeling when we lose, what is our feeling when we win? Are we happy either way? And Inge asked the students: "What was your first memory of when you realized that you were being compared to other people?" This is an incredible discussion to have. When we ask ourselves that question, we begin to see, it starts out quite young, doesn't it? Quite young. And what came out a lot in this discussion, was how we feel compared to siblings, or classmates. I was always being compared to Jeanie Gordon across the street: "Why don't you

clean up your clothes like Jeanie Gordon? Why don't you comb your hair like Jeanie Gordon?" [Laughter.] I'd really like to meet her again, one of these days. [Laughter.]

This whole mentality of out-competing others—it doesn't bring happiness, no matter which end of scale you are on. Because whether you come out winning or losing, you still feel you aren't good enough. And that's what really came out when His Holiness was asking this whole room full of PhD's: "Who has low self-esteem?", and they all said: "I do." [Laughter.] It's totally remarkable seeing this. All these scientists who came to make presentations to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, I mean, these people are special, and they have low self-esteem!

### **Low self-esteem and the two extremes of pride**

We can see that when we don't have self-confidence, when we have low self-esteem, we react by over-inflating ourselves, in some attempt to make ourselves feel good. I think that's also why we have so much problem with pride in our culture. Not knowing what the valid basis of self-esteem is, we bolster ourselves up based on quite meaningless qualities, and become very proud and arrogant. But then on the other hand, and this is what's so confusing: sometimes, we feel that if we actually acknowledge our good qualities, that's being proud and arrogant. And I wonder, I don't know if there is a gender difference in this or not: you know, the way men and women are socialized? But I wonder if, sometimes, maybe especially women feel that if you recognize your qualities or let your

qualities be shown, that it makes you look like you are proud. And so what we do is, we put ourselves down in an attempt not to be proud. And so we vacillate between these two mutually unproductive extremes, never finding what the valid basis of self-confidence is.

### **Valid basis of self-confidence: our Buddha nature**

From a Buddhist perspective, the valid basis is recognizing our Buddha nature, because that Buddha nature, that absence of inherent existence of our mindstream has been with us since the existence of the mindstream. It's not something that is separate from our mindstream, it's not something that can be separated out from the mindstream. And so the fact that our mind is empty of inherent existence means that it can be transformed into a Buddha's mind. And that emptiness can never be taken away, that Buddha nature can never be taken away. And so on the basis of that, we have some valid reason for having self-esteem, because we have the ability to become Buddhas.

So it's not I have the ability to become a Buddha because "I got an 'A' in Math", or because "I'm pretty" or because "I'm a good athlete" or because "I'm rich" or "I'm in a high social class", or any of these things. It's "I'm worthwhile because I have a mindstream that has Buddha potential." And to recognize that no matter how cloudy our mindstream gets, the Buddha potential is still there.

In one text, they have analogies about the Buddha potential, and how the Buddha potential is hidden.



They say it's like a Buddha statue under a bunch of rags, or it's like honey surrounded by bumble bees, or it's like gold buried deep in the ground. So something that's there, that's quite wonderful, but because of the outside casing, there's some obscuration to seeing it. And so, we have this Buddha potential, but we are obscured from seeing it, and the obscuration is the ignorance, anger and attachment. The Buddha potential is the lack of those things being an inherent part of our minds. It takes a while to really contemplate this, but if we can tune into it, then no matter what is going on in our lives, we know that there is some hope for us, because if even the flies or the cats have Buddha potential, then we also do as well, simply by having a mindstream that on one hand is empty of inherent existence, and on the other hand is clear and knowing and has the seeds of these good qualities that can develop infinitely.

I wouldn't say that talking about Buddha nature is the best way for all people to develop self-confidence. Because you definitely need some faith in Buddhism to kind of have that idea, or some kind of deeper understanding. Also, there're different kinds of lack of self-confidence. But if you feel like you are just rotten from the core, that there's nothing good in you, then knowing about Buddha nature can help remove that. But if you lack self-confidence because you can't ride a bicycle, then as Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey used to tell us, if you can become a Buddha, you can learn anything. So while in one way knowing about Buddha nature would help you to have confidence that you can learn to ride a bicycle, in another way, maybe taking bicycle riding lessons

might help you more, because it is working on just being efficacious in a particular skill. So it depends, I would say, on whether your lack of self-confidence is because you don't have a certain skill or because you think you are a rotten person.

Your ultimate self-confidence is when you've realized emptiness, but you can understand something about emptiness and you can understand something about Buddha nature without having realized it directly. If you have some kind of faith, or some kind of correct assumption about the existence of Buddha nature, that gives you the confidence so that you can then go out and understand it in a deeper way.

I think just having even some kind of vague understanding that anger is not an inherent part of my mind, jealousy is not an inherent part of my mind, just even that understanding can give you a whole lot of self-confidence. You haven't realized emptiness but you're beginning to recognize that we don't have to cling onto these things as if they were the essence of my being. You don't have to have a perfect understanding of emptiness to get this. But the more you understand Buddha nature, the more you have self-confidence. The more you have self-confidence, the more you practice, the more you understand Buddha nature. The more you understand Buddha nature, the more ... you know? The two things go together, and you keep going back and forth.

## **Questions and answers**

### **Two kinds of Buddha nature**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Buddha nature and Buddha potential are synonymous, as I am using them here. And there are two kinds:

1 The principal kind that people refer to is the absence of inherent existence of the mind. That's called the natural Buddha potential, or Buddha nature.

2. The other kind is the evolving Buddha potential or Buddha nature, which is the clear and knowing nature of the mind, and the good qualities, like the compassion, love, the wisdom that we have now even though they are very undeveloped. So anything in our mindstream that has the capacity to be transformed into the Buddha's Dharmakaya, that's called the evolving Buddha nature.

### **Two different senses of self: positive and negative**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

His Holiness emphasizes that there're two different senses of self. He says one sense of self is where we make ourselves super solid. There's this real solid inherently existent me in here—that's the one that we have to free ourselves from. But there is a realistic sense of self, where he says we have to have a feeling of self confidence in the fact that we can practice the path and become Buddhas. And that sense of self, or self-confidence, some feeling that you are efficacious, that you can do it: that is a positive sense of self. So we need to get rid of the wrong sense of self, and we need to develop the positive one.

## **Developing correct understanding**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

It's really important to have teachings repeatedly, and to discuss our understandings, so that we make sure we have a correct understanding. Because it's easy to listen to something, think we understand and actually we misunderstand. That happens to many people. I can look back on things that I thought I understood five years ago that I realize now I didn't understand and I wasn't practicing correctly. But I think that this is part of the path. Understanding the proper way to practice is a whole other step because it's not that we just hear teachings and immediately we understand them intellectually and how to put them into practice. It's very much trial and error and really going over things again and again.

## **Need for equanimity to resolve conflict**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Developing equanimity is important because it's so hard to resolve conflicts when our minds are super-sensitive. In fact, it is virtually impossible because when our mind is super-sensitive, then anything the other person says or does, we go off the deep end. And so that's why we talk about the cultivation of equanimity which means detaching ourselves from the eight worldly Dharmas. Because what is it that makes us so super-sensitive? Attachment to praise and reputation—image and approval. Wanting to be liked,

wanting to be approved of. This is why the death meditation is so helpful, because when we do the death meditation then we have less of this kind of attachment, so then we aren't sitting there being so prickly, waiting for everybody to offend us.

## **Self-acceptance of our current level of Dharma practice**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

You are saying if we really understood the Dharma deeply, we would probably be living very differently than we are now? So how come we aren't?

I think here, self-acceptance is important—being able to see where we are at right now, and accept where we are at. Instead of competing with this idealized image we have of the great Dharma practitioner we would like to be and we should be—and we would certainly be impressed with ourselves if we were! [laughter]—instead of competing with that image, just to be able to recognize this is who I am, this is where I am at right now. For example, I see that what Gen Lamrimpa is doing is wonderful, I aspire to do that one day. But I know that I don't have enough pre-requisites to do it right now. So I have to practice according to where I am right now, and what I need to develop right now, without hating myself for not being a bodhisattva! Self-acceptance doesn't mean complacency. It's accepting what is, is, but knowing that with skillful means you can change the situation.

One thing you did bring up that is quite interesting, is this perfectionist mind that keeps itself very busy,

running around to all sorts of different Dharma stuff? Running here, running there, this teacher, that teacher, this retreat, that retreat, this practice, that practice, getting involved in this project, and that project and being this and that, and planning this and that .... Basically, this is like everything else, you know, some people import the busy mind into the Dharma practice, some people import the jealous mind, some people import the attached mind, some people import the anger mind. Whatever our thing is in regular old life, we import it into our practice. And that's why we are stuck with the same old things to work on. Because it's just this patterned behavior that we get ourselves into.

## **Big and small goals**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

So you are saying becoming a Buddha is too advanced but if you see some immediate benefit you get from the practice, then that encourages you to keep practicing? I think we do both things at the same time. I don't think it has to be a either or. I think on the one hand we've a long term goal, on the other hand our little goals. It's like when you are in kindergarten, your long term goal is you are going to graduate from College, but you still like the stars on your paper, and you want the teacher to give you a candy on Friday because you were good. So it's like you work on both things.

You'll hear sometimes, like when Lama Zopa cultivates the motivation, he will have you cultivate

this thing about “All mother sentient beings throughout the incredible six realms of existence who have been suffering since beginningless time, therefore I must become a Buddha to liberate them all from samsara.” But to become a Buddha, what do I have to do? I have to listen to this teaching right now that is going on and pay attention!

So it’s like, you have the super big motivation, at the same time recognizing that if you have any chance at all, you need to be right here doing what you are doing right now making it beneficial. So you have both of them at the same time. Because the thing is, if you just have the one of “I am going to pay attention right now”, then it’s like where am I going with it? So what if I pay attention to every bit, so what? But if you have an idea of this path and where that whole thing is taking you, even though where it is taking you is beyond what you can conceptualize, you do have some feeling that these drops are falling into the bucket.

Okay, let’s dedicate.

## **Review**

We’ve been talking about enthusiastic perseverance or joyous effort, and how it counter-acts the three kinds of laziness. The first kind of laziness was hanging around, sitting in the sun, snoozing until who knows what hour on Sunday morning, on Monday morning. The second kind of laziness was keeping yourself really busy with useless things and meaningless activities, just chasing after reputation, objects of attachment, this and that, those things that

don't have lasting meaning, things that we have to separate from at death. Remember this is considered laziness, and not being busy, clever and successful. The antidote to this is meditating on impermanence and death, and on the unsatisfactoriness of cyclic existence.

## **Laziness of discouragement**

The last time we started talking about the third kind of laziness. It has all these components to it: the laziness of putting ourselves down, lacking self-confidence, low self-esteem, self-degradation, discouragement, whatever you want to call it. Within this third type of laziness, it comes out in three different ways. One is laziness about the result, or discouragement about the result, second one is discouragement about the path, and third one is discouragement about the basis.

### **a. Discouragement about the result**

The result refers to Buddhahood, for example the omniscient mind being able to manifest many, many bodies. Discouragement about the result is thinking, "I can't possibly do that, this goal is too high, this result is too high!" It's discouragement because we think that the result, or the goal of enlightenment or Buddhahood is too much in outer space, that we can't possibly become like that. I'm sure all of us have probably felt this at one time or another, feeling that these qualities are just much too grandiose for us ever to think of developing, they are just out of sight. And so we discourage ourselves from practicing the path in



that way, if we think that the result is too high. Is this ringing some bells? People ever had that happen? You hear about the qualities of Buddha and you go “Huh?”

The way to counteract that is to remember that Shakyamuni Buddha also started out like us, and that he was able to practice and achieve the omniscient mind, achieve Buddhahood. And so it's not that enlightenment is so far and out of sight that it's impossible for anybody to attain. We can see the example of the historical Buddha and how he was able to practice and bring this about in his own mind.

*[Audience:] Is it really possible to achieve qualities like manifesting in multiple bodies?*

Who can actually do it? “I want to see you do it, Your Holiness. Where are those multiple bodies? [Laughter.] Come on! I'm an American and I want proof here!” Some of these, it sounds very grandiose. In a way we have to go on faith, that this will happen.

I know what really helped me in this respect was when I began to do some in-depth study of tantra, and understand the tantric methods for accessing and developing the extremely subtle wind and the extremely subtle mind. Then it became conceptually possible for me to think that yes, it actually is possible to become a Buddha because I began to understand more the resources we have and how they are now untapped and if they were to be tapped, that it is actually possible for these kinds of results to come about. So sometimes getting more in-depth teachings on certain aspects of the path gives you a better idea

conceptually how it is actually possible to go through this transformation.

But to expect any kind of visual proof that we can see with our eyes is impossible. Even if a Buddha walked in through the door, what would we see? Because this is dependent on our karma. Do you know the story of Asanga? Remember Asanga who had the vision of Maitreya? He could see Maitreya but the other people in the village only saw a dog? Having direct access to the Buddha is difficult with very obscured minds. So a lot of this we go on as a matter of faith, thinking that other things that the Buddha said have been true and have made sense, so this must be too even though it is not real clear in our minds how that happens.

Like I said, getting more explicit teachings especially on the tantra can help you see how it is possible for anybody to become a Buddha. It's like the more we understand the nature of mind, the more we understand what is mind, then you get more of an idea that these qualities are possible to develop on the basis of the mind. Sorry I can't show you a video of radiating, emanating bodies and stuff like these. I can, at the teachers' conference, put in a request for it. [Laughter.] When I go to Dharamsala I will say, "My group wants to see you radiating, emanating bodies."

## **b. Discouragement about the path**

The second kind of discouragement is when we're discouraged in relationship to the path. Here is when we think the path is too difficult, in other words we hear teachings for example on the six far-reaching

attitudes (what we are studying now), and we say this is just impossible, how can people actually do this? It's too difficult. For example, we hear stories of the bodhisattvas making charity of their body—remember the *Jataka* tale where the Buddha gave his body to the tigress? And we go: “I can never do that! I can't even cut my hair—and that doesn't even hurt—let alone give my body away”. And so we get really discouraged about the path, or we get nervous, we get frightened, because it just seems too much, we couldn't possibly do it.

Here it is good to remember that all these are very advanced practices. We can do these when we are advanced practitioners, not when we are beginning practitioners. In fact, it's said that we are not supposed to give away our body until we reach a certain level on the path where we have control over our next rebirth. So until we reach the Arya level on the path, the path of seeing, we are not allowed to give away our body, or give away our life in that way. By the time we get to that level on the path, giving away our body or giving away our life is going to be as simple as giving away an apple. Because we won't have any attachment to the body and so making this charity will be very simple. So we can have the confidence that when we get to practice that part of the path, at that time it won't be frightening. We don't need to feel discouraged that we won't be able to do it because when we get there, we will be able to do it. And before we get there, we aren't allowed to do it! Okay?

Does this relieve people's anxiety a little bit? And they say, for example like a bodhisattva, due to their

collection of positive potential or collection of merit, when they have to do things like giving their bodies or entering dangerous situations where they can get harmed physically, that because they have accumulated so much positive potential, they don't experience any physical pain. So the accumulation of good karma gives rise to not experiencing physical pain when you have to do something like that for the benefit of sentient beings. And because of the bodhisattva's collection of wisdom, their minds don't experience fear, or their minds don't suffer when they have to do this kind of practice, because they have the wisdom that understands emptiness and so the fear element doesn't come in.

I think this is important for us to understand, that it is actually possible to do these incredible practices we hear of and be completely okay about them. That practicing Dharma doesn't mean going on some big trip where we make ourselves suffer excruciating pain that is unendurable! That's not the idea in Buddhism at all! The idea is that you build up the things, you make yourself capable, and when you have the wisdom and the accumulation of positive potential, you do it, then it will be very, very easy. It is as easy for them, as I said, as for us to give an apple to somebody, it's no big deal.

*[Audience:] But it's going to take decades to develop such an Arya mind, isn't it?*

Well, this point shows exactly how our American mind thinks. We think a couple of decades is a really long time to practice Dharma! We should be thinking

of a couple of eons instead of a couple of decades!

*[Audience:] Isn't it a little discouraging?*

Only if you have an American mind that wants MacDonal'd's enlightenment! The lamas say that this is one of the chief problems that Westerners have, expecting really quick results. And this is one of the reasons why people get *lung*, get very tensed and anxious and is one of the greatest reasons why Westerners give up the practice.

Of course Tibetans get discouraged, but from the very beginning when you've been a child, you've been raised with this whole other idea of time. First of all, as a Tibetan you are raised with the idea of rebirth, so you don't think of yourself as just this particular body and you don't think of your capability and what you are going to achieve in terms of just the lifespan of this body. So already from the time you are very, very little, there's a whole different idea of time.

### **Taking a long-term view**

And then when you start studying Buddhism, you really begin to understand how long things take to transform. Look at how long it takes people to stop smoking or to change any of our habits. It takes time. So if you as a Tibetan start practicing when you are very young, you begin to see it takes time for people to do things, you realize there are many, many rebirths. You also see that there's nothing else to do in this universe but to practice and attain enlightenment because the only other alternative is continuing in

cyclic existence and that stinks! So what else are you going to do? That's plenty of time to practice the path! So it involves developing a really different idea of time and a different idea of who we are, and not just thinking of who we are as what we are in this present particular body.

To encourage us, they tell the story of Milarepa who achieved enlightenment in this one lifetime. He killed thirty-five people when he was young! So he had a whole lot of negative karma that we didn't have. He killed them through black magic and he was really kind of a gang member even though they didn't have gangs then. And yet he achieved enlightenment in this very lifetime. Also, he had practiced the Dharma very sincerely for five hundred lifetimes previous to that.

Now we have no idea how long we practiced Dharma in previous lifetimes. It is clear we have some kind of connection with Buddha in previous lifetimes, otherwise we wouldn't be here now. We would be at the Scientology church or we will be out channeling, [laughter] something like that! So it is very clear that we had some kind of connection with Buddhism in a previous life and it is clear that we had some kind of practice of ethics in previous lives because we have a human rebirth this lifetime. And it is also clear that we had some kind of connection with the Mahayana path because we are here. We are not doing any other kind of meditation. There is a connection from past lifetime, but how much connection and how many past lifetimes and how much positive potential we accumulated, we don't know. You know, they didn't send the file with us. [Laughter.]

So it is really hard to say how long it is going to take for any of us. We don't know. There is this thing in our culture, we really want fast attainments. On one level of our mind, we say, "No, I have lots of patience", but another level of our mind, we really do want to have fast results. Especially when we hear our friends talking about having attained samadhi and they got this and that experience in meditation, then we definitely get jealous and we think we have to come up with something quick ourselves. We have to leave behind this way of thinking, because it is what causes the discouragement.

Make sense? So, it's a real tough one for us, and I see it over and over and over again. And also, in my own practice. I think that's why the bodhicitta motivation is so important. When you have this motivation to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of everybody, and you know that it took Shakyamuni Buddha three countless great eons to do it, (but he did it,) then, you get some feeling: "Well it's okay, it's a long way away but it is something really noble and it is something I want to do, even if it takes a long time."

They say to try and attain enlightenment this lifetime because we have a human body, we have access to the teachings and the path and everything. So try it, but don't expect instant enlightenment. It's a very different way of making goals than what we were taught in school. We were taught in school to make goals that you are pretty sure you can achieve and give yourself a time schedule, and then get really depressed when you can't control all the conditions and can't achieve your goals because most of our life

is out of our control! This is our habit, our habitual way of thinking and we have to let that go because this is a goal that is possible to attain, there is a path to do it , but we don't have any idea exactly how long it is going to take in our particular case.

And anyway, what else are we going to do? Can you think of anything else in samsara that sounds so wonderful you are going to do it rather than practice the path? [Laughter.]

*[Audience: inaudible]*

You can practice the path and eat ice-cream at the same time. [Laughter.] That's why we offer the ice-cream before we eat it, you see? We transform it, offer and eat it.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Saying that there're Westerners who've practiced twenty and thirty years and aren't going around with radiating golden light bodies in Hollywood, that doesn't mean a whole lot, because you have to remember that the Buddha was very, very strong about people not showing off their attainments. There could be lots of realized beings around but we have no clue who they are because they don't show off. And the people who do show off, we should be really careful about.

So again this is a different way of thinking. When you are at a job interview looking for a job, you have to go in there looking good and show off: "This is what I did and this is who I am and ...". But that is



not the way bodhisattvas and Buddhas act. They act in completely different ways. They say that they may even look like they have faults outwardly, because that's the way to communicate with us. Because if they look completely without faults, then we'd really get discouraged. If they were some human being that came here, and were totally without any kind of faults, they're perfect and radiating light, then we'd say, "Well, they were born that way, I can't possibly attain that!" and we get discouraged that way. So they said that the Buddhas and bodhisattvas deliberately appear looking exactly like us, acting like us, may even appear having faults because by that way, they can very skillfully teach us the path and show us the example of somebody who practices and somebody who goes through difficulties and somebody who has good qualities. They are realized beings but they don't advertise.

*[Audience:] Why does His Holiness say that he doesn't know anybody who has attained enlightenment?*

Because I think he is talking on different levels, and he was also clear that just because he doesn't know of anybody, that doesn't mean they don't exist. And he could be referring to the fact that nobody has reported to him in writing. I'm sure His Holiness can check it up mentally, he could pull the charts on all his disciples and see who is where, but again I don't think it would be particularly skillful of him to announce it. If His Holiness went around saying: "Geshe so and so from the mountain has realizations," what's going to

happen to that Geshe? All the westerners are going to go up there with their cameras and drive the poor guy nuts!

His Holiness does say at other times, in teachings, that he knows people who have succeeded in tummo meditation, or people who have actualized bodhicitta or people who have attained samadhi. He does say that in teachings.

### **“Crazy wisdom” practice**

*[Audience:] What about crazy wisdom practice?*

Crazy wisdom practice. This is a little bit of a misnomer because actually the word is better translated as wisdom unleashed, and it's a way of practicing when you are on very, very high levels of tantra.

Then you hear stories of Tilopa who used to eat fish and throw the bones away, people would say why, if he is a Buddhist, is he eating fish? He was catching them alive and eating them. Why, if he is a Buddhist, is he doing this? Shouldn't he be saving lives? Well, he also had the ability, when he threw the bones on the ground, to make the fish come back to live. So he definitely had some kind of high realizations where he could do these magical things.

Then there're other levels of the path where they say that when people have the full determination to be free from cyclic existence, bodhicitta and wisdom realizing emptiness, then they can use sexual conduct or contact as part of the path. But this is for very, very high level practitioners.

This is where misunderstandings could arise in Buddhist groups. You have somebody who says, “I am doing crazy wisdom practice” and they go around sleeping with a whole bunch of people, saying, “Well, I’m blessing you.” Whether it is or not is a really questionable thing because there seems to be some abuse going on there. It’s hard to say in terms of any particular person, what their level of realization is.

We were having a big discussion with His Holiness. In tantra, people do attain such high levels, do have such abilities to transform things. But they aren’t having ordinary sex; it’s a completely different thing. First of all you don’t have orgasm. One time, a woman came to a lama and said, “Oh, there is this one teacher I was sleeping with. He was telling me that he was a high Tantra practitioner.” The first thing the lama said, “Well, did he have orgasm?” Well, that’s it, because in the tantric practice, rather than orgasm, all the fluid is retained. So it’s not ordinary sex at all.

This whole topic arose because of this seeming abuse that was going on in some communities. His Holiness was asked, “Do you know anybody who is capable of doing this practice?” He said, “No, I don’t know anybody personally who is capable of doing it.” That’s what it was. So it doesn’t mean that nobody is ever capable, or that nobody is alive today who is capable of it, or that he is judging anybody else’s particular attainment. Is that making some sense?

*[Audience:] Would His Holiness know if someone could do such a practice?*

Oh yeah, he would know if they could. But then

again, he wouldn't go around and advertise it, and say "Yeah, it's okay for this one, it's okay for this one, but it's not okay for that one." Because people don't talk about their levels of attainment publicly like that.

Usually, when you are in the student position, the teachers will not tell you their level of attainment. That's why there's all this criteria for checking if someone is a qualified teacher. Looking at whether they live ethically and if they seem to have developed some concentration in their meditation, if they are compassionate, if they are patient, if they know the scriptures well, if they have a good relationship with their own teacher .... That's why you have to look at all these other things because we don't have telepathy that is able to read somebody else's mind and know their level of realization. Is this clear or is all this confusing for people?

*[Audience:] Historically, are there people who can do that?*

Oh yeah. Tilopa, Naropa, Marpa, Milarepa, and many others.

*[Audience:] What about Lama Tsongkhapa?*

They say that Lama Tsongkhapa had that same ability but he wanted to show the example of the value of monasticism. He didn't do that practice although he had the ability to, because he wanted to set a role model for people to maintain monastic vows.

The basic point is there are people who have these kinds of attainments, it is possible to do this kind of

practices but we don't necessarily have the ability to distinguish who they are and who they aren't. What is important for us is to know our level of practice and what we are capable of doing and what we are not capable of doing. That's the important thing in all of these.

## **Planting the seeds**

So they say be content to create the cause, but don't worry about when the result is going to come. Just be content to create the cause for enlightenment. We hear teachings, we hear what is the cause of enlightenment and what are the actions that take us away from enlightenment. It becomes clear to us what to practice and what to abandon, and so be content in our day to day life to do that. Because more than that, more than abandon what we can abandon and practice what we are capable of practicing in any particular moment, what else can we do? So that's why we hear teachings and we put them into practice according to our best capability right now. And then of course as we practice, our capability also matures. But at what rate it's going to mature, we don't know. I mean you don't know what interest rate you are going to get at the bank next year! So? [Laughter.] Lots of things we don't know, but if we are just content to create the cause, then we will be okay.

It's like when you plant your garden in the spring time, you put the seeds in and you wait for the appropriate time and you water it, and you put in fertilizer, so you put all the causes together and then you are content with that. You don't go and dig up the

seeds everyday to see if they have sprouted. That's really counter-productive. When we see that, then we know; all we do is put the causes there. The causes will ripen at their own good time, when all the causes are accumulated. And that worrying about: "I've been practicing Buddhism for a whole month now and ...", or we go into retreat: "Oh, I've meditated in retreat for three years now and I don't have samadhi!"—well, who cares! The basic idea is to try and become a better person. The basic idea is in that time that you were meditating, do the best you can. Okay? It is interesting, isn't it, this whole thing about discouragement, we can see that it so often comes about because of unrealistic expectations.

I think so much of low self-esteem in ordinary life comes about too because of uninformed or unrealistic expectations. It's not that we are incapable, it's just that we are expecting something that's unrealistic. So that is also why His Holiness says "When you look at your practice, don't look at how you are doing today as opposed to last week or last month, because you're not going to be able to see the change in transformation. But look at how you were a year ago." And I think that's good to do, that's one of the reasons I ask people to fill up that form about their practice, so that next year you could do it again, and then see the change in yourself. If you look back, what were you doing a year ago? What was the state of your Dharma practices a year ago? Now, then you begin to see there is some kind of change. Or think what you were doing ten years ago or twenty years ago. There's some change since then, some improvement.

*[Audience:] What if we have done worse?*

Yeah well, then we have to look and see what to clean up. Because we do go up and down a lot.

It's very important to have this long term goal and long term vision so that we have the joyous effort to complete what we want. Because we need that courageous mind and that joy in the practice so that we can complete the path. Because if we expect something really quick, then we are going to do something for a little while and then give it up. And we can look, so much in our life, how many things we've started and given up because we haven't been able to be perfect at the beginning? When we were kids, you start to learn to play football and just because you couldn't make it to the football team, you give it up. Or you start to learn art or whatever, but because you didn't win a prize, you gave it up. How many things do we just give up because we don't meet somebody else's expectations of what it means to be excellent? This kind of mind that is always comparing ourselves to others, that's always wanting to be great and best at the beginning with no effort, this mind is the one that really defeats us.

Those of you who are teachers, I'm sure, see this real clearly in the kids. Because I remember when I was teaching third grade, there's one little boy Tyron, I will never forget him. Tyron was convinced he couldn't learn to read. He was smart, but because he thought he couldn't learn to read, he didn't even try. And thus he couldn't read. It wasn't because he lacked intelligence, it was simply because he expected to be able to sit down and pick up a book and do it

just like that [click of fingers] without any effort, without any practice.

So we really have to look in those corners of our minds, where we have those expectations of ourselves.

Not just in our spiritual practice, but in all the different aspects of our life. If we have a habit of starting things and stopping, and starting and stopping, starting and stopping, then of course we don't get anywhere. And so that may be why we are not Buddhas yet, because in many, many previous lives, we came and then we didn't fill up the form and put it off, [laughter] and so here you are again.

It's quite possible in previous lives, we started a practice and we stopped it. We were on and off again, and so we created on again off again energy, so that's why we're here.

## **How to avoid getting discouraged**

### ***Pacing ourselves***

*[Audience: inaudible]*

That actually comes a little further down. But basically, it is pacing oneself. It's just listen to the teachings, try and understand them the best you can and put into practice what you are capable of putting into practice. And what you are not capable of putting into practice, don't criticize it, don't throw it away, just realize: "I'm not capable of that yet, so I won't try it now, because I don't think I'll be able to do it, but some day when I am capable I will do that." It's



knowing what our level is. We have a huge understanding of the whole path and we hear the value of doing long retreats in the mountains and meditating twenty-four hours a day. But if most of us try that, we would probably sleep for half the day and be distracted most of the other day.

So for us, it's more realistic to spend our time, instead of trying to do hard practices that we can't do, it's better to do practices that we can do and this is why we try and create a lot of positive potential by offering service, and by doing purification practices and making offerings. This is why there're these other practices we hear about—setting up an altar and making offerings every morning, offering to the Triple Gem and the community, offering to practitioners, offering to the sick and needy. These are the practices we can do very, very easily. When you look at the ten negative actions, we can really start to abandon some of them. We are fully capable of abandoning them. Maybe we can't abandon all the little nuances of them, but the major ones: I think most of us can stop killing human beings, and stop stealing things that will be punishable by law. These are things we are actually capable of doing.

And so to look in the teachings what we are capable of doing and do it. Because the laziness is when we are capable of doing something and we just don't even try. That's what wastes our lives. The fact that we don't go off and meditate twenty-four hours a day, that's not wasting our life because that's not what we are able to do right now. But if we are able to do something and we don't do it, that's wasting our lives. Knowing that as you practice, your ability, your

capability will improve, and then you will be able to go and do these more advanced practices.

### *Having a good relationship with our teacher*

Having a good relationship with our teacher, and following the teacher's instructions and offering services to the teacher can be really, really helpful in our practice because the teacher pushes you a little bit beyond what you think you can do. In many other things, not just in teaching where I thought I couldn't do it, my teacher pushed me. He gave me responsibilities that I was convinced I didn't have any capability to do, but my teacher kind of pushed me and asked me and I had a lot of regard for him, so I said, "Well, let's go and give it a try." And it was hard, it was very, very difficult but I really saw that the experience of following my teacher's instructions paid off. Because he pushed me, I could really begin to get some of the potential out that I didn't think I had.

That's one of the reasons why it's important. But then of course that depends a lot on us, because it takes time to develop a relationship. We have to be willing to follow instructions. Lama Zopa, he would encourage us to do prostrations or something like that. I had one friend, who, in later years, went to ask Rinpoche what to do. Rinpoche said four hundred thousand prostrations and four hundred thousand Dorje Sempas and four hundred thousand Guru Yoga, and he (my friend) came out of the room going: "It's going to take me many lifetimes to do this." He was just overwhelmed. But your teacher doesn't necessarily do that, they may say, "Try a hundred

thousand.” [Laughter.]

And you can do a hundred thousand, many people have done a hundred thousand. You set aside the time. Some people do it in a month or three months. I took three years to do a hundred thousand prostrations, because I didn’t do it in a retreat situation, I did a little bit each day. It took me three years but I was determined to do it and I could see the value of doing it while I was doing it. So I just did it. It depends a lot on our determination and really wanting to do it. These are some kind of goals that we can set for ourselves: “I’m going to do a two week retreat every year,” “I’m going to do a hundred thousand prostrations,” or “I’m going to do Dorje Sempa retreat,” or “I’m going to meditate for twenty minutes every day.” These are realistic goals we can set and we can accomplish.

The whole point is that when we become bodhisattvas, then we won’t have problems working for limitless sentient beings. When we become bodhisattvas, then the idea of being reborn in the lower realms in order to benefit sentient beings won’t be frightening to us. Right now, we don’t even want to think about the lower realms, let alone being reborn there to benefit somebody else. But when we are bodhisattvas, then the mind will be firm enough and courageous enough so that we can be born in unfortunate situations or difficult situations because we have the compassion to work for others and we won’t care that the situations are difficult and the mind won’t even perceive them as difficult. In fact, for a bodhisattva, to be reborn in Somalia or Bosnia or in the inner city here, they perceive the whole

environment as a pure land.

So when we are capable of working for sentient beings in that kind of way, we will also have that kind of perception and so it won't be that difficult at that point. So don't get discouraged about hearing how they practiced because slowly, slowly, by practicing we will be able to get there.

### *Developing the courage to face difficulties*

What is important for us is to recognize that if we undergo some difficulty in the Dharma practice, that difficulty is worthwhile. Sometimes in life, when we meet with difficulties doing something, we just give up doing it. And very often we do this in our Dharma practice too. We get stuck, something's difficult, I don't understand this concept or I can't sit cross-legged or we get stuck on all sorts of different things, and then we just give the practice up rather than try to work through the difficulty.

If we have this long range goal, then we develop some kind of courageous mind, and we recognize that going through difficulty for the sake of Dharma, is difficulty that's worthwhile. Because you look at worldly people; worldly people go through an incredible amount of difficulty. Just look at all the difficulty we went through getting an education so we can get a good job! How much difficulty you went through going to school, and passing exams and writing papers. And we go through incredible trips to get jobs. If we can put some energy in that way, we can also put some energy into practicing the path. And if we meet with difficulties, know that those

difficulties are okay, that they are worthwhile.

We go through incredible difficulties traveling here and there to get a job or for some pleasure, but when we have to travel for the Dharma then we get weak-minded. So here again, we have to think that it is worth going through the difficulties traveling to these places and sitting out in the cold listening to teachings in the rain, like I am going to be doing in a couple of months. [Laughter.] And knowing that it is worthwhile because if you undergo some difficulties in Dharma practice, it has a good result, whereas all the difficulties we undergo with a worldly motivation, that's not going to lead us to enlightenment.

Then we get some courage to go through the difficulties in the Dharma practice. There're lots of difficulties, lots of them! I mean I just know for myself, I would sit in India and study, I'd hear about how, when the bodhisattva had this situation, they would do this practice and they would do that practice, and I go: "Huh, what's going on? Why are they doing this? I don't understand this." And then you come out, and you try and practice, and then you understand why the teachings are talking about this difficulty and that difficulty and here are the antidotes to them, because you find out that they are real life difficulties. But there are antidotes to them and people have gone through them before, and so you just must kind of, be a trooper.

*[Audience:] How does social commitment relate to our Dharma practice?*

Again that depends a lot on the practitioner. If

somebody is at a very high level and they don't do any outward practice and just do the social engagement, it's fantastic, and they go zooming ahead. For other people though, if you don't have a real firm mind and you do a lot of social work, then your motivation can easily deteriorate and you start getting angry or jealous or proud. That's why His Holiness says that for us, it's good if we try and do the two things at the same time, some practice and some social engagement, and keep it at a realistic balance.

### *The Middle Way between asceticism and indulgence*

When we start to get discouraged about the path and thinking the path is too difficult, then it is also important to recognize that the Buddha didn't teach an ascetic, difficult path. Buddha taught the gradual path. Buddha himself tried an ascetic trip. Somebody actually sent me this postcard. I've a friend in Afghanistan and in the museum, they have a statue of the Buddha when he was doing the ascetic practice, where he ate only one grain of rice for six years, and was doing samadhi meditation. They say he was so thin that when you touch his belly button, you felt the spine. It wasn't through weight watchers. [Laughter.] He did this incredible ascetic practice because he thought that this was the path to enlightenment. After doing that for six years, he realized that he still wasn't enlightened and that torturing the body didn't necessarily bring spiritual realizations. So he abandoned that practice and he ate food and there is this whole story.

When you go to Bodhgaya for pilgrimage, you can

go to the place where the Buddha was and Sujata came and offered him this milk rice. He ate it, crossed the river and went and sat under the Bodhi tree. You can actually visit those places. The Buddha showed through his own example that self-mortification is not the practice to go by. That's why he talked about the middle way. The middle way between asceticism and indulgence. That's one meaning of the middle path and to remember that so that we don't think the path is some big, ascetic, difficult, horrendous thing. The Buddha himself was very, very practical. I remember Lama Yeshe always used to say to us: "Be practical, dear." [Laughter.]

I remember in Nepal there was one monk who slept on the floor. In the rooms we had, it was all brick floor and it could get really cold. So he was sleeping on the floor and Lama Yeshe went in and said to him: "Don't do a Milarepa trip! Go get yourself a mattress." Lama was just incredibly practical! Most of the lamas are. If we remember that, then we see the path doesn't have to be this difficult, impossible thing. That gives us some encouragement. We should also understand that we do have a lot of potential to undergo difficulties, we have done a lot of it for our worldly goals. I don't think the difficulties we had in practicing Dharma could be any more difficult than what we have undergone for worldly goals. If we think about what we've done to get our worldly goals ... When we want something, we don't give up. We dig our heels in, and we don't give up! So we can do the same for Dharma practice.

### **c. Discouragement about the basis**

The third kind of self-degradation and discouragement is in relationship to the basis, which is thinking that I don't have any potential or the basis for Buddhahood: "Everybody else has Buddha nature but I don't! I'm hopeless, I'm helpless, everything I do is wrong." We've been through this one before.

Everybody hates me, nobody loves me ... We just put ourselves down and think we lack potential. Shakyamuni Buddha practiced the path and attained enlightenment. He was once an ordinary being. But we feel we can't do that. Why? Because we think there is something inherently unsatisfactory about us. So this is one of the real big obstacles for us, I think, psychologically, putting ourselves down, thinking that we as the basis of spiritual attainments are inherently or intrinsically depraved or deprived or whatever it is. "Everybody else has Buddha potential but not me."

That's rubbish, just pure and total rubbish. It is very important to overcome this. First of all to recognize that all that low self-image, low self-esteem, it is not an externally existent object. It is just thoughts. Self-esteem, self-image is nothing more than thoughts. There's no external objective thing. Self-image is only thoughts. Whatever we think as our self-image, we think it is some real existent entity: "This is who I am, inherently." It is all thoughts! We really have to begin to recognize this and throw out the thoughts that are unrealistic and throw out the thoughts that put ourselves down. In other words not believing everything we think. Like little Tyron who thought he couldn't read. We have to look at all the parts of ourselves, not like Tyron, who think: "I can't do this and I'm incapable of that. I can't practice this



and I'll never get anywhere." We should throw those things out because that is really what impedes us.

## **Value of reading practitioner biographies**

Some things to help us overcome that, is to look back and see the progress that we have made. To really look back a year or two years or five years or ten years and see the progress we have made and rejoice at that. Because that gives us some kind of feeling that yes, we can progress. It is also very helpful to read the biographies of some of the practitioners. So read *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*. Read that, hear about his life and see how he practiced, it gives you some kind of energy. There is another nice book called *Women of Wisdom* where they did some research about female practitioners and what they did and their stories and that is really, really nice. So you read these kinds of stories about previous practitioners and then you see what they did and what they overcame. It gives us some feeling that: "Okay, they lived in a different culture or a different historical time, but we have advantages they didn't have and we may have some disadvantages they didn't have, but the same basic ability is there and we can do it too." So, when we read the stories of other practitioners, that gives us a lot of encouragement. Any questions about this?

## **Learning to evaluate ourselves**

i. Be realistic and go step by step

We try and look at what we've been able to do in an accurate way and evaluate ourselves in an accurate way instead of jumping to all these conclusions. We go to a retreat, we sit one day, we have four sessions full of distractions and we say, "I can't meditate, I'm quitting this retreat." That's unrealistic. We have to learn to discriminate between unrealistic and realistic ways of looking at ourselves. This is in all things we do, and this is one of the reasons why I think low self-esteem is so prevalent. We don't learn how to evaluate ourselves. If we spend more time just getting in touch with: "What was my motivation, what really, really was my motivation when I did that," then we know whether either the criticism we got or the praise we got was based on reality. Rather than just relying on other people to tell us our value as human beings, if we get to know ourselves and understand our own motivations, understand our own capabilities, then we can have some more realistic evaluation there.

What we have to do is use the instrument we have and kind of begin to polish it a little bit. If we start to look at ourselves a bit more realistically (we may not see ourselves completely realistically but we get a better idea), then from that we get more encouragement and we do some more practice. And by practicing, we purify our mind, then we are able to see ourselves even a little bit more realistically after that, and that leads us to more practice. So we go step by step. Now, this whole thing is very, very gradual, it's very gradual.

ii. Positive impact of Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer

Well, one thing that I find really strong, is when we do the refuge & bodhicitta prayer. When we say, “By the positive potential I create by practicing generosity and the other far-reaching attitudes, may I attain Buddhahood in order to benefit all sentient beings”, that’s a real positive aspiration. That’s saying, “This is something I’m capable of doing, and the way to do it is through doing the practice of the far-reaching attitudes. This is something I’m capable of. It doesn’t mean that I’m going to practice them all in the perfect unimaginable way with all factors complete at the very beginning, but I can be a little bit generous and I can be a little bit ethical and I can every so often, drum up a bit of patience.”

### iii. Rejoicing and encouraging ourselves

At the end of the day when we do our reflection, do not just look at what we’d messed up during the day, but look at what we did do well and really congratulate ourselves. But not developing pride, not: “I’m so proud because I went to Dharma class. I’m so great because I went to Dharma class”. But saying: “Oh, I was a little bit tired but I went to class anyway and it was good. I was able to concentrate and I learnt something new and I thought about things. I was using my mental energy in a good direction when I was at class. I thought about things I hadn’t thought about, it gives me some inspiration to practice hard and I’m very glad I did that. That’s a very good thing I did today.” Or “Oh, I meditated for twenty minutes. Okay, well, some of it was distractions but I did sit down and that’s good. I did keep the continuity of the

practice and I'm pleased with myself that I did do that. And I did say some prayers and I did generate a little bit of bodhicitta or reflected on it a little bit."

So really look at the things we did do and congratulate ourselves. "Somebody at work really laid into me but I didn't tear him up afterwards. I actually kept my cool and I came home and I thought about it and I dissolved the anger and I'm really glad, I'm making some progress." It's important at the end of the day, not just look at what we didn't do in terms of practice but look at what we did do and congratulate ourselves. That's this whole practice of rejoicing and dedication. We don't just purify, we also rejoice and dedicate. This is very important.

It isn't just: "Oh, I went to Dharma class, aren't I wonderful!" But it's like: "Oh, I went there because I wanted to learn something about the path, and I may not have a real clear motivation but we said the prayers at the beginning and I thought about it afterwards and I got a little bit of bodhicitta in there." Okay? So we know that was worthwhile, that we weren't just doing some kind of perfunctory thing for the sake of it. But that there was some thought and good motivation behind what we were doing.

#### iv. Setting motivation

Motivation is what creates the cause. The result is the effect of the action that you've done because of the motivation.

We set the motivation at the beginning of the class when we do the prayers. Then we do the meditation, and then I get you to reset it again because I think that

sometimes people's minds are calmer after the meditation, so the motivation will be deeper than if they just said the prayers before the meditation. Also we're setting the motivation for the class, not for the meditation that we just did.

That's why when we wake up in the morning, try and set the motivation: "Today as much as possible, I'm not going to harm others. Today as much as possible, I'm going to be of service and help and today I want to do all my actions for this long range motivation of becoming a Buddha for the benefit of others." And so, at the beginning of the day, we try and be mindful and act according to it during the day, and then at the end of the day we sit and evaluate, and we rejoice at what went well and we dedicate all that positive potential. And if it didn't go so well and we got angry and when we blew it, then we do purification. And then we dedicate the positive potential from having done purification.

#### v. Benefiting "others" does not mean self-sacrifice

You're saying some prayers emphasize benefiting "others". Well, the Four Immeasurables says "all" sentient beings. I think the idea behind saying "other" sentient beings, is that by benefiting others, you benefit yourself too. So it's not a self-sacrificing trip, because if you don't take care of yourself, you can't benefit others. If you go on some self-sacrifice trip, then your ability to help others degenerates. It's very important to know that helping self and helping others aren't two diametrically opposed things. So when we say, "I'm going to do this for the benefit of other

sentient beings”, it’s because we benefit through serving other sentient beings. But it’s not “I’m going to benefit through serving you, so therefore I’m going to serve you!” It’s emphasizing the “you” and then indirectly I get the benefit from it. So I think that’s why it emphasizes other sentient beings, but it comes to the same point of helping oneself.

#### vi. Opportunity to contribute in every situation

In every situation, particularly a potentially unpleasant situation, instead of going into it with: “What are all these people going to think about me? What are they going to do to me?” we can transform our motivation. We can go in and say: “What can I give?” Then the whole situation becomes a situation that is teaching us and providing us with an opportunity. That’s why it is so important to constantly remind ourselves. I find it useful for myself because I tend to start looking at an unpleasant situation as: “This is a drudgery, this is something I can’t wait to finish so it’s all over.” And so to keep reminding ourselves, “Well this is an opportunity, and this is a potential,” and so we see situations as something to contribute and give to.

Okay, so let’s sit and let this sink in for a few minutes.

### **Compassion as an antidote to low self-esteem**

Last week we talked specifically about the laziness of discouragement, the laziness of putting ourselves down, the laziness of thinking that we are not

worthwhile. Yesterday I was listening to a tape by His Holiness. He was talking about the importance of having self-confidence in ourselves. He prescribed compassion as an antidote to putting ourselves down. I've heard him do this many times before, but each time you hear it, something more sinks in.

Isn't it interesting that he prescribed compassion as an antidote to low self-esteem? He was saying that when your mind has a lot of compassion for others, it becomes stronger and more courageous. There is a real sense of purpose and courage. When our mind has this strength and courage, it doesn't get discouraged as easily. And when we are not discouraged, we don't suffer from low self-esteem or lack of self-confidence. Interesting, isn't it? You can see how it actually works.

He was saying that compassion is the source of inner strength, because it gives rise to a higher determination in our life, a higher purpose. Therefore we have access to much more energy and we have much more confidence in ourselves. And that, in itself, brings a greater chance of success. In other words, when the mind is buoyant and the mind is confident, we are much more likely to succeed. On the other hand, when we have a lot of anxiety and fear, when we put ourselves down, then we are putting ourselves in a very negative mental state and we are automatically preprogramming ourselves to fail in whatever endeavor that we undertake.

I believe I told you about Tyrone last week—the boy who thinks he can never read? I always find it interesting that just when you are right in the middle of thinking about something, His Holiness answers

that exact question. That happens to me so many times. I will be thinking about something or talking about something with my friends, and then when I go to teachings, that's exactly what my teacher talks about. I keep having this eerie feeling that they have been eavesdropping. [Laughter.] But this was on a tape so I don't know how he was eavesdropping. [Laughter.]

## **Four Aspects of Joyous Effort**

In the practice of joyous effort, there are four qualities that are important to generate:

1. Aspiration
2. Stability or steadfastness
3. Joy
4. Rest

Let's go right to the fourth one. [Laughter.] These four qualities are aspects of joyous effort. They are the ways to develop joyous effort and the ways to practice it.

### **1. ASPIRATION**

Aspiration means aspiring to practice the path. It is that wish or strong yearning in your heart to practice the path. Right now we do have many aspirations, but our aspirations are often leaning towards making more money or meeting the right person or something like that. Here we are talking about the deliberate



cultivation of the aspiration for the path. Without aspiration, we can't actualize anything.

It is very clear, isn't it? When we don't aspire, when we don't have the motivation, we don't get anywhere. And so in our life, we encounter one difficulty after another. Our whole life is just the story of a string of problems and things not going right. This happens because we have allowed ourselves to be distracted from practicing the path and we have been distracted by many meaningless pursuits. When we don't have a strong aspiration [to practice the path], our mind is very easily taken away by the glitter of all sorts of worldly things. We engage in the eight worldly concerns which in turn brings so many problems into our lives.

Also when we lack aspiration for the Dharma, we don't create the causes to meet the Dharma. This is very clear. Sometimes we feel: "I don't have enough Dharma. I don't have the right causes and conditions to practice. Things aren't going right for me and my practice." This comes because in previous lives we didn't create the causes to have good circumstances for practice today. We didn't create those causes in previous lives. We didn't have the aspiration. We wind up being poor in the Dharma to some extent now because we didn't have the aspiration for it before. So what they are doing is pointing out to us how important it is not to take the Dharma for granted, but to have the strong aspiration which motivates us to act and create the cause for us to be able to practice in good conditions in the future.

## **How to develop aspiration**

## *Contemplate the advantages of having aspiration*

To develop this aspiration, there are two things to do. One is to contemplate the advantages of having aspiration. You will find this similar point all through the path. How do you develop a particular quality? Contemplate its advantages. It's very much a sales pitch, isn't it? When they sell you a new car, they will highlight the benefits of having this car so that you will want to buy it.

Well, the Buddha is like that. [Laughter.] He is saying: "Look at the advantages of having an aspiring mind." Then the mind gets excited and we want to develop this kind of aspiration. When we get in touch with our human potential, when we think of the value of our human life and what we can actualize based on this life, then the aspiration develops quite easily. We see all the things that we can gain by having the aspiration, especially the qualities of enlightenment, the qualities of the bodhisattvas, or even just something basic like how wonderful it would be to be peaceful and calm instead of neurotic and frantic. When we think of what that would be like, and that we have the methods and tools here to do it, then the aspiration comes to develop that. That's one way to develop the aspiration—by thinking of its advantages and by thinking of our potential on the path.

## *Contemplate the law of cause and effect*

A second way to develop the aspiration to practice is by doing some serious contemplation about karma, recognizing that the cause of happiness is constructive

action and the cause of unhappiness is destructive action. The cause of a happy rebirth is ethical conduct. The cause of an unhappy rebirth is unethical conduct. Really sit and stew with this for a while. Let this sink in. When it does, we begin to see so clearly how we hold our whole future in our hands.

The present is in our hands and it is really up to us, through our aspiration, to direct our energy one way or the other. Nobody else puts us in the pure land. Nobody else puts us in the hellish realms. They are created by our own mind. If we aspire to practice the path and we practice it, this environment becomes a pure land. If we don't aspire for the path and the mind's continually distracted by all its usual attachment to worldly happiness, it becomes a hellish realm.

Really sit a long time and think about how our happiness and our misery stem from our own mind. It is so amazing that although this is a fundamental premise in Buddhism, we forget it too easily. We do all the study about mind training and thought transformation, but as soon as we have a problem, what is our instantaneous perception? Our instantaneous reaction is that the problem is out there. The outside circumstance has to change.

It is the same with happiness. We learn that our happiness is dependent on how we view the situation. But when we look at how we live day in and day out, we see that we often fall back to our old attitude, which is: "The happiness is inside the chocolate cake and I want it!"

Please spend a lot of time contemplating how the mind is the source of happiness and pain and how the

mind creates karma which in turn creates our environment and experience. That will help us to develop a very strong aspiration to practice the path as we come to see how important it is to practice. We see that we have the potential to actually transform our experience into practice.

Developing this aspiration also involves thinking of the disadvantages of the first two of the Four Noble Truths—the undesirable experiences and their causes—and doing some serious contemplation on the advantages of the last two Noble Truths—practicing the path and attaining the cessation of all the difficulties. We come back to the basic teaching of the Buddha—the Four Noble Truths, which is a very profound teaching. Go over that again and again. As we do them, the aspiration for the path gets much stronger.

When there is aspiration, practice becomes a joyful thing to do

When we talk about the aspiration to practice, we are talking about something coming from here [pointing to the heart]. We are not talking about the mindset that says “should” and “ought to” and “supposed to.” Remember this is called ‘joyous effort’, it’s not called ‘feeling obligated and guilty to be good’. [Laughter.] We are talking about an internal transformation. When there is a deep aspiration within, it becomes much, much easier to practice. Practice doesn’t become a drudgery. It becomes something we are happy to do because we aspire for it.

It’s like when you aspire to go skiing, you will not be bothered by all the hassle of buying the skis,

packing your car, getting the right equipment and putting the chains on your car, and getting stuck in the snow. All that hassle doesn't bother you. You have a joyful mind. The mind knows where it is going: to the mountains. Here, we are going to the mountain of enlightenment. [Laughter.]

## **2. STEADFASTNESS**

The second aspect of joyous effort is stability or steadfastness. This is an important quality, especially now, when things are so unstable in our society. We change everything. We have so much choice to make. Our minds are always bouncing around with "I want this" and "I want that", and "Give me this" and "Give me that". We want the highest and the best. It becomes difficult sometimes to be stable in our practice. We will practice well for a week but not practice for another two weeks. We will go on a retreat and get inspired but not do anything the very next day.

### **How to develop steadfastness**

I taught a course for the Chapman University students and they have to do a report at the end of it. One woman sent in her report. It's really lovely. I am going to seek her permission to share it with you. She wrote her diary, and a lot of it is talking about the different conflicts in her mind. You can see as the days passed, how much the course affected her. She began to question things and started to understand things deeply. At the end of the course, she went away with

a very strong aspiration to continue with the practice and what she learned at the course.

The second last entry in the diary was written on the day that she left the course with that aspiration. The next entry (the last entry in the diary) was dated a week later—the day of the earthquake (Chapman University is in Southern California). She said: “I woke up and everything is shaking. My friend said everything is going to be okay, but what if everything isn’t okay?” She made this comment about how she had very much intended to keep on with what she had learned in the course, but when she got back to her old environment, it was just so natural and easy to slip back into the same old habits. And she said: “I haven’t meditated the whole time I have been back, but tomorrow I will.” [Laughter.]

Developing steadfastness in the practice can be quite difficult sometimes, and sometimes it takes that earthquake to get us to be a little more firm, doesn’t it? [Laughter.]

## **Having self-confidence**

They say in the scriptures that the cause for developing steadfastness or stability is having self-confidence. We develop self-confidence by first checking if we can do the job, and having determined that we can do it, then actually doing and completing the job. It’s quite interesting. You develop self-confidence by making realistic goals and by sticking to the job and completing your goals.

## **Examining well before we make a commitment**

Before we commit to things, instead of just saying: “Oh that sounds good. Yes, I want it,” and commit, to sit and think: “Can I do this? Do I have the resources now? Do I have the time? Is it something I really want to do? Can I carry it through to the end? If there are difficulties that are likely to arise, how can I overcome those difficulties?”

Think well before we commit ourselves to doing something. This is incredibly wise advice not only for our practice, but also for our life in general. Very often we commit to do something, but after doing a little bit, we pull back. Doing this reduces our confidence, because we didn’t finish what we started. Also, it can often be very inconvenient for other people. We have committed to doing something and they are counting on us and trusting us to do it, but halfway through, they are left holding the bag because we go into a crisis and say: “Sorry, I can’t do it. Bye!”

I think it’s a very wise advice that we think well before we commit to do things. This doesn’t mean that we have to hesitate all the time and be fearful of commitment. I don’t think that is especially healthy either. Also, it doesn’t mean that we should let a difficulty that might happen stop us from committing ourselves. Rather, think about the difficulties that can arise and think beforehand about the resources that we have access to—both within ourselves and in the community—that can help us overcome those difficulties. With that awareness, we can then commit to various things. That makes things clearer in our life.

Also in our practice, think well before we commit ourselves to certain practices or retreats or other things. In this way, we will be much more stable when

we are doing something.

When His Holiness talks about marriage and relationships, he often says that people need to think well before they get married. They should develop some kind of stable feeling from understanding the other person and having true concern for them before making the commitment, instead of just plunging into it out of a rush of excitement. When you look at the state of the family in our society or the state of the non-family, it's pointing again to think well before we get engaged in things.

It is important to check things out before we start to engage in them. It helps us set up a good habit. If we are always starting and stopping, starting and stopping, what that does, especially in Dharma practice, is it creates the cause in future lives not to be able to practice consistently, where we are always having to start and stop and start and stop, either due to our habit and/or due to the external circumstance. Beware of this.

### **Contemplating the advantages of having self-confidence and the disadvantages of not having it**

Another way to develop self-confidence is to think of the advantages of having it and the disadvantages of not having it.

If we lack self-confidence, our negative mind chips in very easily. If we don't have self-confidence, we start lying. We start messing around. We start cheating people. Our ethical behavior goes down. We become discouraged. We separate ourselves from the path. We separate ourselves from our Dharma friends. We



separate ourselves from the methods that can help us put ourselves back together again. All these happen when we lack self-confidence.

On the other hand, when we have self-confidence, there is clarity and energy regarding our direction in life. Things become much easier as we can evaluate things better—what is beneficial, what is not beneficial—and just go for it. (I am not referring to pushing ourselves.)

### **Ego vs self-confidence**

His Holiness talks about two different senses of self. There is one sense of self that is very detrimental for the practice. This refers to our ego, that hard concrete personality that we defend and protect. Ego is the chief source of all of our problems, and that's the one that we want to eliminate. Such a self does not exist, even though we believe it does. There is no real basis for it.

The other sense of self is the very strong sense of self-confidence. We do need this for the practice. To have self-confidence, we don't need to have the strong sense of a concrete self that is an inherently existent personality. But to eliminate that false conception of the self, we do need this strong, clear self-confidence—the mind that can really go ahead and do something. If you look at the bodhisattva practices or read the biographies of the bodhisattvas, you will find that they are not wishy-washy people who don't believe in themselves. They are people who have a lot of confidence—not pride, but confidence and humility.

## **Self-confidence is not pride**

Sometimes we confuse self-confidence with pride. We are afraid that if we are self-confident, we will appear very arrogant and proud in front of other people. I think in our culture, although it also depends a lot on gender and family, often, you are taught not to show your good qualities and just be meek and reserved. But we confuse that with having no self-confidence and we confuse having self-confidence with boasting. They are very different ball games.

I think when we don't have self-confidence, we mask it in pride and arrogance. When we don't feel good about ourselves, then we come on as: "Look at me! I am so fantastic. Look at my list of qualifications," "I am the big boss in charge," and "I have to dominate the situation and control it." I think a lot of that comes when we feel insecure. I don't think proud people have self-confidence. I think it's quite often the opposite. I have noticed that for me, when there is pride involved, it's usually because I don't feel very secure about whatever it is. The mind uses pride to mask it.

Whereas self-confidence is a very different ball game. Self-confidence is being able to see our abilities, our potentials, our value and our talents. Knowing that they are there and rejoicing in them. We also recognize that they come due to the kindness of other people who have taught us and encouraged us. Therefore there is no reason to think we are so great. There is also nothing to be ashamed of or to hide. There is no need to pretend we don't have those abilities and qualities. It is perfectly okay to recognize

our abilities and our qualities. In fact, that's an essential part of the bodhisattva practice, because how can we benefit others if we can't even recognize what our talents and abilities to benefit them are? Really, part of the bodhisattva practice is to be able to recognize the abilities and potentials we have that need to be developed. But that doesn't mean that we need to get proud about them.

I think that self-confidence actually goes along with humility, while pride and insecurity go together. When we have self-confidence, it's completely okay to be humble. We aren't all insecure about: "How am I appearing?" and things like that. Our mind is open to learning from other people, and this is what humility is. It's the ability to learn from other people, the ability to show respect to other people, which comes through feeling secure and stable and confident ourselves.

You see that in the Dalai Lama. I have told you many times, that on one occasion, he said he didn't know the answer to a question that somebody asked, and he was the expert on the panel. The humility of saying "I don't know" in front of an audience of 1200 people. He was able to say it because he has self-confidence. Humility and self-confidence go very closely together.

Watch that in our lives. See if there are instances in our life where self-confidence and humility go together. Look at the other times when we mask our lack of self-confidence in pride. In this way, we will become very clear in our own mind about the importance and the okayness of self-confidence.

## **Not running away from problems**

Also, when problems arise, try and seek resources to overcome them as much as we possibly can. We tend to chuck the whole thing when the first difficulty comes up, not just in relationships, but also in our career and Dharma practice. We get all excited about Dharma but as soon as our knees hurt, we chuck the practice and leave the retreat.

## **Postpone things that are too difficult**

When we see that there is something in our practice or in our life in general that is too difficult for us to do right now, we can postpone doing it. We don't need to negate it and say that it is not worthwhile. We don't need to feel inferior and discouraged. Recognize that our progress as a human being and our progress on the path is something gradual. We might look at a certain Dharma practice and say: "Wow, that sounds incredible but truthfully speaking it's a bit too high for me right now. I don't think I can actually commit myself to this and be steadfast in this. It confuses me."

We just choose; we don't criticize it. We don't feel insufficient ourselves but we just say: "I will do this later when I have more resources at hand." We do not have to feel guilty and incapable. Recognize that our growth and our progress is going on, but it's something that happens gradually. Doing that allows us to be steadfast and firm on the path.

## **Not being erratic**

It's also important not to be erratic, like jumping from one meditation practice to another, or from one tradition to another. This is something that is quite difficult to do nowadays. There is so much available to us and we always feel: "I want to sample everything. I want to try everything. The next thing that I am going to try might turn out to be the perfect simple practice for me." [Laughter.]

I have seen this sometimes. People will start one retreat and then in the middle of that, they will say: "Oh no, I don't want to do this" and give it up. Or they will start one practice and in the middle of that, say: "No, I don't want to do this," and they will give it up. Or they start one course of teachings and then say: "Oh no, there is something better." That kind of mind that is like a jumping bean.

That is why I always joke about people going for crystal class on Monday night, holistic healing on Tuesday night, Lamrim class on Wednesday night, Vipassana meditation on Thursday night, yoga on Friday night, channeling on Saturday night and something else on Sunday night. [Laughter.] We don't get anywhere on the path when our mind is like a jumping bean.

## **Being consistent**

This is why I encourage people to come consistently for this class. When there is consistency, you will get something out of it. It is like filling a bucket with drops. When there is consistency and the drops are falling in, the bucket definitely gets filled. But when there is one drop here and one drop there but lots of

time it's missed, then it doesn't get filled.

From our side, consistency is very important, not only in attending teachings, but also in our daily practice. I know this is difficult for people. I am just like you, but somehow at the beginning, I managed to get myself out of bed in Nepal when it was real cold. It is much easier getting out of bed here in the West. I remember it was so cold in Nepal and there was meditation at 5:30 in the morning. I just wanted to stay in the warm sleeping bag. I had to think about death to get myself out of bed and into the meditation hall. [Laughter.]

This set up some kind of good habit and I really feel the benefit of that good habit now because even when I am sick, even when I am on an airplane, no matter what is going on, I always do my morning meditation. It's not difficult now. It's just part of what I do. Even when you are going across time zones and you have less or more time to do your prayers depending on which way your plane is flying, you still do them. There is the consistency. Getting in that habit is extremely beneficial. This in itself gives you self-confidence. You can see: "Oh yeah, look, I wasn't able to do it before but now, I am able to do it, and I feel good about this."

### **Shantideva's advice**

Shantideva has a way to generate this mind that is steadfast. He said we should think very strongly: "I will practice what is wholesome. Worldly people are unable to make their lives meaningful. They are totally under the control of afflictions and karma.

They are totally pushed around by the eight worldly concerns, running here and there due to the ‘jumping bean’ mind. For this brief moment, I have the ability to discriminate between what to practice and what to abandon. I have the ability to be clear about the path. Therefore for the sake of all these other beings who don’t have that clarity at this moment, I am determined to undertake the path and do it in a stable, steadfast way.” Think in that way.

Again, this is linking back to the first meditation on the precious human life. When we see the advantages of our precious human life, the difficulty of getting such a rebirth and how so many other people on the planet don’t have the same kind of opportunities to practice as we do, then that helps us generate the joyous effort to start the practice and continue with it. We are also motivated very much by compassion to do it for other people who don’t have the facilities to do it right now.

### **Not taking religious freedom for granted**

As I told you, when I came back from China, I came back with a whole new awareness of the value of religious freedom. Religious freedom is something that we take very much for granted. For us, to have Dharma classes on Monday and Wednesday nights is no big deal. But over there, you wouldn’t be able to do this, unless you get all the government permission and stamps, etc. They might send representatives to see what you are doing. It is very difficult for people to get systematic teachings, to get teachings on a text from beginning to end with a good teacher.

Even in the monasteries, it is the government that decides who can and cannot ordain. For many of the monks and nuns, their job is basically to issue tickets to the tourists or ring bells and ring gongs when people come to bow at the temple. When you see that, you feel: “Wow! Our circumstance here is so precious! What did I do to deserve this? It would have been so easy for me to be born in that other circumstance. So easy! Why am I born in this one and not that one?” Then some kind of feeling comes: “Well, here are all these other people who don’t have the fortune that I have. I want to practice so that I can do something beneficial for them. I really want to take advantage of the opportunity that I have right now.

I told you I will be going to Eastern Europe and the ex-Soviet Union countries to teach. It is the same situation there. It is very difficult to get teachings there. It is a little bit easier now, but still not very easy. Alex, my friend who arranged for me to go on this trip, was there before the Berlin Wall fell. He said in Czechoslovakia, everybody had to go to the house where the teachings were held at a different time. They could not all come at the same time. They would have the teachings in an inner room and in the outer room where the table was, they would set up cards like they were having a card game ...

*[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]*

... that’s what they had—aspiration. I asked them: “What was it that gave you the ability to do that?” They said: “Faith in the Triple Gem. Faith in the efficacy of the Dharma.” We can learn a lot from



them.

## **When Dharma intrudes on our sacred ego territory**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I think that's a very good observation. You are right. The Dharma pushes our buttons and the Dharma points out all of our stuff. We are all at different levels, and up to a certain point, we are still fine with that. But beyond that point, it's like: "Wait, this is sacred ego territory! [Laughter.] Dharma is not allowed in my sacred ego territory!" We start setting up all our defenses, and the defenses can be many.

They can be pride: "I know this already. I am already together. I don't do this." It can be anger: "This teacher doesn't know what they are talking about and the people at the center are dysfunctional and co-dependent." [Laughter.] "This Dharma practice doesn't bring me any wisdom. I should go listen to the spirit at the channeling session."

That is the hardest part in the practice. This is the time when we are so convinced that something is wrong with the teachings and the teacher and everything else outside. That is the time when it is so easy to just quit the whole thing, and let's go watch TV. It's much easier to curl up with some frozen yogurt in front of the TV. [Laughter.]

We must have the courage to go through the rough times in our practice. We will hit rough times. This is normal. We hit rough times in everything else we do in our life. Why shouldn't we hit rough times in our

practice? When it happens, have the space to recognize: “Oh, this is a rough time.” And even if you recognize it only afterwards, it is still good. That’s recognizing it. It definitely pushes our buttons. Definitely. And that’s the purpose.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

The joyous effort gives you the courage to not take whatever you are experiencing so seriously at any particular moment, but to just keep on practicing.

I think I will stop here for now. We can save joy and rest for next time. [Laughter.] Do some contemplation on aspiration and steadfastness. Stability. Self-confidence. Think about these things.

## **Review**

### ***Aspiration***

In the previous session, we started talking about the four different aspects that were important for joyous effort. Aspiration is one of them—the wish to practice because we see the advantages of the practice. Also, we understand karma, so we know what the result is if we don’t practice, and what the result is if we do practice. That gives us a feeling of aspiration, wanting to practice, wanting to develop joyous effort.

### ***Steadfastness***

The second one is steadfastness or stability or consistency. This is the mind that is able to stick to it.

In the last session, we had a whole discussion on self-confidence and how self-confidence is a cause for steadfastness in the practice and how important it is. Shantideva says that it is very important before you commit yourself to something, to first think about it, “Do I have the resources to do this? Is this what I want? Am I going to be able to complete it?” First you evaluate, and once you have committed yourself, then remain steadfast in the practice.

Shantideva was talking about this not only in terms of practice, but also in terms of things in daily life. Before promising friends that we are going to watch their kids or do something, or before getting married, to think about it well before hand, “Will I be able to complete this?” If we can see that we won’t be able to, then put it off for the time being and let the other people know. If we see that we will be able to and we have the resources to overcome potential difficulties that may arise when we are doing it, then to remain stable and steadfast so that we can complete it. Because if we start and stop things, always starting and stopping, then we never get anywhere. In addition, it also creates the karma so that in future lives we are never able to complete our projects.

You can see sometimes people who just can’t seem to carry anything through from beginning to end. You may work with a person like that. They said they were going to do something and they started it, and then they gave up. It’s like everything they do, somehow, either from external causes or internal causes, they cannot bring it through to a conclusion. That is a karmic result of not being steadfast, of committing and then drawing back and committing and drawing

back.

That is why it's suggested, in our practice, to really stick with things. And especially not to always jump around, doing this and that practice and this thing and that thing, because then it is very hard to make a lot of progress. We can see it with any kind of discipline. If you want to learn skating or you want to learn football, it requires perseverance. Dharma practice is no different from any other kind of practice in that respect. It needs to be done consistently and with the heart in it. But the difference between Dharma practice and football practice is that with one, you wind up with a broken this or that, and with the other one, you wind up as a Buddha. It is a matter of sitting and thinking about what you want the result of the effort you put in to be.

Also if we are steadfast, it gives us much more confidence in ourselves because we can see that we are able to do something and complete it. And then the more confidence we have in ourselves, the more we become steadfast in what we do too, because we have that kind of buoyancy and confidence which give us the impetus to stick through things even when they are difficult. It is important to cultivate that kind of—His Holiness says—strong will power, not this kind of tight will power but a strong enthusiasm or wish to do something that is important to bring to fruition on the path. We can't become a Buddha otherwise.

### **3. JOY**

The third factor is the factor of joy. This is having a

happy mind that takes delight in the practice. One way to develop joy is to think of the joy that people take in doing things that are very worldly. People take tremendous joy in building up a big chain of used car dealers. They take tremendous joy in going on vacation and all the things that worldly people take joy in. But these bring very limited results. You will get some kind of result and then it is finished, except for the karma that you have created.

Whereas if we think about the result of the Dharma practice and the happiness that lasts, then that gives us much more joy in doing the practice. We know that it brings a good result, and in particular, once we reach the higher paths, we will never slide back down again. We generate a sense of joy in wanting to do the practice because we see the beneficial results that it will bring.

### **Having joy in our practice vs pushing ourselves**

Here it's also important to note that there is a big difference between having joy in your practice and pushing yourself. There is a very big difference. Lama Yeshe used to talk a lot about that because he saw that we Westerners go into Dharma practice with our high achieving will power minds of, "All it needs is will power and I am going to do this and I'm going to get it right ..."

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Type "A" personalities, exactly! Neurotic type "A" products of high achieving families who feel that they

have to do it right the first time! And then we get performance anxiety. This kind of attitude of pushing ourselves is the very opposite of joyous effort. Joyous effort has joy in it, whereas pushing has guilt, obligation, wanting to prove it to ourselves and others. It has all these other sorts of stuff in it. It's very important when we practice, to not push ourselves.

But the antidote to not pushing ourselves isn't to lie back and do nothing. This is where we flip flop. Either we push ourselves or we lie back and do nothing. The real antidote is this joy in the practice and we have the joy because we can see that the practice is going to bring a result that we want very much, and that makes us happy.

### **Thinking about the qualities of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas**

To generate this joy, it is very helpful sometimes to think about the qualities of the bodhisattvas and the qualities of the Buddhas. We talked about the qualities of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas when we studied refuge previously. When we hear them, we think, "Wow! What would it be like to be a bodhisattva and when I heard somebody needed help, my mind was instantaneously happy?"

Wouldn't that be nice if instead of thinking, "Oh God," when somebody needs help, my mind is so well trained that when I hear somebody needs help, I think, "I want to do it." Wouldn't that be wonderful? That is how a bodhisattva feels spontaneously, so we think about that. "Now wouldn't it be nice to become a bodhisattva. I would like to feel like that

spontaneously.” That gives us that kind of joy to train our minds in the attitudes that the bodhisattvas have.

Or we think of another bodhisattva quality. When a bodhisattva walks into a room, the first thing they think of is, “Here are all these people who have been kind to me, and I wonder how I can help them.” We usually walk into a room and think, “Here are all these people I don’t know. Oh I feel kind of nervous and afraid. Who is going to like me and who is not going to like me and what are they going to think about me and what are they going to ask me to do? Am I going to fit in?”—all of our usual anxieties.

Wouldn’t it be nice to be a bodhisattva and not have that anxiety and to be able to walk into a room full of strangers and feel, “Wow, all these people have been my closest friends before. I really understand them. These people have been very kind. I wonder what they need. I wonder how I can help. Wonder what they are thinking. I wonder what it would be like to be their friend.” Wouldn’t it be nice to be able to walk into a room and think like that? If we think that’s how a bodhisattva is, then that gives us some kind of joy, “I want to practice because I want to train my mind so I can be like that too.”

In this way we think of the different qualities of the bodhisattvas. We have been doing all this study about the far-reaching attitudes—generosity, ethics, patience, and so on. And so with any of them, when you review your notes, just think for a while, “Wow, what would it be like to have that? What would it be like to be like that, to feel that way spontaneously?” For a moment imagine that; imagine what it would be like and then think, “Oh yeah, that sounds wonderful.

I think I am going to practice in that way.” In that way we develop the joy that wants to practice, because we can see the benefit of it.

This way of thinking, this way of meditating is a very good way to review the far-reaching attitudes. At the same time you develop a sense of joyous effort in them, and it also enhances our refuge because the beings who are like this are the ones whom we are entrusting our spiritual guidance to. What I am trying to do is pull together a lot of different strands from different meditations so that you can see how they relate.

Implicit in this joy is the mind that can practice in a reasonable way; the mind that isn't tight and guilty, but the mind that is happy and relaxed and accepts ourselves at where we are. “I am not a bodhisattva yet, but I am practicing on that path. I don't have those abilities yet but that's okay because I know that I can train myself and develop them.” Whereas the pushing mind is so self-critical, “Oh I don't have generosity yet. There are three kinds of generosity and I don't have this one and I don't have that one and oh God what a wreck I am!” Talk about non-acceptance and judgmentalism—that is what the pushing mind is. The joyous mind is totally opposite. The joyous mind says, “Oh I don't have those qualities but wouldn't it be wonderful to have those. Yeah I think I am going to try that.” It's just a matter of the way we think, isn't it? So, developing this sense of joy.

#### **4. REST**



## Knowing when to take a break

The fourth aspect of joyous effort, the fourth thing that is very essential for joyous effort, is rest. [Laughter.] I think this is very important. Rest is part of joyous effort. Part of being joyous and having effort in the practice is knowing when to take a break. It's knowing that we don't have to get neurotic and push ourselves and become a high achiever. We do something and we take a break. It is like when you do retreat, you do a meditation session and you take a break. You don't sit there and squeeze yourself twenty-four hours a day. You practice in some kind of reasonable way. If we are doing a lot of service work, we do a lot of service work but we also take a break.

The whole idea is that when we get burnt out, when we get exhausted, then it becomes very difficult to help anybody. If we push too much and we get tired in our practice, then it becomes difficult to continue, so that is why it is very important to learn to be balanced people and to learn to take a rest and take a break when we need to. That's very important.

That is a hard thing for us to do because so often we feel, "I just have to do more and more and more." But it's really learning to be balanced. People talk so much about, "Well, you just have to learn to say 'no.'" When everybody's hounding you, you just have to say "no." That kind of tone of voice and that kind of way of talking to ourselves is very different from saying, "When you work hard, when you are tired, you have to relax to recoup your strength so that you can go on." Both those things—"I have got to say no to these people" and "I have completed something and I am

going to take a rest,”—are coming to the same point, which is, as one person said, “If you want to be happy, resign as general manager of the universe.” [Laughter.] But they are coming at it from two different attitudes.

When we get into this thing of, “Well I am going to stand up for myself and just say ‘no’,” our mind is so tight. We are more at peace if—and again this relates to the whole thing of acceptance—we think, “Well I did something. I rejoice at that and I am glad that I did that. I dedicate that merit and now it is completely okay to take a break because I am taking the break so that I can continue to benefit others.” You still get your break and your rest but your mind is happy and peaceful with yourself and with others in the process of doing that. We can learn to practice in a regular normal way without getting fanatical and without getting exhausted in the process. The important thing is knowing when to take a break.

### **Being responsible when we take a break**

And then of course if we need to take a break, to communicate that to the people that we are in dependent relationships with so that it doesn't become a case of lacking stability or steadfastness, as explained above. When we take a break, let people know and make provisions so that other people can take over what we need to do, instead of just fading out of existence. This is something that is very important because I think sometimes we know we need to take a break from something, but we are so afraid to say to somebody, “I need a break.” We are

afraid or we feel that they are going to humiliate us, or we are going to feel humiliated if we say it. I don't know what exactly is going on in our mind, but because we are afraid to be direct and honest with the person, we just drop the whole thing, fade out of existence, and leave the person saying, "I thought you were going to come over and do this for me, but I haven't heard from you in weeks." The desirable approach is to be responsible when we take breaks, when we take rests, and not feel guilty when we do.

### **Pacing ourselves**

One part of rest is taking breaks so that we don't get tired. It is also learning to pace ourselves, in our life in general, and in our practice. It is not four hours of meditation today and nothing tomorrow, but this whole thing of pacing and joy and consistency. It is building up a different habit, isn't it? Because wouldn't it be nice to be consistent and joyful and pace ourselves properly so that we get a proper balance of effort and rest? If we did that, then we could make a lot of progress.

### **Doing practices within our capability**

Another aspect of this thing of rest is to temporarily postpone doing practices that are too difficult for us at the present moment. Rather than jumping in way over our heads and starting with practices that are very high and complicated so that we just start feeling, "Oh God I am so confused," and give it up, maybe just hear the teachings on those practices. Know that we

won't be able to put them all into practice right away, but we are listening and we are taking it in as much as we can, but we are not going to make it the centerpiece of our practice right now because we are not capable of doing it.

Often there are opportunities to hear teachings that are quite high or quite complicated and we need to make a decision. We may say, "If there is a lot of commitments and I am not able to do them, then maybe I shouldn't take this certain empowerment." Or we may decide, "Well, there aren't very many commitments, or I can handle the commitments that there are, so I am going to take this. But I know that I am not going to make this the centerpiece of my practice because if I look honestly, I don't have the determination to be free and bodhicitta and wisdom yet. Making this tantric practice the centerpiece of my practice is going about it upside down. I'll keep my commitments and I'll do my mantra and visualization every day, but the real place where I am going to put most of my effort, is let's say, determination to be free, working with the eight worldly concerns, bodhicitta and wisdom."

The thing is to be able to know where different practices are on the path, know what we can take and what we can't take, and how to balance our practice. There is a real tendency in the West to think, "Well, this is the highest practice. The fastest ones to enlightenment," and so we jump in. We start to practice ...

*[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]*

... but that is something that is quite difficult. I aspire to be able to do it. There are certain aspects of it that I can do right now. I will do these right now, but the real place that I am at is, (let's say,) eight worldly concerns. That's what I am really going to work on right now." Again it's coming to a kind of balance and temporarily postponing things that are difficult so that we can actually practice and make some progress on the things that are at our level right now.

Sometimes we find people who say, "Okay, I want to do prostrations. I want to do mandala offerings. I want to do Guru Yoga. I want to do Dorje Sempa. Give it all to me because I want to do 100,000 of them all!" And then they do like a hundred of them all and then say, "Oh it's too much, forget it!" These practices are wonderful practices, but look at your capabilities and say, "Well, maybe I should just work on one of them right now. Or maybe I will work on all four or five of them, but I will just do a little bit each day." That's perfectly all right. Many people choose to do that. That can be quite good. You work on all of them at the same time and don't worry so much about the numbers. It is important to do things in moderation instead of thinking I have to do it all at once and push, push, push.

### **Not getting attached to the results**

Then another aspect of resting—and this is an interesting way of interpreting rest—is that we give up attachment to the things that we have already attained. Sometimes people might attain a certain level of calm abiding or a certain level on the

bodhisattva path or they might begin to have certain states of samadhi, and resting here means taking a rest from those to progress onwards to upper things. It's taking a rest from being self-complacent and smug in what we have already attained. Once you start getting some progress on the path, it's tempting to think, "Oh I have this samadhi and it's incredibly blissful. Let's forget about the wisdom aspect right now. I like the samadhi!" Part of what resting means, is not letting ourselves fall into being complacent or being attached to whatever attainments we have achieved, but taking a rest from those in order to make further progress.

### **Striking a balance**

Again with this whole thing of resting, it is very important not to push ourselves in the practice, because if we do push ourselves, then what used to be Dharma practice becomes something that creates more mental disturbance and anxiety inside of us, like when we think, "OK, I am going to do 100,000 Dorje Sempa mantras in 1 month!" Dorje Sempa is designed to purify the mind. It brings up your garbage, but you get a lot of good feeling from the meditation too. You will learn a lot. But when you push yourself excessively, then instead of the practice helping you along the path, you get *lung*—a kind of nervousness or anxiety because you are pushing, pushing, pushing—and then you can't do anything. Again it's this whole thing of being balanced. Dharma practice doesn't mean just mumbling off a certain number of mantras so that we can say, "Oh yeah I have said this certain number of mantras or I have done this number

of prostrations.” Rather, Dharma practice means maybe going slowly and really doing the transformation that is involved in those practices.

So this concludes the far-reaching attitude of joyous effort.

## CHAPTER 10

### Meditative Stabilization and Special Insight

#### Practicing Each of the First Four Far-Reaching Attitudes in Relation to the Other Five

As we go through and review the far-reaching attitudes, I especially want to emphasize how we practice each one in relation to the other five, so that we don't think that they are different and isolated things.

#### GENEROSITY

When we are practicing generosity, we also practice the **ethics of generosity**. This means that when we are being generous, we're also trying to be ethical. We aren't generous with booze and fire-arms and things that can actually harm others. And so this involves being ethical and being wise in how we give.

Giving doesn't mean just giving everybody what they think they want, but it means seeing things from an ethical perspective and understanding how our gifts are going to be used, and then deciding how and when to give. So, that's the ethics of generosity.

We also have the **patience of generosity**. Sometimes when we are generous, people don't appreciate it. Instead of being nice and kind to us in return, as we want them to be, they may be rude and



nasty and say: “You only gave me this much. How come you didn’t give me more?” or “How come you gave me this but you gave that other person more? That’s not fair!”

And so, sometimes, even though we’re coming from a generous mind and a kind attitude, other people don’t appreciate it and they speak harshly to us. In such cases, it’s really easy to lose patience and become angry. But when we do that, we destroy the positive potential of giving. That’s why it’s very important to practice patience as well when we are giving.

I think there’s a lot in here to think about, to review different times in our life when we have been generous but wound up getting angry afterwards. Or we regretted it because the person hasn’t behaved in the way we wanted or expected them to, or the person hasn’t behaved in the way they ought to, by having good values and proper manners.

Also, we want to practice **joyous effort with generosity**; we want to take delight in being generous. In other words, not being generous out of obligation or guilt, or the mind that feels we should. We want to be generous out of a mind that has joy and is enthusiastic about giving. Giving becomes a pleasure. They say that when a bodhisattva hears that somebody needs something, the bodhisattva gets so happy and excited: “Somebody needs something. I want to go and help!” So that’s the joyous effort of generosity.

Practicing **concentration with generosity** refers to keeping our motivation very stable and very clear. Concentrate on our motivation, which is to be of

benefit to all sentient beings, and keep that motivation stable at the beginning, in the middle, and at the conclusion of the action of being generous.

We do not start out being generous because we want others to notice how wealthy we are or because we want others to like us, and only cultivate the bodhicitta motivation in the middle [of the action]. Try to generate the altruistic intention from the beginning, and keep it throughout the action so that we have the motivation, the action and the dedication, all imbued with altruism.

Practicing **wisdom with generosity** means not seeing the whole act and the participants in the action of giving as solid, concrete, inherently existent entities. If I give these flowers to Leslie, practicing generosity means recognizing I'm not inherently existent, she's not inherently existent, these flowers aren't inherently existent flowers, and the action of giving is not an inherently existent action of giving. Recognize that all these things exist because the others exist; you don't have one without the other. Recognizing the whole interdependence of the action of giving.

Giving is taught as the first far-reaching attitude because they say that it's the easiest. But the Buddha was very skillful in realizing that for some of us, it's not so easy. I think I told you the story that for one person who had a lot of difficulty in giving, the Buddha had her practice giving from one hand to the other so that she got the energy of giving. [Laughter.]

## **ETHICS**

The second far-reaching attitude is that of ethics, which is the wish to abandon harming others. The three types of ethics are:

- Ethics of abandoning harmful actions
- Ethics of creating positive ones
- Ethics of working for the welfare of others

There is a list of different kinds of people to specifically look out for when we are helping. Examples are the poor and needy, the people who have been kind to us, travelers, people who are grieving, people who don't know how to distinguish constructive from destructive actions, and so forth.

Again, when we are practicing ethics, we try and practice it with the other five far-reaching attitudes.

First, we have the **generosity of ethics**, which means that we try and teach other people ethics. We try and lead people in that path and help them to appreciate the value of ethics, teaching about it, showing through our example and so forth.

For those of you who are parents, or who have nieces and nephews or people who look up to you, when you act in ethical ways, you are setting an example for them. That becomes the generosity of ethics. Whereas, it is not so kosher if you teach your kids how to lie, cheat, and do things like that, or you tell them to do as you say, not do as you do: "It's okay for mum and dad to lie, but not for you!"

Then we have the **patience of ethics**. Sometimes, when we are trying to keep our ethical discipline, some people may not like it. They may get upset with us. For example, if you have taken the five lay

precepts and you are trying not to steal, then somebody else who wants you to participate in their shady dealings might get mad at you. Or if you have the precept not to take intoxicants, then somebody might get mad at you when you say: “No, I’m going to have grape juice instead of wine.” Or they might make fun of you.

We need to be patient while we are being ethical, so that we can go through those situations without getting upset by others’ negative reactions to our practice. That’s really important, because sometimes we can get very self-righteous: “I’m keeping the precepts. Get off my case! Don’t be nasty to me. Don’t be mad at me, because I’m keeping the precepts!”

We are not talking about getting self-righteous, because when we get self-righteous and defensive, there’s a lot of clinging and a lot of solidity. But, rather, we are talking about not going to the other extreme of letting ourselves be influenced by people who disapprove of us acting ethically. Or not getting angry with them and losing patience when they make snide remarks or comments or ridicule us.

Then, we have the **joyous effort of ethics**—taking delight in being ethical, having delight and feeling a sense of personal satisfaction from keeping precepts. So, if you have taken refuge and the five precepts, have a real sense of delight in the fact that you have them. To see your precepts as something that liberates you, something that protects you from harm.

Also, take delight in taking the eight precepts—getting up early in the morning to do it. In the winter, it is especially easy to take them because the sun rises

later and you don't have to get up so early! [Laughter.] Really taking delight in taking the precepts for one day, because you see the value for yourself and others in doing it. So that becomes the joyous effort of being ethical.

And then the **concentration of ethics**, is again to keep our motivation of bodhicitta very clear through the whole process of being ethical—with our motivation, our action, our conclusion and dedication. Although ethics is also the cause for our own personal happiness (ethics is the cause of having a good rebirth and the cause of attaining liberation), it is a far-reaching attitude because we are trying to practice it for the benefit of others as well. We are not just practicing ethics for our own sake.

The **wisdom of ethics** is knowing how to be ethical. We're talking about relative wisdom: how to be ethical, because ethics is not a black and white subject. As His Holiness always says, it depends. People ask him any of these questions and he always says: "It depends." It's because it's dependent arising. It requires understanding the different factors, the causes and results of actions, and how to put the three sets of vows together and practice them together (the individual liberation vows which are the five lay precepts or the monks' and nuns' vows, the bodhisattva vows, and the tantric vows). That's involved with wisdom.

The wisdom of ethics is also seeing that ourselves, the situation, the thing or the person we're being ethical with and the positive potential from practicing ethics—none of these things are inherently existent. All these things arise dependently. None of them has

their own essence.

## PATIENCE

Then we have the far-reaching attitude of patience. This is the ability to remain undisturbed in the face of harm or difficulty. It is quite a noble state of mind. Here we have three kinds of patience:

- The patience of not retaliating—when others harm us, not retaliating and getting even
- The patience of enduring suffering—when we are sick, when unhappy things happen to us, not getting angry and dissatisfied and out of sorts because of it
- The patience of studying the Dharma—being patient with various hardships we encounter in Dharma practice; facing our own internal obscurations or facing the difficulties externally in order to practice the Dharma

To practice patience with the other five far-reaching attitudes, first we have the **generosity of patience**, which is teaching other people how to be patient. This can be in terms of acting as a good example. Or when we're talking with people, when our friends come to us and they are really distressed, to talk to them about patience in the sense that we can discuss their problem using a Buddhist viewpoint but without using any Buddhist jargon. So, that's the giving of patience, helping others learn to be patient. Teaching it to our children as well. Or, if you're a teacher, teaching it to students.

The **ethics of being patient**. While we are being patient, we want to make sure that we are also being ethical—not be patient in a way that counteracts our ethical conduct.

**Taking joy in being patient** is incorporating the far-reaching attitude of joyous effort. This is very important, isn't it? Because it means that being patient is something we do happily. It's not like: "Oh God, I've got to be patient. If I'm not patient, what a lousy person I am. All these people are going to criticize me if I don't stuff my anger and paste a smile on my face." That's not the joyous effort of patience. Here, it's really seeing the advantages of being patient, and so trying to practice the antidotes, do the meditations, so that we can uproot the anger and transform the situation, not just stuff it down. Stuffing it down isn't practicing patience.

The **concentration of practicing patience**—we need to keep our motivation clear. Keep the bodhicitta motivation at the beginning, in the middle and at the end. All the time, when we're practicing patience, to keep in mind that we are doing it for the benefit of all sentient beings. We are doing it so that we can attain enlightenment. When we can concentrate on this motivation and we have that intention in our mind, then it gives our mind so much more courage and endurance to do the practices of patience. Because we know: "Wow, it's for the benefit of all sentient beings! This isn't any trivial action. What I'm doing is something quite worthwhile." This gives our mind some internal strength. Bodhicitta makes the mind quite strong, quite firm.

**The wisdom of practicing patience.** Understanding what patience is. Patience is not telling other people off. Patience is not repressing our anger. Really understand it at a deep level. Patience is not feeling guilty when we get angry—we have a tendency to do that. We get mad at ourselves. That's not having the wisdom that understands what patience is. We have to understand how to practice it. Also, understanding that being patient doesn't mean being passive. It doesn't mean allowing ourselves to be a doormat. It doesn't mean: "Oh, I'm so patient. Sure. What do you want to do? You want to abuse me? Fine—go right ahead." That's not being patient. Recognize that when others are angry, just letting them act out their anger isn't always so beneficial for their karma or their future lives. Having some wisdom in how to relate to people who are angry.

On the ultimate level of wisdom, understand that ourselves as the practitioner, the person whom we might be upset with (or whom we're practicing patience with) and practicing patience—all these three arise in dependence on each other. There is no inherently existent practitioner of patience without having the situation of practicing patience and the person you are practicing patience with. And you don't have any of the other two without having this one. They're all interdependent. That's called realizing the emptiness of the circle of three—the agent who is doing it, the object that you are doing it with, and the action. It's the same for all the six far-reaching attitudes.

## **JOYOUS EFFORT (ENTHUSIASTIC)**



## PERSEVERANCE)

Now we have the practice of joyous effort. Here, we have three kinds of joyous effort:

- The armor-like joyous effort that is willing to go to the lower realms for eons if it's for the benefit of even one sentient being. Can you imagine that? That much joy and happiness: "Oh, I get to go to the hell realm for eons to benefit somebody!" [Laughter.]
- The joyous effort of creating positive actions or acting constructively
- The joyous effort of benefiting sentient beings

We also spoke a lot about the three kinds of laziness that they oppose:

- The laziness of sloth and torpor, i.e. hanging around and sleeping or lying on the beach
- The laziness of keeping ourselves extremely busy with worldly things and useless activities
- The laziness of putting ourselves down and self-deprecation

To practice enthusiastic perseverance with the other five far-reaching attitudes, first we have the **generosity of enthusiastic perseverance**. This means teaching enthusiastic perseverance to others, showing them, by our example, what it's like to be an enthusiastic Dharma practitioner. Here I think of Lama Zopa Rinpoche who doesn't sleep at night. He's just so enthusiastic about not sleeping at night, he

wants everybody else to join him in the wonderful practice. [Laughter.] The generosity of showing other people that that's possible, that you can actually do it and be completely together and be very happy doing it.

The **ethics of enthusiastic perseverance** or joyous effort: When we are practicing the Dharma with delight—keeping our ethical vows, keeping our ethical standards.

The **patience of joyous effort**: Being patient when we are practicing. Being patient with our own obstacles to having joyous effort. Being patient with other people who criticize us because we take joy in practicing Dharma. Being patient with any kind of suffering that we encounter while we are practicing Dharma. So, being patient while we are taking delight in what is virtuous.

The **concentration of joyous effort** . Holding on to the altruistic intention to attain enlightenment for the benefit of others at the beginning, in the middle and at the end—of being joyously effortful in whatever we are doing.

The **wisdom of joyous effort**. To recognize that we as the practitioner and whoever we are practicing with, the action of having joyous effort, that these things arise dependently. None of them are inherently existent with their own kind of independent essence, a “findable” existence separate from the other ones.

In the *lamrim*, the last two far-reaching attitudes of concentration and wisdom are explained in a very brief way as part of the six far-reaching attitudes. And then in the next section, it goes into them (concentration and wisdom) in depth, because these

two are so important for cutting the root of cyclic existence. So I thought I will talk about them in a brief way to finish the six far-reaching attitudes today, and then in the next session, we will talk about concentration and wisdom in a more in-depth way.

## **Meditative Stabilization (Concentration)**

Meditative stabilization is another translation for concentration. It is a mental factor that focuses single-pointedly on a virtuous object. It's the ability to control our mind and direct it towards a constructive object that will lead us towards liberation and enlightenment.

### **Ways of classifying meditative stabilization**

#### *According to its nature*

When we talk in general about concentration or meditative stabilization, we talk about two kinds of concentration according to their nature. One is a mundane type of concentration and one is a supra-mundane or transcendental kind.

The **mundane meditative stabilization** or concentration is when you are doing the steps of calm abiding or samatha or zhi-nay (in Tibetan) and you reach certain levels of absorption called the form and formless realms concentrations. You get born in the form and formless realms when you develop these states of single-pointed concentration. You have the ability to focus single-pointedly. It is within the form

and formless realm types of concentration. Your concentration isn't imbued with the determination to be free. It isn't imbued with refuge. It isn't imbued with bodhicitta or wisdom.

When you have mundane meditative stabilization, you are basically creating the cause for an upper rebirth in one of these realms [form and formless] where you can have the bliss of samadhi all the time. This is great for as long as you are born there, but once the karma to be born there ends, then as Serkong Rinpoche says: "When you get to the top of the Eiffel Tower, there is only one way to go." So when you get born in these upper realms of concentration, when the karma finishes, there's only one way to go.

The **supra-mundane or transcendental concentration** is that of an *arya*, somebody who has realized emptiness directly. It's called 'transcendental' or 'supra-mundane' in the sense that that concentration has the ability to focus on emptiness and realize emptiness with direct perception. Realizing emptiness with direct perception cuts the root of cyclic existence by eliminating the ignorance, anger and attachment forever from their root. This is why this kind of concentration is supra-mundane. It takes you beyond cyclic existence, beyond worldly existence. It is the good kind of concentration that we want to get, because it is the one that will bring long-lasting happiness instead of just big thrills.

### ***According to its function or result***

There is another way of talking about concentration where you divide it according to its function or result.

First, we have the **concentration that cultivates physical and mental bliss**. When you are doing the calm abiding practice, you can get a lot of physical and mental bliss and that is great. That is good. Though it is limited, it is definitely a step in the right direction.

The second one according to function or result is the **concentration that brings all other advantages**. An example is the concentration that enables us to have psychic powers. There are various ways to get psychic powers. Some people get them through karma. You get them because of actions done in your previous lives. But this type of psychic power can be inaccurate.

You can also get psychic powers through deep states of concentration. If you have the bodhicitta, getting these psychic powers can be very useful, because then it gives you a lot more tools to be able to benefit sentient beings. Therefore, the purpose of getting psychic powers is not so that you can open up a shop and tell people's future. Rather, you are getting psychic powers because you have a very sincere wish to lead all sentient beings to enlightenment. If you have the ability to understand their previous karma and understand what they think about, their dispositions and their interest, it gives you a lot more information about others than is immediately available to the eye. It becomes easier to be skillful in serving them.

Thus, psychic powers are useful if we have the proper motivation. If we don't have the proper motivation, then they just become worldly things. And they may even bring you big problems. Some people

who have psychic power get all proud and arrogant. Then, that ability basically leads them to the lower realms.

*[Audience:] Could you give some examples of psychic powers of the karmic kind?*

You sometimes meet people who get very accurate premonitions about the future or things like that. Or some people might have a little bit of clairvoyance or clairaudience, and sometimes it's actually frightening for them. I have a friend who had some kind of power like this when she was a child, and it was very frightening for her because nobody else had that. Nobody knew what she was talking about. So, she was very glad when it went away. Some people who claim to be psychic, they might have some power or they might not. It's hard to say. And sometimes these abilities are accurate, and sometimes they aren't.

The third kind of concentration according to its function or result is the **concentration to work for the benefit of sentient beings**. This happens when you are able to combine calm abiding with penetrative insight, or to use the Sanskrit terms, samatha with vipassana. With this ability, we can work for the benefit of other sentient beings by teaching them these two things and helping them to happen. In this way, we can really help sentient beings cut the root of their own cyclic existence.

**Wisdom**

On the relative level, wisdom is the ability to analyze what is constructive and destructive. On the ultimate level, it's seeing the emptiness of inherent existence of all phenomena.

We have here three kinds of wisdom:

## **1. The wisdom that understands relative truths**

This wisdom understands karma. It understands how things function. It understands what is a positive action, what is a negative action, what to practice, what to abandon. This is a wisdom that makes you street-smart in a Dharma way.

Being a Dharma practitioner doesn't mean you're spaced out and out of touch with how people live. Rather, you understand relative existence quite well and you understand cause and effect relationships and how things fit together. It's extremely important, because how can we benefit sentient beings if we don't understand the relative functioning of things? It becomes quite difficult.

## **2. The wisdom that understands ultimate truths**

This wisdom recognizes that all these relatively existent things are ultimately empty of inherent existence. Although they function and they appear, they don't have any solid, existing essence that is them, that makes them what they are, who they are, in and of themselves.

This wisdom of ultimate truths is extremely important because when we realize the emptiness of self and the emptiness of phenomena, then we are

able to eliminate the ignorance that grasps at the independent existence of self and phenomena. By eliminating that ignorance, then we eliminate the attachment, the aversion, the jealousy, the pride, the laziness, and all the other afflictions, and we also cease creating all the negative karma created under the influence of these afflictions. So this wisdom understanding ultimate truths is that which really liberates us from cyclic existence. This is extremely important.

### **3. The wisdom understanding how to benefit others**

Remember when we talked about ethics and when we talked about the joyous effort of benefiting others, we had a list of eleven kinds of beings to take care of or to benefit. Here, we too have a list of beings we can benefit: the sick and needy, the poor, people who are obscured, people who are grieving, people who have been kind to us, the people who can't tell constructive from destructive actions. So, it's the wisdom of how to benefit all these different categories of people.

### **Practicing Concentration and Wisdom with the Other Far-Reaching Attitudes**

Likewise, when we practice concentration and wisdom, we also practice them with the initial ones.

### **CONCENTRATION**

First we have the **generosity of concentration.**



Helping others to practice concentration. Helping others learn to meditate. Setting up the physical situation so that people can develop concentration.

The **ethics of practicing concentration**: Being ethical while we are practicing. Actually, ethics is extremely important for developing concentration, because if you can't keep ethical precepts, which means controlling the speech and the body, then it's going to be very difficult to develop concentration that is controlling the mind. So, ethics is really essential for the practice of concentration.

**Being patient while we are practicing concentration**: It's going to take a long time to develop the ability to concentrate. Being patient in that whole process. Being patient with ourselves, with our obscurations, with anybody else who might interfere with our practice, having that kind of incredible stability and immovability so that the mind isn't like a yoyo when we are practicing concentration.

The **joyous effort of concentration**. Having joy in doing it. Recognizing that developing calm abiding is going to take a lot of effort and a long time, but taking joy in that process, having that long, far-reaching goal that is going to keep us hanging in there, instead of the perfection of impatience, the perfection of wanting to do it right the first time and getting it down immediately. [Laughter.]

The **wisdom of concentration**. Knowing what the teachings are. Knowing what concentration is and what it isn't. Being able to recognize excitement when it arises in the mind. Being able to recognize laxity when it arises in the mind. These two things—laxity

and excitement—are two of the chief hindrances to the development of concentration. So, having some kind of wisdom or intelligence that can discriminate between all the different mental factors that we need to cultivate in order to concentrate and the different mental factors that are obstacles for concentration.

The wisdom of concentration is also understanding that we, the object of meditation, and the process of meditating, are all empty of inherent existence.

## WISDOM

We also practice wisdom with the other five far-reaching attitudes.

We have the **generosity of wisdom**. Teaching other people how to be wise. Showing a good example of being wise.

The **ethics of wisdom**. Maintaining our ethical conduct while we are practicing wisdom. When we practice wisdom, not going to the extreme of negating relative truth and thus negating the value of karma and ethics. We want to be able to balance our wisdom with an understanding of relative truth and the functionality of things, and so having a lot of respect for ethics.

At the last teacher's conference, His Holiness made a very important point. He said if you realize emptiness correctly, then automatically, out of a correct realization of emptiness, you have more respect for cause and effect and ethics. Not getting wrong notions like, "Oh, I've realized emptiness. So I'm beyond cause and effect."

The **patience of wisdom**. Having lots of patience

as we are trying to develop wisdom. Wisdom is not easy to develop, as we all know. We are still here in cyclic existence from beginningless time. It's not an easy thing. We need some kind of patience.

We also need enthusiastic perseverance ...

*[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]*

... wisdom is the thing that is going to save ourselves and others and free us and liberate us. And so having the joy to practice wisdom instead of getting discouraged. And you will see this. The teachings on wisdom can be presented in a nice, simple way. But once you start getting into the philosophical teachings on it, it's like a whole new vocabulary. It really stretches your brain. It really does. And so you need to have a lot of patience and a lot of joyous effort to keep up with that study.

And, then, we also need **concentration**. We need to concentrate when we are developing wisdom. We need to maintain our good motivation the whole time that we're developing wisdom, so that we can conjoin the good motivation of bodhicitta with the wisdom realizing emptiness, which will lead us to full enlightenment.

*[Audience:] How capable are we to develop wisdom if we need the other qualities first?*

I think that's a good point. It depends a lot on the person. In order to realize emptiness, we do need to do a lot of purification and a lot of collection of positive potential through all the other practices.

They're really essential to do. And so it's important to do all those other practices.

But it's also important to have some understanding of emptiness because when we do the other practices, we are also supposed to practice them with wisdom—the wisdom of generosity, the wisdom of ethics, the wisdom of patience, and so on. Therefore it's also very important to develop some understanding of the teachings on wisdom, because it helps us practice the foregoing practices in a much deeper way.

For example, let's say you don't know anything about the teachings on wisdom. Then when you do a visualization of the Buddha and the light coming, you're going to see the Buddha as inherently existent, all your garbage as inherently existent, the purification as inherently existent, and the light coming as inherently existent. You are seeing everything in a boxed-in and categorical way. Whereas if we have some teachings on emptiness, then when we do the visualization, let's say of the Buddha and the light coming, we might begin to say: "Oh the Buddha isn't inherently existent. All my garbage isn't inherently existent either. Imagine that!"

Once you start realizing that your garbage isn't inherently existent, then your guilt starts to go away, because guilt gravitates towards inherent existence, towards that wrong view. So the understanding of emptiness can really enhance all the other practices, just as the other practices enhance the understanding of emptiness.

In the same way, when we get even some understanding of emptiness, it can help the bodhicitta increase. When we understand emptiness, we begin to

see that there is actually a way to end samsara. That it's actually possible to remove the ignorance. And all the suffering that other beings are undergoing—they don't really have to undergo. That makes your compassion and your altruism much stronger. So, I think it's important to get them both together and practice them hand-in-hand.

And also, we shouldn't think that you do all these other practices without knowing anything about wisdom, and then all of a sudden, you start studying wisdom from scratch. Because the whole way of studying Dharma is .... We talk a lot about planting seeds. I remember when I first started getting the wisdom teachings, it was like: "What are you talking about, Geshela? What was that word? How do you spell it?" And then the second time I heard it, it was like, "Oh yeah, I remember those weird sounding words." And then the third time, "Oh yea, I remember what they mean." And then the fourth time, "Oh yeah ..." And so it's really a thing of learning it in a gradual way, training the mind in a gradual way so that you can understand.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

A number of words used here in the West are not the traditional way of using those words in Asia. For example, the word 'vipassana'. 'Vipassana' means special insight, particularly special insight realizing emptiness. It is a particular type of meditation. What has happened here in the West, is they have taken the name of one type of meditation and made it sound like a whole tradition. Usually, there is the Theravada

tradition, Zen tradition, Tibetan tradition, Pure Land tradition, and so on. And now all of a sudden, in the West, we have the Vipassana tradition. But actually, the people who say 'I practice vipassana,' learned it from Theravada masters. But when the Westerners took the teachings to the West, they didn't take all of the teachings of the Theravada masters like refuge and karma and all the other topics. They basically extracted this one kind of meditation, because they thought it was really effective for Westerners, and made it like a tradition. But actually vipassana meditation is found in all the Buddhist traditions. It's a type of meditation.

Therefore, what they now call the Vipassana tradition is not really the Vipassana tradition. It's the Theravada tradition and in there, not only do you have the vipassana meditation, you have refuge, you have karma, you have metta, you have many other teachings too.

So there is a whole bunch of words here in the West, that are not used in the traditional way. Like the word 'yogi'. When I came back to the West, anybody who goes to a retreat is called a yogi. In Asia, that's not how you would use the word 'yogi'. In Asia, yogis are the ones who go up to the mountains and they are the really serious practitioners. A yogi is not just somebody who goes to a weekend retreat.

Similarly, take the word 'sangha'. In Asia, when you talk about the three refuges, Sangha are the beings who have realized emptiness. Or in a general way, Sangha refers to the monastic community. It's only here in the West that anybody who comes to a Buddhist course is automatically called a sangha. It

was interesting. One time in the USA somebody asked His Holiness a question about sangha, and His Holiness started talking about the monastics, because that's what it means in an Asian context. So you find all these words that are used differently here than the traditional way.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I always use the terms in the traditional way, because that's how I grew up. My Buddhist babyhood was in Asia.

There is another way of dividing meditative stabilizations—according to their strengths or according to the angles that they take.

First, the meditative stabilization of **calm abiding meditation**. That's where we are trying to learn to focus the mind single-pointedly on a virtuous object and get the mind stable and calm so we can concentrate.

Second, the meditative stabilization of **special insight or vipassana**. This is a meditative stabilization in which we are able to analyze the object. This is what you use when you meditate on subtle impermanence, when you meditate on emptiness. It is an analytical mind that has strong concentration, but the analytical part is especially emphasized so that we can understand reality. We need that kind of analytical mind to understand reality.

Third, is the meditative stabilization that **combines both of these**—union of calm abiding and special insight. This is the full definition of special insight, where you have an analytical mind that is able to

analyze something like emptiness, and that analysis does not disturb the mind's ability to concentrate.

Sometimes, when you first develop the calm abiding, you may be concentrating on one object, but if you start to analyze within that, your concentration goes. This is because when you analyze, you're thinking about things from different ways and looking at them from different angles. So, it's difficult to stay single-pointed. It may also happen that if you do the analytical meditation, the special insight, you can't stay single-pointedly on it because you are analyzing. So in the beginning, those two don't go so well together. This third type of meditative stabilization is where you actually succeed in putting them together, so that you can remain single-pointed and analyze at the same time.

*[Audience:] Why is this not under wisdom?*

It's showing the overlap between wisdom and concentration. It's talking about meditative stabilizations here and one of them is where you just do calm abiding. One is where you do analysis and penetrative insight. And another kind of meditative stabilization is you put the two of them together. So, it's just talking about different kinds of meditative minds.

The six far-reaching attitudes aren't completely separate. This is showing that one meditation isn't just in one drawer. If you look at it one way, it can fit in this drawer. If you look at it in another way, it can fit in that drawer. This is especially so with meditative stabilization, the fifth far-reaching attitude. So when



we are talking about this far-reaching attitude, it's talking about a meditative mind that you can apply to any of the other subjects of meditation in the *lamrim*. For example, you can apply it to the metta meditation or the meditation on compassion.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

It has a certain element of analysis, but analysis doesn't mean sitting and thinking, "A+B=C" and "P isn't Q", like in a philosophy class. But it has the element of close observation. It is not just concentrating on something. Rather, it is a close observation of the way things inter-relate. In what they call the Vipassana tradition (which is actually the Theravada tradition), when they are doing the Vipassana meditation, they aren't analyzing through logical reasoning. But it is still considered analysis in the sense that there is the mind that is noting all these mental events and deducing that all they are, are mental events. And that there is no 'I' that is self-sufficient that is controlling the whole ballgame.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Maybe. It's hard to say. In the West, we think of analytical as being intellectual. When the Tibetans say analytical, they don't mean intellectual. It's a very different sense of the word 'analytical'. And I think that's where we often get stuck. When we think of analytical meditation, we think: "Oh, it's just analyzing things in your head. When I do analytical meditation on death, I'm just contemplating death up

in my head.” But this is not what it really means. It is analytical in the sense of really investigating things. Maybe we can call it an investigating meditation. Would that help a little bit? The term ‘analytical’ is a difficult one.

## **More on Wisdom**

We mentioned in the last session that there are three types of wisdom: the wisdom understanding emptiness, the wisdom understanding relative existence and the wisdom of helping sentient beings. I want to emphasize that the wisdom understanding emptiness or the ultimate truth is what actually frees us from cyclic existence, but the wisdom understanding relative truths is also very important.

### **The importance and purpose of cultivating the wisdom understanding relative truths**

In ancient times, the wisdom understanding relative truths came from studying poetry, grammar, medicine, astrology, and all the ancient sciences. What it is emphasizing to us, is the necessity of understanding current disciplines in the society.

The wisdom of understanding relative truths is emphasizing that a bodhisattva doesn’t isolate himself or herself from what’s going on in the world around. A bodhisattva understands karma and how things function, as well as some of the things that are going on in the society, so that they could explain Dharma in terms of what’s happening in the society.

Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey used to tell us when we struggled learning Tibetan: “If you can become a Buddha, you can also learn Tibetan.” Not that learning Tibetan is central to becoming a Buddha, but what he was emphasizing was that on the bodhisattva path, you try and learn about many different fields that can help your practice and help you explain the Dharma to other people. So I want to emphasize this point.

### **The four kinds of wisdom in terms of how they are generated**

Then I also want to talk about wisdom in general, not necessarily the far-reaching attitude of wisdom. This is an interesting aside about wisdom. Sometimes, we talk about four kinds of wisdom in terms of how they are generated:

1. Wisdom that comes because of previous life imprint
2. Wisdom from hearing
3. Wisdom from reflecting
4. Wisdom from meditating

I think these are very helpful to know. The wisdom coming from previous lives is the wisdom that we are born with. This is the ability to investigate, reflect or understand, which comes as a result of what we cultivated in previous lives.

Part of what we are now is a result of previous lives, and part of what we do now is going to affect how much wisdom we have in the future lives. But

that's only one of the four kinds of wisdom, so we shouldn't get all hung up thinking that wisdom means IQ, or wisdom means innate ability, because we have the other three kinds of wisdoms that are very important, too.

These three wisdoms arise in the context of this life and your training in the Dharma practice. We have a certain kind of wisdom from previous lives that we are born with. But then as we listen to teachings, more wisdom comes. Wisdom as you are listening to teachings or as you are studying. In other words, as you are getting the information into you, a certain kind of understanding arises in your mind. It may not be a single-pointed, in-depth absorption of the object of meditation, but it's a certain kind of wisdom that comes from hearing teachings. That's one reason why we are encouraged to hear a lot of teachings, and to read, and things like these, because each time you hear something, some kind of understanding is generated that wasn't generated before.

For example, His Holiness is going to teach in Dharamsala soon. You will find all these Geshees there too who have taught the same text that His Holiness is teaching, but they will be sitting there, listening to His Holiness teaching. Why? Because when you sit and listen to teachings, a certain kind of wisdom arises from the listening process, because you are thinking about things as you are listening. So that's one kind of wisdom that we start out with.

And then from there, after we listen and read and get the information in, we deepen that wisdom by reflecting. We go home with the teachings and we reflect deeply on them, thinking: "Does this make

sense? Does that fit with my experience? Does this match everything that is going on in my life?” And you discuss it with other people.

This process of discussing what you have understood and thinking about it some more yourself, is very, very important. Because, sometimes, we hear something and we think we understand it but we actually didn't. If we skip reflecting and go directly from hearing to meditation, and if we didn't understand correctly what we heard, then our meditation is going to get screwed up.

So it's very important to go through this intermediate process of reflecting on what we have heard, thinking about it and discussing it with other people. That's why Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey used to say you learn 25% from your teacher and 75% from thinking about it and discussing it with your friends—really emphasizing how important it is to reflect and discuss with others.

You might notice that sometimes, somebody you work with might ask: “What's the Buddha's teaching on patience?” And you thought you had understood it, but as soon as you start to explain it, your mind gets all twisted up, and it's like, “I don't really get it!”

Actually, it's quite good when that happens because it's showing us what we need to work on. That's the process of developing wisdom through reflection, through discussing it and trying to verbally express what our understanding is, and listen to other people's understanding and commenting on it. They help to refine and deepen our understanding. Then, we go on to meditation.

In our meditation, we're sitting and trying to

integrate it with our very being and develop some kind of calm abiding and penetrative insight on the material that we have previously understood. So in one way, it's a gradual process. You hear, then you reflect and you meditate. But we can, in terms of our daily practice, do all three at the same time. So don't think: "Oh, I will just hear when I'm young, reflect when I am middle-aged, and meditate when I'm old aged." When you're young, you cultivate all three, and you do the same when you are middle-aged and when you are in old age.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Well, it's the wisdom like when you first come to Buddhist teachings and you listen and you feel: "I knew that already. I kind of believe in that already, and they are just putting it into words for me." So it's that kind of wisdom. Or, sometimes, many of us can look back on things that we used to think about or wonder about before we met Buddhism, and find that we have actually quite a lot of Buddhist thought, but we never identified it as that.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Right. Some ability to learn from what has happened to us and to put it together in a constructive way. Our wisdom can actually increase in one lifetime because as we hear and reflect and meditate, our wisdom increases.

I'm taking time to explain this because, sometimes, we come into Dharma and we think: "I have a low IQ.

My SAT scores weren't so good. I'm such a dimwit, how can I learn Dharma?" "I went to take my driving license and I flunked it. How can I learn Dharma? I'm not very intelligent." I think it's important for people to recognize that there are many different kinds of intelligence and many different kinds of wisdom and understanding, and that Dharma wisdom and understanding is very different from worldly wisdom and understanding. You can have a person who is extremely smart in worldly ways, but when they come to Dharma, they are totally ignorant.

For example, take a 100% gung-ho, award-winning scientist who understands all the neuro-biology of the brain. As soon as you start talking to them about the mind and about subduing the mind and developing concentration and things like that, they totally fall apart and they say: "I don't understand that. That stuff doesn't exist." They can be somebody who is very smart in a worldly way. Somebody who has an MBA and can make tons of money, or somebody who knows how to make nuclear bombs. Nuclear scientists are very good examples. They are extremely brilliant but when it comes to Dharma and their sense of morality and ethics, they might be very dumb. So we shouldn't associate worldly wisdom with Dharma wisdom. You can have some people who are good in both, but you can have people that are good in one and not good in the other.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I've been in a lot of settings with people who are new to Dharma, and I've seen people who are extremely

brilliant in worldly ways, just scratch their head at teachings. They just don't get it.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

It could be a lack of interest. But it's also a thing of karmic obscuration. Understanding Dharma isn't just a matter of intellectual intelligence. It depends a lot on your karma. When we have a lot of negative karma, that creates a veil on the film so the mind just cannot get it.

We can see it even in our mind now. We have a lot of interest, but sometimes we listen to things and we just don't get it. But we have the interest.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

It's karmic obscuration. Because of negative actions done in previous lives, the mind is fogged up. It's clouded over by the imprints of this karma, and that's why it's so important to do repeated purification every day.

It's an interesting point because we can see that to develop Dharma understanding, you need some kind of intelligence, but that's not sufficient. We need some kind of concentration, but that's not sufficient. We need some kind of interest, but that's not sufficient either. We need some kind of appreciation and some kind of aspiration, but those aren't sufficient. To actually get ourselves to the point of having a real deep understanding, there are many mental factors that we need to develop. They need to all come together for us to really get it. So this is one



thing that I wanted to explain about wisdom.

### **All the Dharma we study are meant for practice**

At the time that Lama Tsongkhapa was alive in Tibet, there were a lot of misconceptions. Some people thought that there were some things about Dharma that you studied, and some things that you practiced, and that they were two different things. We study these texts and we practice other texts. Lama Tsongkhapa, especially here in the wisdom section, is showing that that's not true at all. All the texts, all the different explanations, they are all meant for practice.

His Holiness says this repeatedly. I think he does it because some texts list many categories and contain a lot of logical reasoning, and it's really tempting for our intellectual mind to say that these are just intellectual things—without realizing that the main underlying purpose of doing all that is to gain some experience.

And so sometimes we make this division: “Oh there are intellectual texts and there are practice manuals. I don't want to become intellectual, so I will just focus on these practice manuals. All these other texts are totally useless.” Lama Tsongkhapa is really emphasizing here that they all fit together, and we shouldn't make a division in our mind that some things are for intellectual understanding and other things are for practice. They are all for practice. They all help us to understand our life.

I think that's really important to note, because we have been studying the *lamrim* for a long time, and it's very tempting when you hear certain subjects that are at first difficult, to think: “Oh, these are just for

intellectual understanding. They aren't so important." In actual fact, if we deeply understand them, they make a big imprint on our mind and how we view the world.

Here, under wisdom, it is emphasized that we need to understand things completely. And that it's very important in our practice to develop the ability to discriminate—in a wise way. In one way, we say our discriminating mind makes a lot of problems for us because it says: "I like chocolate ice-cream and I don't like strawberry, and I'm not going to be happy unless I can have chocolate." We certainly need to shut up that kind of discriminating mind.

But there's another kind of discriminating wisdom that's very important to develop. This is the discriminating wisdom that can actually understand what emptiness is. Emptiness isn't like there's nothing in your refrigerator and nothing in your stomach. It's a really precise thing, and we need to be able to discriminate what is emptiness and what is nihilism. We need to discriminate between dependent arising and permanence. We also need to be able to discriminate what are actions that create constructive imprints in our mind and what are actions that create destructive ones. And what's the difference between the two.

Also, it is not just understanding all these things intellectually, but discriminating in terms of applying them to our own mind. We not only understand: "Okay, killing is bad karma and saving lives is good karma." but we also recognize what killing is. What the intention to kill is. What the mind feels like when it kills. To recognize the intention to preserve life or

save life.

All these things that we are talking about aren't just external categories. They are things to understand. Learn to discriminate—not just as generalities, but in terms of discriminating our own mind and understanding what's going on in our own mind at any particular time. We need that kind of discriminating bright wisdom or understanding that can see things accurately.

This is so important because so often in the West, we like to talk about space and light and love. In Buddhism, we talk about space and light and love too, but space does not mean being vague and amorphous. That is a very important point. And love means some real, concise kind of understanding and feeling.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

You don't get the red dots and white dots, but that doesn't have to be the major emphasis of your practice right now." That's not the major important thing that you need to know. So with that kind of thing, it's like: "I don't really get that. Some other time, when I'm practicing on a different level, that could be important information to know and I might be able to get it then. But right now, I'll just file that and put that on the backburner, but come back to what's essential for me right now." Buddhism isn't taught with the assumption that we are going to understand everything the first time we hear it. Or even the fourth or the tenth time, not to mention different lifetimes of having it explained to us.

*[Audience:] Why do we need to learn the whole lamrim? The Buddha taught his first five disciples the Four Noble Truths and they became arhats. Even when the Buddha taught in India, he only taught people what they needed to know.*

But he didn't just give one lecture to each person. Some people heard many teachings.

Anyway, they say that that's because the people who were born at the time that the Buddha lived, had incredibly much more good karma than we did. They had practiced so much in their previous lives. They had done so much work in their previous lives and created the positive potential to be born when the actual, historical Buddha was alive. It's like they did all their homework before. So they just needed to get a little bit of teachings from the Buddha and they were able to tap into the whole understanding from before.

Whereas for us, even if we were born at the time of the Buddha and we sat in on one of those teachings, we'd probably still scratch our heads. The way I see our learning the whole *lamrim* and all the different subjects is, we are trying to fill in that whole vast array of understanding. This is also why we make prayers to be born at the time of Maitreya Buddha. If we learn all these teachings now, then when we are Maitreya's disciples, Maitreya gives us one teaching and we will gain the realizations. How we will be at that time depends a lot on what we have done in previous lives—how much good karma we have accumulated and how much understanding we have.

Even within that, you do find people that come to

Dharma reacting differently. You may have two newcomers to Dharma, they hear the same talk, and one will come out saying: “Wow! This makes sense.” They really get it. It’s like everything is transformed. And the other comes out and says: “Why doesn’t he speak better English? I can’t understand a word he is saying!” I have seen this happening repeatedly. This is just indicative of what we bring with us from previous lives. Which is why the cultivation that we are doing now is very important. If we cultivate well now, then in future lives, we are going to get it quickly.

*[Audience:] What are karmic obscurations?*

As you begin to practice, start to meet people and watch your own mind, you will get a better sense of what karmic obscuration means. For example, you can sit there, have lots of interest in the Dharma, and it really makes sense to you, but when you try to meditate, your mind is just totally blocked. Your mind feels like a piece of lead. Or your mind is running around to every single object in samsara, and doesn’t want to stay on anything to do with the Dharma at all. Or your mind gets annoyed and complains: “This place is too cold.” “He doesn’t speak English.” This is what karmic obscuration is and this is why purification practice is so important.

*[Audience:] How do you incorporate purification in everyday practice?*

Excellent question. I like questions like this—practice questions. We went through the four opponent

powers. Remember them? What are they? Regret, refuge and bodhicitta, determination not to repeat it, and remedial action. We try and go through those four at the end of the day when we do our review. Or we can go through them in the middle of the day, or whatever time is good. For the remedial action you could do the Vajrasattva mantra for those of you who do that, or you could do the prostrations to the thirty-five Buddhas which I've also taught. Or you could just do the visualization of the Buddha in front with the light coming in and purifying.

You could incorporate all four opponent powers in these practices. For example, with the prostrations to the thirty-five Buddhas, you take refuge at the beginning. And then you recite the Buddhas' names, which is the remedial action. As you're reciting the confession prayer, you're generating regret for all the negative actions you have committed and you are also determined to avoid them in the future. So, this practice incorporates all four opponent powers. And if you look at the Vajrasattva practice, it does too. If you do the Shakyamuni Buddha meditation and really think about the actions and generate regret and determination, then that includes all the opponent powers too. You could also include the four opponent powers in the Lama Tsongkhapa guru yoga, Tara practice, and other similar practices.

Sometimes when you do your meditation practice, things really click and you get a lot of things. Other times when you do your practice, the mind is real tough! This is a signal that we need to rebalance and do more practice on the purification side. Whenever the mind gets tough, stubborn, rebellious, resistant,

tired, then it's good to shift to doing more purification and more creation of positive potential.

*[Audience:] There are so many practices. How do I select which to practice?*

I think you can pick one that you have a stronger affinity for, and concentrate on that one. But it's good to know the other ones as well, because they do help. But you can make one the principal one.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

It is hard to say. It's good to remember that if you do the prostrations to the thirty-five Buddhas and you have a nightmare, the practice didn't cause the nightmare. The negative karma caused the nightmare. This is real important to remember. It could be that there is some deeper purification there. It could be that you just need some time to develop familiarity with something. And it could also be that from previous lives, you have a stronger affinity with one than the other. That's okay because we all have some practices that we have a strong affinity with and others that we don't have such strong affinity with. That's why the Buddha appeared in many different forms.

I just want to make sure that people are clear about this. We talked about meditative stabilization, which is the ability to be single-pointed on a virtuous object. And then we talked about the different ways of dividing it. There was one way of dividing it where we had (1) calm abiding, (2) special insight, and then (3)

the union of the two. The thing to note is, the way categories are made in the Buddhist teachings, not everything that is found listed under that category necessarily fits the exact definition of that category. I think that's what is happening in this one. So you have (1) calm abiding, which definitely is single-pointed on a virtuous object. You have (2) penetrative insight that is on a virtuous object, which is not necessarily a mind of calm abiding. They call it special insight, but really, to be truly special insight, it needs to have the calm abiding with it. So this one is a similitude of calm abiding. And then the third one is where you have the two together.

Also, to realize that even though here, we are talking about special insight under meditative stabilization, when we meditate on wisdom, we are trying to develop special insight there. But meditative stabilization and wisdom overlap, and meditative stabilization and patience overlap, and meditative stabilization overlaps with all the other points in the *lamrim*, because the more concentrated and clearer our mind gets, then the clearer the other things become to us.



## CHAPTER 11

### Training in Calm Abiding

Now we're going to do the part in your outline: "How to practice the last two far-reaching attitudes in particular". The first one is "Training in calm abiding in order to perfect meditative stabilization". Meditative stabilization is the far-reaching attitude, and we train in calm abiding in order to perfect it. The second one is "Training in special insight to perfect the wisdom of emptiness". The wisdom is the sixth far-reaching attitude, and we train in special insight to accomplish it.

#### Sources of the teaching

In the Gelugpa tradition, the teachings on calm abiding combine two major presentations from the Indian commentaries.

One presentation was from Maitreya's *Utanamche* (Sanskrit: *Madhyantavibhanga*), *Separation of the Middle from the Extremes*, which is an incredibly beautiful text. There, Maitreya discusses the five faults or hindrances and the eight antidotes—how to correct the faults in order to develop calm abiding.

The second major Indian presentation was from Asanga's *Hearer Grounds* (Skt: *Sravaka-bhumi*) and *Compendium of Knowledge* (Skt: *Abhidharmasamuchchaya*), and from Maitreya's *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* (Skt: *Mahayana-sutralamkara*) where he described the nine mental

abidings or the nine states to progress through before one attains calm abiding.

These two presentations from the ancient Indian scriptures were put together by the Kadampa masters. This tradition descended from Atisha when he went from India to Tibet. Material was also taken from Kamalasila's *Stages of Meditation* (Skt: *Bhavanakrama*) and so forth.

The Kadampa geshe emphasized that it is very good for us to study the Indian commentaries on calm abiding or the Tibetan synthesis of these commentaries, because they explain calm abiding in detail. They talk about the different mental factors that we need to abandon to develop calm abiding, and how to abandon them. Also explained are the mental factors that we need to develop, particularly those for cultivating calm abiding and concentrating our mind. If we can understand this material well, then when we sit down to meditate, we will be able to do it quite effectively.

The mental factors point out different aspects of our own mind. When we hear the teachings, we gain a kind of intellectual understanding. But the key is to find these mental factors in our own mind when we sit and meditate, and try and develop some concentration. For example, when it talks about excitement, we check: "What does excitement look like in me? When excitement arises in my mind, what does it feel like? What's going on? And what is mindfulness? When I am mindful, what is my mind doing? What is it that is mindful? When I have introspective alertness, what does it mean? What is my mind doing?" If we learn all these things, and then

apply them in our meditation, then it gives us a lot of tools and skills that help us concentrate.

## **Importance of study**

Studying is important to help us in our meditation, as His Holiness is always emphasizing. Some people think meditation and study are two different things: if you study, you become an intellectual and you're dry; if you meditate, you get some experience. But His Holiness emphasizes this: if you study and you become a dry intellectual, that's your problem—but that's not why you study, that's not the purpose of the study. The purpose is to learn things so that your meditation goes well and is effective.

I think this is very important, especially these days when everybody is meditating. If you ask people what they are meditating on, the response is often: “Well, the guy next door made up a meditation and I'm doing it.” Or “I made up a meditation.” Or “Meditation means sit and imagine myself being very successful with everything I want around me”—that's meditation on how to increase attachment! [Laughter.]

Getting the right instructions on meditation is important. When we do it, we want to do it right. Otherwise, we waste a lot of time. We waste years and lifetimes ‘meditating’ but not really getting anywhere. I have been reading Genla's (Gen Lamrimpa) book on calm abiding and he emphasizes the very same thing.

Look at Genla. He was no dry intellectual. You can see the teachings in his life and yet he tells his students it is good to study these texts and learn these

things. Genla's book: "Calming the Mind: Tibetan Buddhist Teachings on the Cultivation of Meditative Quiescence", by the way, is excellent. Very well done. Really quite wonderful.

## **Etymology, Definition and Explanation of Calm Abiding**

I want to talk about the etymology of calm abiding, how it got that name. I remember when I wrote "Open Heart Clear Mind" and I sent the manuscript in to be edited, the editor kept circling "calm abiding"—"What kind of English is this—'calm abiding'? This isn't English. This is some weird language!" And I said: "It's a technical term." And she said: "Can't you find another translation?" [Laughter.]

"Samatha" is the Sanskrit term. The Tibetan term is "zhi-nay". "Zhi" means calm or peace and "nay" means to abide, to stay, to rest or to remain.

The mind is abiding on an internal object of observation, for example, the image of the Buddha or the breath. An internal object is an object of the mental consciousness. The mind is not directed outside towards something. It's not abiding on chocolate cake. It's abiding on an internal object of meditation.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

The internal object is an object of mental consciousness. We do not develop calm abiding by

staring at a candle. For example, if we use the image of the Buddha as the object of meditation, we might look at a picture of the Buddha for quite a long time to learn the details of the Buddha's appearance. But just staring at the picture is not how we're going to get calm abiding. What we have to do is lower the eyes and be able to recreate that image in our mind and hold our mind on the internal object.

The mind is 'calm' because it is calmed down from running to external objects. When you sit and do the breathing meditation, you will find that your mind is "traveling" [laughter]—it is at work; it is at home; it is in Tahiti; it is everywhere else. It is not calm.

*[Audience:] What is the difference between using the Buddha image and using other objects as our object of meditation, since they are all empty (of inherent existence) anyway?*

When you think of chocolate cake, what effect does it have on your mind? When you think of the Buddha, what is the effect on your mind? Different images have different effects on the mind. If we imagine the figure of the Buddha in our mind's eye, it has a psychological effect of calming the mind down and generating a lot of faith. Like when we are all crazy and going bananas, and we see the Buddha is just sitting there, his long, narrow, compassionate eyes completely still.

On the other hand, the image of chocolate cake in our mind is going to generate a whole lot of energy to get off the meditation cushion and go get it! It is also going to be hard to concentrate on the image of

chocolate cake, isn't it? But if you use the figure of the Buddha, the object is very pleasing, and the more you look at it, the more you want to look at it. It is refreshing to sit and concentrate on the Buddha.

To generate calm abiding, it is important to have conducive external and internal conditions during the beginning, the middle and the end of our practice. If you have these conditions, then developing calm abiding becomes quite easy. Some people say you can even do it within six months. On the other hand, if we do not have these conditions, then even if we try and meditate for years, it is going to be difficult to gain the realizations.

In our normally busy life, it is virtually impossible to have all of the conditions for developing calm abiding, even just the external conditions. For this kind of practice to reach its completion, we need to practice it in a retreat situation, not just in a session before you go to work and a session when you come home. But still, we can do something. There are nine stages you go through before you attain full calm abiding. What we can do, is we can work on the first few of these nine stages. We can work on them even if we are living in the city and have a busy life. We can make progress on these. This is quite valuable. Our mind starts getting calmer and more concentrated. Also later, when we are able to get all the conditions together and go into a retreat, it will be easier as we have had some previous training.

Calm abiding is a type of meditation. It's called "stabilizing" or "absorption meditation." The purpose is to get the mind to stay single-pointedly on an object.

Here is the definition of calm abiding from *Lamrim Chenmo*: It is a samadhi accompanied by a joy of mental and physical pliancy in which the mind abides naturally without effort for as long as one wishes, without fluctuation, on whichever virtuous object it has been placed. (These terms will be explained as we go on.)

“Samadhi” is sometimes translated as “concentration”. We usually think of samadhi as being in a state of single-pointed concentration so that even if a canon goes off beside you, you remain undisturbed. Actually, samadhi is one mental factor that we have right now in us. The ability to concentrate. It’s not very well-developed in us right now. But we have samadhi now and what we want to do is develop, enrich, and strengthen it till we enter into the state of calm abiding, and even beyond. There are other stages of concentration beyond calm abiding.

Calm abiding is a type of meditation and it can be a prerequisite for other types of meditation, and they can all be done in combination. For example, after you have calm abiding and you meditate on love with calm abiding, then your meditation on love becomes very powerful. Your mind has the ability to stay on the virtuous object for as long as it wants to.

When you use your calm abiding to meditate on emptiness, you will be able to stay on the object of emptiness. When you turn your mind of calm abiding to the relative nature of the mind, the clear—knowing quality of mind, it is able to remain there. Calm abiding is like a talent or a skill that you can use in many, many different ways. You can use it together

with many different things.

Calm abiding is something that is also found in non-Buddhist traditions. In other words, it is not a quality or an ability that only the Buddhists have. I think the Hindus practice it. I think some Christians also achieve it. Anybody can have it as long as they have the method and the technique to develop it. In fact, in the Buddhist scriptures, it is mentioned that many Hindu sages developed very strong calm abiding, but they mistook that for liberation from cyclic existence. In Buddhism, it has been made very clear that calm abiding alone is not what liberates one. We need to conjoin it with the wisdom that realizes emptiness. Otherwise we can't get liberated. But so many people mistake calm abiding for liberation, because it is so blissful when you develop calm abiding.

Calm abiding is something done in common with non-Buddhist traditions, but there is still a difference when a Buddhist does it and when a non-Buddhist does it. When a Buddhist does this practice, it is conjoined with refuge in the Triple Gem. It is conjoined with the determination to free ourselves from cyclic existence. When somebody on the Mahayana path practices it, it is conjoined with the wish to become a Buddha for the benefit of others. If you have firm refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and you develop calm abiding, you're going to do something completely different with it than if you don't have refuge.

The same happens if you have the determination to be free while developing calm abiding. The determination to be free also gives you the strength of



mind to do the meditation to develop calm abiding. It is going to be much easier to get yourself to the cushion to meditate if you have it than if you don't have it.

It is the same with bodhicitta. If we have at least some feeling for bodhicitta, this motivation is going to help us attain calm abiding more easily. After we have attained calm abiding, we will use it in accordance with the motivation of bodhicitta. It is going to be used in a different way than if we do not have the bodhicitta motivation. It is actually quite interesting, and it is an important difference. It is like two people who both have credit cards, but depending upon each person's motivation, the credit card will be used very differently.

## **The Tibetan approach to meditation**

*[Audience:] The Tibetan masters seem to emphasize the analytic meditation much more than the calm abiding meditation. Why is that?*

Especially for those of us beginners, the Tibetan masters do not emphasize that we develop calm abiding right away. They feel that it is more useful for us to first get a general understanding of the path and a philosophy that applies to our lives. This is why they emphasize the analytic meditation.

This doesn't mean we neglect the development of calm abiding. It is very good if we develop some ability to concentrate. But in order to actualize calm abiding, you have to do just calm abiding meditation and nothing else. You cannot watch TV. You cannot

go to work. Therefore, to do it requires a lot of purification and a great collection of merit. If we don't have that, we're going to run into all sorts of obstacles when we try to meditate on calm abiding.

This is why the Tibetan lamas emphasize that we do a lot of purification and other practices to collect positive potential. It is also important to hear the teachings and reflect and meditate on them. It is good to try and develop some determination to be free, an understanding of refuge, bodhicitta, and some understanding of emptiness. If you have a good overview of the *lamrim*, then you will know how to put your life together. When things happen in your life, you have a way to understand them.

If you don't have this broad understanding of the path, and you just go for one particular kind of meditation right away, then you tend to see a big gap between your meditation and your life. When things happen in your life, you will not know how to put it together. All you know is how to sit on your cushion, which has nothing to do with your life.

That is why the lamas do a lot of the analytic meditation with us. They want us to have a broad encompassing life view. I know for me personally, I really needed that. If I had been told to just watch my breath in meditation when I first came into Buddhism, I would probably have left after a couple of days. What I needed at that time was to learn how to put my life together, to understand what was happening in my mind. This is the beauty of the *lamrim* teaching.

That is the Tibetan approach. Other traditions do it quite differently.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

We prepared the meditation outlines to help people do the analytic meditations. The outline lists the points to think about. The key is to think about them in relationship to your own life. It is a meditation where you are thinking or contemplating, and there are a few ways to do it.

One way is to mull over each point in your mind. For example, if we do the death meditation, the first point is: death is definite. Mull this over in your mind. Or, think of many examples of it. Or, as one person told me, pretend you are trying to describe the point to your mother. How do you describe that to your friend, or to your mother? In the process of explaining, you come to understand the point in a deeper way. You understand what it is all about. It is not just saying the words; it is making examples.

All the analytic meditations are designed to help us gain some kind of conclusion or some kind of experience. The conclusion is not just [regurgitating the main points]: “Oh yes, death is definite. Time of death is indefinite. Only the Dharma is important. When you die, you dedicate all the merits ...” [Laughter.]. It’s not like that.

It is more of a feeling like: “Death is definite. I’m going to die. I’m going to leave this body! What does it feel like to know that some day I’m going to leave this body? What does it feel like to know that some day, people will talk about Thubten Chodron but I won’t be around? My mind will be born somewhere else. Or that I’m going to leave all these. Here I create this wonderful, fantastic ego-identity, only to see that

one day it will be gone. I'm not going to be American anymore. I'm not going to be a woman. I'm not going to be five foot four. I'm not going to be this or that. It's all going to go! What does that make me feel inside? What's my understanding?" The conclusion is not just a dry intellectual one. Some change of feeling in your heart happens. When that happens, you stay single-pointed on that.

Or, you meditate on the precious human life: "I could have been born as an animal. What would that be like? What would it be like to be Achala [the kitten]? If I were born as Achala, how could I practice the Dharma? He is in this incredible Dharma environment. But what is going on in his mind all day?"

*[Audience: inaudible]*

That's why it can be very helpful before you do the analytic meditation, to do some prayers and breathing meditation. When you do the breathing meditation, you start to let go of the jabbering mind, so that then when you do the analytic meditation, you are not jabbering the points to yourself. There is some kind of deliberateness to the way you're thinking about it.

*[Audience:] What's the benefit of doing it on your cushion versus doing it on the highway or in the gym or something like that?*

Well, I think sometimes when you are on your cushion, you can concentrate better. This isn't to say don't think about these things on the highway. Think

about them on the highway as much as you can. Think about them wherever you go. But the thing is, when you are on the highway, you also have to pay attention to the cars. Your mind cannot be as concentrated on the analysis. That is why we try and do it on the cushion too.

*[Audience:] How do we do the meditation in the car?*

American meditation [laughter]. This is what Cindy does. She puts the tape in and she listens to it on her way to work. She tells me she turns the tape off and she'll sit and think about the thing for a while, and then she will turn the tape on and continue. This is very good. Remember we talked about the three steps: hearing, reflection and meditation? This comes under reflection. Hearing the teaching, and then turning the tape off to think about it for a while, even while you're driving the car—that is okay. Or you talk about it with friends.

Sometimes our meditation is more a reflection than real meditation. We are trying to understand the contents rather than meditating on them. What we should do is to make sure we get the concept right, to get some general understanding first. Meditation is when we begin to sink the mind into it and the experience starts to come.

## **Arranging Proper Circumstances for Calm Abiding Meditation**

We've just started the teachings on calm abiding. If

you look at the Lamrim outline, the first section is talking about finding a conducive place and arranging the proper circumstances for doing calm abiding meditation. They say that if we have all the proper circumstances, it is possible to attain calm abiding in as little as six months. But if you don't have them, then even if you meditate for years, you won't be able to attain calm abiding. As we go through the list, you'll probably see that we lack one or more of them.

Don't be discouraged. We can still practice at our own level. It is also telling us not to expect to be able to attain single-pointed concentration and go into full absorption while living in the middle of Seattle. It's telling us to be realistic with what we expect to attain.

Different texts have different ways of listing these circumstances, but they boil down to the same points.

## **1. LIVE IN A PROPER AND CONDUCTIVE PLACE**

The first one is to abide in a favorable place. This is talking about the external place, the conditions required for the place. It should be a place that is calm and quiet. If possible, go to a place that is high because when you are doing a lot of meditation, you want to be able to look out onto far distances, to stretch the mind out and look in the sky. Hence a place in the middle of a valley and a closed-in place will not be suitable.

It should also be a place that is healthy and free from illness, where you can easily get good quality water and food and where the air is pure. These things do influence the mind. If you are living in a place

where the water is very dirty, or the air is polluted, or the food lacks substance, then it becomes more difficult to carry on with your practice.

You want a place where you can get your necessities easily, for example, food and clothing. You don't have to go down to town a lot and you don't have to break your meditation schedule to go and get things. When you do calm abiding meditation, you have a pretty rigorous meditation schedule. You can't afford to take a half-day break or a whole day break to go down to town to get food or clothes.

Also, you want a place where you will not need to engage in wrong livelihood in order to get the necessities. You don't want to be in a situation where you have to steal to get your food, or where you have to tell stories or lie in order for people to give you things. That's going to damage the meditation.

It's also good if we can live in a place where other great mediators have practiced before. There is a certain blessing or transformation that happens in the place. I remember when I first heard this, it sounded like superstition to me. But when you go to some of the pilgrimage places, for example, Bodhgaya or Mt. Kailash, you find that there is a special energy in these places. I figure if I can feel special energy then it must be there. I am about as tuned in to esoteric, mysterious things as a piece of concrete is.

My own experience from doing pilgrimage is when I am in places where great practitioners have been, it does inspire my mind. It could just be an interplay between your mind and that place because you think of how the great practitioners were, how they practiced, the attainments they received in that place.

Automatically your own mind feels much more uplifted, joyful and enthusiastic about practice.

However, we can't just rely solely on the energy of a place where a great meditator has been in order to practice well. That alone isn't going to take us into deep meditation. I learned this from my own experience. One year Lama Zopa Rinpoche took a small group of students up to Lawudo, the cave where he had meditated for 20 years in his previous life. It's way up in the middle of the Himalayas. It's an incredible, beautiful place. We did a short retreat inside the cave. If you are talking about blessed places, this was it! But my mind was totally bonkers, all over the world, bouncing off the walls! This showed me very clearly that you can be sitting in a room with a holy being, in a holy place, doing a holy practice, but when your mind is uncontrolled, it is uncontrolled.

I'm trying to put things in balance here. There is a certain energy in places where great meditators had been, but don't give it more importance than your own mind.

Also, we want to be in a place where it's free from dangers, where there aren't wild animals or wild people, for that matter. Maybe a place where they have no guns, or there is gun control or some other kind of control.

Also, a place that is free from disease and where there's not much sound. There is no sound of barking dogs, running water, howling wind, or noisy people. Even the sounds of nature can be distracting when you're trying to do single-pointed meditation.

It is good to be in a place that's near other



meditators. We want to be solitary enough to be able to do our practice seriously, yet not too isolated from other like-minded meditators. When we do serious meditations, we often encounter obstacles and difficulties. It's helpful to have Dharma friends around who are doing similar kinds of meditation and who have a similar value system as we do. We can then discuss and seek advice from them when we encounter obstacles and difficulties.

When you go into a serious retreat, you should have all the things that you need with you. I have watched some people go into retreat and every day for the first week or the first month, they come up with a new shopping list of the things they need. They were sure they had everything before, but they didn't.

It is important to make sure that we have a clear understanding of the teachings before we do long retreats. This is the purpose of the study that we are doing now. We want to get a clear understanding of the teachings so that when we do a serious retreat, we will have the 'tools' at our fingertips. We will know how to meditate, what the antidotes for the various obscurations and problems are, and what to do if certain hindrances arise. There are people, especially Westerners, who go into long retreats without knowing what meditation means. This can be quite difficult. It can make the mind restless and uncomfortable. If you don't know what you're doing, then what comes up in your meditation? Well, the usual things that crop up when you are in the city, except that if you don't know how to meditate, you won't know how to deal with them. Therefore it is valuable to have clear instructions, to study and

prepare yourself beforehand.

I received a letter from one young man who had first met the Dharma at one of the courses I was teaching at Tushita [in India]. He had spent three years studying and doing some retreats. Last autumn, he did a strict retreat. He said he had a good experience doing it. He felt that all the years of study he had done had really paid off in this retreat. He felt like he knew what he was doing and where he was going in his meditation. I thought that was quite interesting.

## **2. HAVE FEW DESIRES AND ATTACHMENTS**

The second prerequisite is to be free from gross desires, and to have fewer desires. That means working with our attachment. The more we can do this before a retreat, the easier our retreats are going to be. The more we can subdue our attachments, the easier our whole life is going to be! We have to be able to abandon the mind that is always day dreaming and thinking “How nice it would be to have ...” When a shopping list is coming out of a practitioner’s room every day, it is the desiring mind that is at work.

Sometimes there are legitimate needs that people forget to take care of before the retreat. Sometimes it’s the mind that’s saying, “Oh well, if only I had this, my meditation would go better.” The ‘if only’ list goes on and on and the mind starts wanting ten zillion things. When you’re meditating, you have nothing to distract you from your craving and your cravings get exceptionally forceful and potent, “I need a box of raisins. I can’t meditate without a box of raisins!” This

happens a lot. We have to be mindful in our meditations and during the break times to apply the antidotes when the mind of desire arises.

Actually, the word ‘mindfulness’ has different meanings. In the Theravada practice, mindfulness refers to just witnessing different things. Here, mindfulness is referring not just to witnessing, but also to actively ask ourselves, “How am I responding?” and if a defilement is arising, knowing the antidote and applying it. Here, it isn’t just sitting and watching attachment, clinging or craving as these are coming up, but knowing, “OK, when my mind is stuck in attachment, clinging and craving, I have to meditate on death, on the ugly aspects of the things that I’m attached to, on impermanence and on the disadvantages of cyclic existence.” It is knowing what medicine to give your mind to calm the desires.

The attachment habit is one of the chief obstacles when we start to do serious meditation. It is a particularly hard habit to break for those of us who have grown up to be patriotic consumers. [Laughter.]

### **3. BE CONTENT**

This point is similar but slightly different from the previous point. To be satisfied or content is truly a virtue. Satisfaction doesn’t mean getting all the things that we want. It means being able to say what I have is good enough. When desires pop up, to practice saying, “Oh what I have is good enough. What is happening in my life now is good enough. These clothes are good enough. This house is good enough.” Developing contentment and satisfaction gives us the

ability to be happy no matter where we are living and what's going on. If we don't have contentment and satisfaction, even if we go in to do a retreat in a penthouse hut, the mind is still going to be wavering and discontent. Try having the mind be content with what is happening right now instead of thinking, "Oh when this retreat is over, I'll go and get this and this and that."

It's interesting. When you lead a two-day retreat [that starts on Friday night], people's mind starts leaving on Sunday morning. If you lead a four-day retreat that starts on Wednesday night, people's mind starts leaving on Saturday, which is the day the people who are doing the two-day retreat are just settling in and getting there. And when you lead a month-long retreat the mind starts leaving about a week before the retreat is over. The mind just thinks, "Oh when I go out of retreat I'll get this and do that. I'll talk to this friend and that friend and I'll tell everybody my far out experiences." The mind is so creative in its distractions! We kind of settle into retreat and we have some kind of experiences in meditation, then we get all excited and can't wait for the retreat to be over to tell people about it.

Try to develop the mind of contentment, not letting the mind go into the future with fantasies of pleasures. Not wanting more and better. This is America's theme: more and better, more and better. Whereas here, we are developing contentment, "What I have is good enough." As much as we can develop this in our daily life right now, that much more it will prepare us for serious retreats. It will also make our life right now much more peaceful.

#### **4. AVOID DISTRACTIONS AND EXTRANEOUS ACTIVITIES**

The next quality is to be free from involvement in worldly activities. When we are doing calm abiding meditation, we have to set up a good condition not just externally, but also have some discipline in our mind so that we aren't always communicating with other people. It is very difficult to do a retreat and carry on a social life at the same time. That's why when I lead retreats I encourage people to be silent. As soon as you talk during the break time, when you sit down to meditate, you start rerunning the discussion in your mind. You'll probably see this if you meditate in the evening, or in the middle of the day. You rerun all the things that happened in the day, and our mind gets so picky, "Oh they said this to me, and I said that to them. Oh I hope they didn't misunderstand. I said the wrong thing. They didn't mean this. I responded the wrong way. I've got to get up from my meditation seat. Oh no, they're meditating too. I can't talk to them in the middle of the session, but in the next break I've got to clarify that I didn't mean that, so they're not mad at me and not upset with me." We spend the whole meditation worrying, basically, about our reputation.

Either that or we're on the other end of it and thought, "They said that to me. What did they really mean?" And start analyzing it. Therefore it is important when you are doing meditation, to have your own space and basically mind your own business and not get involved in a lot of what's going on in the community around you and what's going on with the

people around you. This means no telephone calls. No letter writing. No socializing. No doing business, or you will start meditating on, “Well, I bought two of these for five dollars, and I have to sell them for seven dollars to make a profit. If I sell enough then I can meditate for another two years.” We have to keep our energy very much inward, and communication with other people to a minimum. That doesn’t mean blocking other people out when we’re in retreat and being cold. We are very much trying to cultivate a heart of compassion. Rather, it means not getting involved in frivolous socializing that keep our mind chattering away.

Above are some disciplines to think about deeply not only for the days when we go and do serious, long retreats, but also when we go down to Cloud Mountain [Retreat Center] or any other retreat center to do a weekend or a month long retreat; how to make our retreat successful.

## **5. MAINTAIN PURE ETHICAL CONDUCT**

Another quality we need is pure ethical conduct. This is one of the most important ones. Maintaining pure ethical conduct means to abandon the ten destructive actions during the time when we are in retreat. And also to do some purification for the destructive actions we have engaged in previously. When we do retreat, all our ‘stuff’ comes up, one of which is a lot of desire for this, that, and the other thing. Another thing that comes up is a lot of regret, self-hatred and remorse for things that we have done in the past. If we are able to keep good ethical conduct before we do the retreat,

regret and things like that will not come up as much, and this means less hassles and less problems during the retreat.

It is also good to do purification both before retreat and daily while we are in retreat. I was really pleased that during the one-month Lamrim retreat last year, the retreatants, of their own accord, due to the enthusiasm of a few of them, got very conscientious about doing the thirty-five Buddhas and Vajrasattva practice every night. I went to take a walk or read a book or go to sleep, and they were all doing prostrations and Vajrasattva. It was very good because I think it helped the retreat tremendously. As you purify, your whole retreat goes better.

Ethical conduct is important because when you are doing calm abiding meditation you are working on controlling the mind. Before we can control our mind, we have to practice controlling our verbal and physical actions. Our actions are much easier to control than our mind. They say everything comes from the mind. The mind is the originator or source of all activities. First the mind moves, then the speech or the body. If we want to stop negativities, we have to start with stopping the actions that happen after a time delay or time lapse. It's easier to stop the verbal and physical negativities and then work on the mind. It will be very difficult to control our mind if we can't even control a little of our speech and our body.

## **6. ABANDON PRECONCEPTIONS ABOUT SENSE OBJECTS**

The last one is to abandon preconceptions regarding

sense objects. This has to do with having much attachment or aversion towards sense objects. It also has to do with developing a proper motivation for meditation. If we think, “Well, I’m going to develop calm abiding so that I’ll feel good or I’ll be famous or I’ll have clairvoyant powers,” our motivation is one of attachment to the happiness of this life. But the mind of calm abiding is a mind of the form realm which has given up attachment to the realm of desires. If we have a motivation that’s very much concerned with desire realm success, our reputation and our own personal benefit, it will become an obstacle to our meditation. It becomes more difficult to leave this kind of attachment to go into the mind of calm abiding.

So above are the circumstances for having calm abiding meditation.

## **More Advice on Doing Retreat or Meditation Practice**

### **Consistency**

When we’re doing calm abiding meditation, we do a very consistent practice, not taking a day off. Actually, this is true whether you’re doing a calm abiding retreat or any other kind of retreat. It is very important to keep the consistency up. If you take a day off in the middle of your retreat, you need another five days to get back to where you were before you took the day off. A retreat is very much a practice of developing a new pattern, developing a



new habit, and immersing your mind in the Dharma. If you take a day off and go into town, the energy is lost. You don't realize it until you do it, and then you have to go back and then you will realize, "Oh God I blew it, didn't I?"

## **Starting with shorter sessions**

Calm abiding is a special kind of meditation where we're trying to develop the ability to focus the mind single-pointedly. We're not doing a lot of analysis and investigation of other things. We identify our object of meditation and then hold the mind on the object without letting it either get lax or excited. It is recommended that we do short sessions at the beginning, because we can't concentrate very well. You probably notice when you do the breathing meditation that you get about two breaths on a good meditation before your first distraction comes.

It is good to start with short sessions. Gradually as our ability to concentrate improves, we lengthen the duration of the sessions. Often, they recommend having eighteen sessions a day at the beginning of the practice, each lasting about just five or ten minutes, not very long but something potent. You have a session and a break time, and another session and a break time, and so on.

## **What to do during the breaks**

In calm abiding meditation, break times are very important. In other kinds of retreats that you do, you may want to read a book in your break time to help

you in your retreat. For example, if you are doing a retreat on Chenrezig, in the break time, you might want to read about Chenrezig or about compassion. This will help your retreat on Chenrezig. But if you're doing calm abiding then you do not want to do too much activity in the break time. You don't want to read too much because it makes the conceptual mind more active. This will make it more difficult to stay firm on the object of meditation.

In different retreats, we act differently, and we have just seen one difference above. Actually in all retreats that we do, it is incredibly important to be mindful in the break time. Be aware, "What am I feeling and thinking? What am I about to say, what am I about to do?" To be very aware of what our experience is, is important not only in retreat but also in daily life. Otherwise we develop a kind of schizophrenic mind that says my meditation is here and my life is over there. In our meditation we are mindful of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, but as soon as we get up from our meditation seat, we let our mind run all over the place.

This is something to be very careful about in our daily meditation and especially in retreat so that we carry the energy with us in a retreat situation. Also if you're mindful in this way in retreat, it makes coming out of retreat much easier. You do not have the schizophrenic mind of retreat and break time. Everything becomes part of your meditation. When you do retreat, you see how much of what you do in the break time influences your retreat sessions. You can probably see it in your daily meditation too.

What you do during the day influences the quality

of your meditation. In our daily life we have a long break time between sessions [laughter]. The more mindful we can be, the better it is for our meditation.

### **When to lengthen the session**

In a calm abiding retreat, except for time spent eating and sleeping, you're trying to meditate most of the time. As I said before, you might do a short session followed by a short break, and then another short session and another break, and so on. Gradually, as the ability to concentrate improves, you can increase the session time. But you want to have your meditations fairly stable before you increase the session time. You don't increase the duration of all your sessions because you had one ten-minute session that went very well. You want to ensure it is a consistent pattern before you increase the duration.

### **Do not push ourselves too hard**

It is important not to push ourselves in meditation. If we push ourselves and try to sit too long, concentrate too hard, we end up making the mind tight. We begin to look at our meditation cushion with dread instead of with pleasure, "I have to go sit again and fight with my mind." Therefore it is important to make your sessions a reasonable length of time. When I was preparing for this session, I recalled what Lama Yeshe used to tell us. We didn't do any calm abiding meditation, but he had us do deity meditation or Lamrim meditation. He would tell us to make the session about an hour or an hour and a quarter long;

not to sit there and push ourselves for two or three hours.

But we pushed ourselves. We did group retreats where the sessions were two hours or two and a half hours. You would just push, push, and push to get yourself to sit there. But it doesn't work. Your mind becomes tight and we wrongly think that meditation is just all a matter of will power. But you can't willpower your mind into meditation. Make your sessions of reasonable length and take breaks, go outdoors, stretch the mind and stretch the body. Then when it is time to go sit again, you feel happy to do it. You like the place. It is a place where you can make friends with yourself, not a place where you have to fight yourself because you expect too much and want yourself to do something that you're not ready to do.

*[Audience:] What is lung?*

The Tibetans have this expression *lung*. *Lung* means the wind or air element in the body. It is easy for this element to get out of balance. One way that it gets out of balance is if we push ourselves in meditation, if we see meditation as a matter of willpower, "I'm gonna sit here for two hours and concentrate!" Or we get tight with our concentration. Or when our minds are distracted, instead of being patient with ourselves by thinking, "Of course my mind is distracted, I've never tried to concentrate before." We get angry, judgmental and critical, "Oh, I'm not doing it right. I'm not doing it properly. Everybody else is meditating better than I am. I bet no one else has these kinds of problems. What's wrong with me? Everything in my life is a

mess!” This creates a lot of tension or what they call *lung* or wind imbalance. It comes from this kind of combative, heavy mind.

*Lung* manifests in different ways in different people. One way is you become extremely restless. You have pushed your mind so tight, the mind is like [explosion sound] and it becomes exceedingly restless. Some people get *lung* in the form of fatigue, where they are just constantly tired. Other people get *lung* in the form of pain—pain in the back, stomach or heart area. When *lung* happens, you have to let loose and relax your mind and meditation a bit.

I always believe in *lung* prevention. I am like Smokey the Bear [laughter]. When I do retreat, I take long walks. This is very important for me. This is the way I prevent *lung*. If I get out and look at nature, at flowers, at the stars, and into the far distance, the mind relaxes. There is not this kind of tension and pushing.

Let’s talk about the cushion and the environment in the room.

### **The environment in the room**

It is not necessary to face the wall when you meditate. But if your mind is very excited and it helps when you face the wall, then do it. I find that for me, facing the wall when meditating is not particularly helpful. I know in the Zen tradition they do that.

If your mind tends to be sluggish, then you want to sit in the bright part of the room and to make sure your room is bright and cheerful. You want the room where you meditate to be clean and not be littered

with all your paraphernalia and junk. [Laughter.] Otherwise your mind gets distracted. Having lived in a monastic situation, when I go and stay in people's houses at times, there are so many things in some of these houses and I would have the urge to go and clean everything up. [Laughter.] I think that somehow our environment reflects our mind. The two things interrelate. If you make your meditation area tidy, it is easier for your mind to be tidy.

Also, when you do sessions, have everything taken care of before you do the session. This way you don't have to sit there with a notepad and write down all the things you [laughter] need to do. It is very helpful sometimes when you start a session to say to yourself (let's say your session lasts half an hour), "Do I have this time free right now to do this?" And you check, "Yes I have this time free. OK, then I have a half an hour I can spend mediating now, and there isn't anything urgent to be done to pull me off the cushion". This helps the mind to be a little firmer and more stable when we start the session.

## **The meditation cushion**

You want to have a cushion that is even, not lumpy and not off-balance. This way you're not sitting leaning off to one side nor are you leaning backwards or forwards. The Tibetans usually sit on quite a flat surface. But most of us find it easier to have a cushion under our rear. They actually advice doing this because it enables you to keep your spine straight and your legs and your rear don't fall asleep. By keeping your spine straight it helps the flow of the energies

within the body which helps the meditation. There are different types of cushions—round or square, hard or soft, flat or low. You might have to experiment to find out what works for you. But again be aware that the mind can take off and be dissatisfied, always wanting to change cushions like musical chairs.

That's why when you do a tantric retreat and you are counting mantra, you have to do that number of mantra in one place on one cushion. I think it is done this way to take care of this restless mind. As you do retreat and you cut down your relationship with sense objects, then all the small things in your environment become really inflated. How comfortable this cushion is and many other small things become issues. Sometimes in retreats you will see people constantly changing their seat. Every session their sitting place looks different. They will sit with their feet tucked under one of those little benches (I forget what you call them). Then they're on a chair, and then they're doing something else. After experimenting a while, it is good to settle on one thing that seems to work best and stick with that.

It does take your body some getting used to sitting cross-legged. It can be painful and you do have to be patient with your body. I think there is some kind of change that happens even in your physical energy as you meditate with time. When I first began meditating, I was a lay person and I remember sitting in the meditation hall. The nuns were in front and they didn't move. It was like, "Oh, my goodness!" Ven. Sangye Khadro was already ordained then and she did not move. I was sitting there and I had so much problem with my right knee that every five minutes I

had to stretch my leg out. I was squirming. My back hurt. My knee hurt. My body itched. “This is impossible!” And it was ‘impossible’ like that for about a year (and maybe even a little longer) of serious practice.

But eventually the energy in the body begins to change. Your body gets used to it and you can sit for a longer period of time. The restless physical energy calms down and your muscles get stretched out. But you have to stick with it initially. Of course, don’t torture yourself and don’t cause permanent damage. People always say, “If it hurts very badly, what do you do?” I am not one of these samurai Zen people who says, “SIT THERE!” I say move your leg. But before you move your leg, check up and see what is going on. See if you do need to move it or if it is just the mind being restless. When you move it, move it mindfully. Some people can spend some time looking at the pain in the meditation and find it quite helpful. At some point we do have to build up some tolerance for discomfort. If every time you are uncomfortable you move, then you’ll never get anywhere because our body is an organism that is constantly uncomfortable. When it hurts badly, then you move. But until it gets to that point, try to develop a little bit of patience with it, without straining yourself.

If you’re doing other kinds of retreats and not calm abiding retreat, it can be very helpful to do prostrations in between sessions. With calm abiding you do not want to move your body too much between sessions. But if you are doing a Lamrim retreat or deity retreat, doing prostrations between sessions can be very helpful. It is important that when



you do prostrations, put a cushion under your knees to protect them. When you're doing long prostrations especially, don't crash your knees down on the floor when you're going down. Put your hands down first, followed by your knees, and then stretch out. Do take care of your knees if you are doing a lot of prostrations.

The Tibetans have a custom of putting a swastika under your meditation seat or cushion. You draw it with chalk or on a piece of paper and put it under your seat. It's a swastika that doesn't go the same direction as the Nazi one. This one goes clockwise. Don't get worried. It's quite interesting. It's a symbol of Buddhism. If you go to China you'll see swastikas all over. It's an ancient, Asian symbol and it's for auspiciousness, hope and well-being.

You also put some kusha grass under your seat. This is the grass that they make brooms out of. It's the grass that's very straight. This is the grass that the Buddha sat on when he attained enlightenment under the bodhi tree. Some people would even sleep on kusha grass. They believe that it's purifying and it helps to clear the mind. It helps to straighten the mind. Often you take two sticks of kusha grass and you put it with the tips forward and coming together, as in being single-pointed. You put them underneath your cushion.

And then there is a kind of long life grass too, which is a grass that has many joints and knots in it. It is like long crabgrass, the kind that keeps growing on your lawn. It's customary too, to put some of that under your meditation seat. It symbolizes long life.

## **Shrine**

It can be helpful to have a shrine where you are meditating. I highly recommend this for your daily meditation practice. For your life in general, it's very nice to have pictures of the Buddhas there. When you are all frazzled, you might just be walking past it and see the Buddha, and the Buddha is just sitting there, and it occurs to you, "Oh yeah, I can be like that too. Calm down." [Laughter.] Having a shrine in front of your seat can be very helpful. Make some offerings on the shrine.

When you are doing calm abiding meditation and you're using the visualized image of the Buddha as your object of meditation, then it's especially helpful to have an image of the Buddha there. You can look at the Buddha and it helps when you close your eyes to visualize it.

Similarly, in terms of your daily practice, if you're doing Chenrezig meditation or Tara, if you have a picture of the deity, then you can look at it before you visualize and do your practice. Or before we do the prayers like we have been doing here, look at the merit field, look at the Buddha, and that helps in your visualization before you do the prayers.

## **Sitting posture**

In terms of your posture, it's recommended to sit in the crossed vajra position. It's not called the lotus position. It's called the vajra position. The way you do this is first you put your left leg on your right thigh. And then you put the right leg on the left thigh. If you

can do that, it is very good. If you can't do that, then you put your right leg down, so your left leg is on your right thigh, but your right leg is down. It's called the half vajra position. Another way to sit is like how Tara sits, except with your legs closer to your body—your left leg in against your body and your right leg in front. Both of your legs are flat on the floor. Or, you can just sit cross-legged. It's going to depend a lot on your body. I think it's often easier for women than for men to sit crossed-legged, because of the construction of our bodies.

When you get to high stages of practice, being able to sit in the vajra position is important. At our level of practice it's less important. If you need to sit in a chair, do so. But if you train yourself a little each day to sit cross-legged so that your body gets stretched out and familiar with the position, it is very helpful.

Some time or another, you will have to sit cross-legged. If you go to the teachings in India, you can't bring a chair along. [Laughter.] Many people like to use the bench, but I think later on, it is still good to train your legs, if you can, to sit cross-legged.

Your right hand is on the left, with the thumbs touching forming a triangle. This is in your lap, and depending on where your navel is, your thumbs are either at your navel or a little below your navel. Sometimes I see people holding their hands up [not resting on the lap], and it looks incredibly uncomfortable. Rest your hands on your lap. Your thumbs should not slouch, but they're up forming a triangle. You get used to this position after a while.

The shoulders are level, and the back is straight. There is some space between your arms and your

body, allowing air to circulate. Don't hold your arms in [against your body] like this and don't stick them out like chicken wings. But again, a position that's comfortable and reasonable.

To help get the head at the right angle, it can be helpful to imagine that you are being pulled up by the crown of your head. Your head might be very slightly inclined. It's not inclined too much. It's not sky gazing. And it's not in a rigid military position. It's straight and erect but it's not military-like.

The eyes are lowered. Don't roll your eyes back in their sockets. Some people think this is a sign of being holy. No. [Laughter.] They say you can have your eyes directed toward the tip of your nose, but many of us find that very uncomfortable. You can loosely focus your eyes down on the ground in front of you. Open your eyes a little, but do not focus on anything in particular. Keeping your eyes a little open is a good habit to get into. I know very often your eyes close naturally, but they say in the long run it's better to go through the difficulties and learn to meditate with your eyes a little bit open.

One reason for this is that you won't experience this big difference of seeing things and feeling the visual world as imposing when you arise from your meditation. Another reason is that with your eyes a wee bit open, some light comes in, and you don't get as drowsy. Also, you learn not to pay attention to the visual consciousness. It's functioning, but you're not paying attention to it in your meditation. This is also very helpful later on in your practice. It's also helpful for maintaining your visualization during your break time when you are using your visual consciousness.

You have already trained yourself to be able to visualize with some visual appearance, with light coming in your eyes. In the long run it becomes helpful if you can do that.

But I wouldn't make a big deal out of it. I wouldn't strain myself and I wouldn't be constantly checking to see how much my eyes are open. But just kind of try to do it. Don't open your eyes fully and look straight out ahead and stare at everything. It's not like that. It's just opening your eyes very slightly, and letting some light come in. Level shoulders, straight back, your head slightly inclined, your eyes slightly open. Leave your lips and your teeth in a natural position. Don't clench your jaw. They say it is good to have the tip of your tongue on the upper palate. I've always wondered where else you are going to put the tip of your tongue. But I have heard subsequently in talking with other people, that some people have more room in their mouth than I have in mine, and the tongue can wander all over the place [laughter]. But in my mouth there is no other place it can be, but against the roof of the mouth. It is good to do because then when you develop deep concentration, you won't start salivating and drooling [laughter]. If you go into samadhi for a few hours, you don't want to make a mess. [Laughter.]

### **Circumstances, refuge, motivation**

Last time we talked about how to create a good circumstance for doing calm abiding meditation. This includes the external circumstance where you want to meditate and the internal circumstance in terms of

having few desires, being content, having good ethical conduct and lessening one's preconceptions about sense objects. Then we talked about the cushion, the meditation seat and also your posture when you sit down to meditate.

After you sit down to meditate and are all ready to go, it is good to check your motivation to make sure that your motivation for doing the practice is pure. We want to be sure that we are not just aiming to achieve the state of calm abiding because it is something far out and wonderful. We also want to be sure that we do not want to achieve calm abiding because we ourselves want to be far out and wonderful. Instead we should aim for calm abiding because we see its place in the whole Dharma practice and its value in terms of giving us a more powerful, concentrated mind to be able to actualize the other attributes of the path.

To be free from cyclic existence, we need to realize emptiness. Our realization of emptiness has to be strong. In order for our realization of emptiness to be strong, we need calm abiding. So with refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and with an awareness of the importance of calm abiding, we make the decision or the determination to try and attain full enlightenment for the benefit of others. In this way we really permeate our meditation on calm abiding with bodhicitta.

It is quite important to keep a pure motivation in what we are doing, because anything we do with bodhicitta becomes karmically very powerful. When you have bodhicitta, any small action has behind it the wish for the welfare of all beings and for their

enlightenment, so any action done with bodhicitta becomes extremely powerful and creates a lot of positive potential. That positive potential then enriches the mind and enables us to attain realizations quicker.

So you see, if you do the calm abiding meditation with the motivation of bodhicitta, it helps to create positive potential which then helps you to actually attain calm abiding. Also, it then ensures that if we do attain calm abiding, we are going to use it for the proper purpose and not just get side-tracked because it is so blissful. I think this is why many of the Tibetan lamas do not put their beginning students in calm abiding retreat because it is so tempting just to get blissed out. You can then stay blissed out for a long time and not develop all the other qualities on the path. But if you have bodhicitta, it ensures that even if you get calm abiding, you are going to use it to develop the other qualities and realizations on the path so that you can actually free yourself and others. Therefore, when you do calm abiding retreat it is very important to meditate on bodhicitta at the beginning of the session.

## **What to do first in preparation for the actual calm abiding meditation**

### ***Meditating on the breath and generating bodhicitta***

When you first sit down to meditate your mind will be a little bit turbulent and distracted, therefore it is good to watch the breath for a couple of minutes to settle the mind down and then generate the motivation with

prayers. We do prayers at the beginning of the session to remind us of our motivation. It is very good to learn to cultivate the motivation on your own by explaining it to yourself in your daily meditation sessions. In this way you learn to generate bodhicitta on your own. I do it very quickly each session here to remind people of it, but it is good if you take some time in your practice and learn to do it yourself.

### ***Seven limb prayer***

At the beginning of the session, maybe do a couple of minutes of breathing, and then generate the bodhicitta. Then it is good to do the Seven Limb Prayer before you start the actual calm abiding meditation. With the Seven Limb Prayer you purify lots of negative karma which obscures the mind and you also enrich the mind with a lot of positive karma. That is why we do the Seven Limb Prayer before our sessions here. It is a standard prayer and, in fact, many of the longer prayers and even deity meditations, focus very much around the Seven Limb Prayer. The Lama Chopa or Guru Puja is basically a long Seven Limb Prayer plus a *lamrim* review prayer and a few other things thrown in. It is basically a Seven Limb Prayer practice.

### ***Requests***

After the Seven Limb Prayer it is good to do some requests to the Guru-Buddha, to your spiritual teacher in the aspect of Shakyamuni Buddha. That is what we are doing here and why we do the request prayers.



Requesting their inspiration helps to wake the mind up, tune it in and makes us feel close, sustained and helped in our practice. So the request is quite important too.

## **Duration of the session**

Then when that is completed, you can actually start the calm abiding meditation. It is good, especially at the beginning, to make the session short. The quality of the session is more important than the length. You then slowly extend the sessions as your ability to hold the object of meditation increases.

## **The Object of Meditation**

Now we come to the topic of what object of meditation to use to develop calm abiding. This is quite an interesting subject because it is going to vary a lot from person to person. The Buddha actually gave quite extensive teachings on what we call the ‘object of observation’ or the ‘object of meditation’—what you are holding as the focal thing to concentrate on to develop calm abiding. The Buddha made many different kinds of objects because people have different tendencies and dispositions and what is good for one person may not be good for another person.

It is quite interesting. I will not go into this in-depth, but it is as if almost anything there is could be an object of meditation. You can meditate on impermanence. You can meditate on the different sorts of phenomena. There are a few quite standard

objects of meditation that people very often use to develop calm abiding. One is the breath. A second one is the image of the Buddha. Some people might use the nature of mind and other people might use emptiness—these last two are much more difficult. Some people might use loving-kindness and develop calm abiding doing that.

The Buddha divided the objects with which we can develop calm abiding into four general categories:

1. Pervasive or extensive objects
2. Objects for purifying behavior
3. Skillful objects of observation
4. Objects for purifying afflictions

## **OBJECTS FOR PURIFYING BEHAVIOR**

I thought I would explain more specifically the second category ‘objects for purifying behavior’ because it contains a lot of information about how to counteract the behaviors and attitudes that get in our way. There are objects for purifying desire, objects for purifying anger and hatred, objects for purifying obscuration, objects for purifying pride, and objects for purifying discursiveness, or distraction. If you master these, it will help you no matter what other object you meditate on.

Even if you do not choose one of these as your object of meditation for developing calm abiding, even if you choose something else like the image of the Buddha, if you know these particular objects, it is going to be easier to develop calm abiding, because it will help you to eliminate distractions. In the process

of explaining the objects for purifying behavior, we will also get into a lot of the nitty-gritty teachings found in all the traditions. I am going to explain these more in-depth because I find them quite helpful in dealing with the day-to-day stuff that arises. As I start to describe these some of you are going to go, “Yikes!” so I am warning you now and if you begin to feel that way, you will know that I have told you so. [Laughter.]

## **Purifying desire**

The first one is ‘objects to purify desire.’ The kind of desire that we are talking about is attachment. There are different kinds of desire, there is a positive kind of desire and there is a negative kind of desire. Positive desire is when you have an aspiration for enlightenment, but here the word ‘desire’ is being used in a negative sense. Examples are clinging attachment, craving, obsession or compulsion. I am not using the terms ‘obsession’ and ‘compulsion’ in the psychological sense of you needing to check for your keys every five minutes or something like that. Rather I am talking about your regular obsession and how we get obsessed with objects like our paycheck, or our physical looks, or a person whom we are attached to, or our image. So we are talking about the mind that is full of attachment and really gets stuck.

You probably notice this type of obsession when we do the breathing meditation before class. What floats through the mind as we are trying to concentrate on the breath? Food, sex, money, image. These are standard stuff and you are not the only one

who does it. [Laughter.] We often think, “Oh goodness, if anybody read my mind when I was meditating I would be so embarrassed.” In actual fact, all of us are basically the same.

### *Meditate on ugliness*

Very often, what our mind gets stuck with is our own body or somebody else’s body. We have lots of attachments of this kind. When we are attached to our own body we are concerned with “How much do I weigh? Am I good looking enough? Is my hair the right color? Am I athletic enough?” You know how obsessed we get with our bodies. We become exactly what the media teaches us we should be. So when you follow media instructions and are all obsessed with your body, meditation on ugliness is the meditation to do. [Laughter.] It is also good when we are obsessed with other people’s bodies—when you are trying to meditate and somebody that you are physically attracted to floats through your mind, and there goes your single-pointed concentration.

So when the mind is stuck on attachment, it is very good to meditate on ugliness. The Buddha described many meditations for ugliness. The following meditation is incredibly effective. It sounds awful, but it is effective and it really works if you do it. It works one-hundred percent. You can meditate on internal ugliness and external ugliness. Internal ugliness is when you meditate on what is inside the body. Nothing is made up in this meditation. We are just going to take a good, honest look at what is inside the body.

## ***Meditation on the internal ugliness of the body***

The Buddha talked about thirty-six organs that you can meditate on. So you can just sit there with the wandering, fantasizing mind of attachment and start looking at your body. There is hair, nails, teeth, sweat, body odor (If you are getting all hot and bothered about somebody in your meditation, remember what they smell like), skin, flesh, bones, channels, arteries, ducts, veins, kidneys, heart, liver, lungs, small intestine, large intestine, stomach and the upper part of the stomach, bladder, spleen, rectum, saliva, snot, oily connective tissue, limb, marrow, fat, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, brain, the membrane over the brains, urine and old age spots. [Laughter.]

This really works for attachment. It is very good when you are all infatuated about your own body or worried about your own body.

This is also quite effective when the mind gets nervous about dying and is thinking things like, “I’m going to leave this body. Who am I going to be without this body? Well, I’m going to be without this body that is lungs, guts, snot, etc.” Then you begin to realize, “Oh, why am I so afraid about dying? Giving up this body is not giving up some kind of pleasure palace.” It really eases the fear of death, because it makes us think, what is there to hang on to in this body? What is there to be attached to? It is no great beautiful thing.

***Purpose of the meditation is not to cultivate hatred of the body or person***

In doing this meditation we have to work against our old Judeo-Christian upbringing that says the body is bad and the body is dirty. The Buddha is not saying the body is bad. I repeat ... the Buddha is not saying the body is bad. This meditation is not to cultivate hatred of the body or a neurotic fear and distrust of our body. We do this meditation simply to counter-balance the mind of attachment that creates an image of a body that has nothing to do with the body that actually exists. This meditation is done simply to bring the mind into equilibrium. We get all stuck on attachment to our own body, or we get all involved in sexual fantasies about somebody else's body, and this meditation makes us check up on what exactly we are getting all hot and bothered about. So it is used to bring the mind into equilibrium and it works one-hundred percent.

This meditation is not designed to make the body out as evil, sinful, or hateful and it is not designed to make us blame or criticize the other person for their body. I say this because sometimes when people have a lot of sexual desire and do this meditation thinking of the ugliness of the body of the person that they are attached to, they start disliking the person. That is not the purpose of this meditation, it is not the person's fault that they have that body. Well, they created the karma and the afflictions to get born like that, but we are not meditating this way to develop dislike for another sentient being. This meditation is directed towards the mind that is imagining the body to be more beautiful than it is.

*[Audience:] It seems like with this meditation you*

*would be cutting yourself down because you don't like your body.*

That is like having one mind saying, "I want this body to be beautiful!" and then another mind saying, "But it isn't because you are a creep." We are already doing this in our life, so this is not the purpose of the meditation. When we think like this, we are not really giving up attachment to the body, because we are still identifying very much with our body and still very attached to the body.

What the meditation does, is it is saying, "Hey! If you want to be beautiful, don't look to your body to be beautiful, because you have other stuff inside that can be more beautiful." It is really helping us to stop this gross identification with "I am this body." It is to help us stop thinking that this body reflects everything about who we are.

### ***Venerable's long, beautiful hair***

This meditation was very useful for me when I first met the Dharma. You people did not know me at that time, but I had long, beautiful hair. I was very attached to my hair, because it took me years to grow it down to my waist. When I started hearing about attachment and the disadvantages of attachment, I started realizing how attached I was to my appearance, especially my hair. I then decided that I needed to counteract this attachment.

It sounds grotesque, but it is completely within the realm of what this meditation is doing. I would say to myself, "Okay, there you are. You are so vain about

your hair and your physical appearance. When you die you are going to be a beautiful corpse with long beautiful hair.” Then I imagined myself to be a corpse with long beautiful hair and go, “Is that what you want to be?” I put that question to myself, “Is that what you want to be? Is this the purpose of your life? Is this the whole meaning of your precious human life, to go around being so vain about your hair that at the end you are a corpse with long beautiful hair?” When I put that question to myself it became real clear that this was not the purpose or meaning of life. This was not what I wanted to have to show for myself when I died. This meditation really helped my mind let go of clinging to appearance and to hair. It was what enabled me to finally be able to cut my hair and be happy about it.

The first time I cut my hair, I didn’t shave it, I cut it short. That was like my biggest Dharma practice. My hair was a real object of attachment, so when I cut it off I put some on the altar in the room I was sharing with some other women during a course I was attending. I put some of my beautiful hair on the altar. Then somebody walked in afterwards and said, “Eeww, who put all this hair on the altar?” [Laughter.] That was certainly a lesson in emptiness and on how the mind creates the object, because what was so beautiful and valuable to me was something disgusting to somebody else. [Laughter.]

### ***Meditation on external ugliness***

If you are attached to the color of the body, there are meditations to do to counteract it, and these are



practiced especially in Theravada countries. People actually go to the cemeteries and do these meditations. You contemplate the four colors of a rotting corpse. These are: putrid blue, putrid black, pus colored and putrid red. They say if you cannot go to a cemetery to do this meditation, you can buy a piece of meat in the summer and just watch what happens to it, because basically our body is a piece of meat, isn't it?

This meditation is very effective because it helps us develop the determination to be free from cyclic existence. This body that is made of flesh, blood and guts and decays like this, what are we hanging on to it for? When we can have a body of light that is completely pure, what are we hanging on to this decaying thing for? It is useful as a tool for the practice of Dharma, but it is hard to find any other value for it. So the meditation helps us center on what really is the purpose of our life. It helps us focus on what we want to do and what it is we want out of life.

Do we just want a happy, beautiful body? If what we want is a happy beautiful body, we can try our whole life to get that body but we are never going to succeed. The very nature of the body is that it gets old and is prone to illness, aging and disease. If you do not like this kind of body, then cut the ignorance, attachment and anger that cling to it and are attached to it, and get a body of light. This is really emphasizing why Dharma practice is so important, what our potential is and what the purpose of our life is.

We keep coming back to this in a whole bunch of different ways. But it is very important, because if we

do not have this kind of understanding, if we do not even have the basic desire to get out of cyclic existence, then even if we do high tantric meditation, where are we going to get to? How are we going to realize any higher kind of meditation if we are so attached to cyclic existence? Is this making some sense? I find in my own practice that it is so important to keep coming back to this point.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

When I go places and see people all decked out in finery, I feel an incredible sense of sadness. It is as if that is all they see as valuable in their life. That is the meaning of their life, to deck themselves out and look beautiful. But where does that get you? On the one hand, I feel sad when I see this. But on the other hand, I can look and say, “This is beautiful. I offer it to the Buddha.” So you develop some flexibility of mind. You can see things in a variety of ways and in a variety of situations. You do not have to go around all day, “Yikes, this is ugly!”

So I think that it is helpful to develop that flexibility of mind and be able to see the same thing in a variety of ways. It also prepares us to understand emptiness at some point, because we stop grasping onto the way an object appears to us as being the way that it really exists.

### *More antidotes for attachment to a person*

If you are attached to the **shape of the body**, for example somebody’s face, the shape of their face and

how good-looking they are, you can visualize it as if an animal had chewed part of it off. Scatter the body parts all over. This works for sexual desire. If you are distracted in your meditation by sexual desire, this meditation works. Your mind will not wander anymore when you do this one.

If you are attached to the **touch of the body**, then as you meditate you think of the flesh with worms in it or it being like a skeleton. You imagine touching a person's bones. And if you are attached specifically to sexual pleasure, then you meditate on the person as being a movable corpse, which is basically what we are, movable corpses.

If you are attached not so much to the physical aspects of sex, but more to the emotional part and to the person's good qualities and how wonderful that person is, how good that person's mind is, that they are well-respected because they have a good nature, or a **good personality**, then you can still meditate on them as being a corpse, because a corpse does not have a personality. So again it shows you that the person might be a very nice person, but it makes you think about why you are attached because a corpse does not have a personality. Getting in touch with what our body is, is very effective for developing the determination to be free.

When I was in Singapore, one of my students died. They cremate people there, so I went before the cremation and we did some prayers. Then they put the body in the crematorium and you go back a few hours later and go through the ashes and pick out the pieces of bones with chopsticks. This is very good for developing compassion, because here is this person

that you care about, who was so attached to a body and at the end the body is ashes and bones.

Also, this thing of picking up the bones with chopsticks—what a meditation on impermanence it is. You go through your whole life creating this thing of, “*Me!* Here I am—notice me!” and at the end what is left is just bones that your friends pick out with chopsticks.

### *A reality check*

This meditation helps get our mind very clear. It is not morose, it is not revolting and it is not seeing the body as evil. It is just thinking about what is going on here and is a reality check. Meditating on death and impermanence poses some important questions: What is the meaning of our life? What is important in our life? What do we have to show for our life when we die? This puts us right back into the Dharma, because our mind and our karma are what we have to show for ourselves when we die, not our body, not our possessions, nor our reputation. The Dharma is what goes with us. The body and all the physical things stay here, but our mind, our karma and the habitual attitudes that we have cultivated—those go on with us.

Sometimes we get very jealous of somebody who can do something better than we can, or who has something that we do not have. It is very helpful to remember that that person is like a moving corpse. Then compassion comes for that person instead of jealousy. Here is this person who thinks that they have something valuable. Basically they have a body and

they have a mind, but what are they doing with their mind? Then compassion comes and jealousy very quickly goes away, because we realize that there is nothing to be jealous of anyway. This kind of meditation breaks our karmic patterns of being obsessed about the body and physical things. It breaks the habit of clinging. This frees the mind greatly and makes it much more powerful for meditation.

### ***A field of bones***

There is one meditation they do where you imagine your own body. You imagine the skin and the flesh slowly dissolving so that there is just the skeleton. Then you imagine that skeleton getting bigger and it becomes a huge field of bones. Then you develop single-pointedness on this image of the field of bones. That is your object of meditation. It makes the mind really calm.

All these meditations are done to bring the mind into balance. They are not done to create hatred for the body or to become morose. We have to learn how to properly use these meditations. If we are doing too much of these and our mind starts getting depressed or something, then we definitely have to meditate on loving-kindness and remember that sentient beings have a mind also and that they have been kind to us and want happiness. In this way, we open our hearts towards them.

### **Purifying hatred**

Next are the objects for purifying hatred. Here we do

the metta or loving-kindness meditation. This is done quite a bit in the Theravada tradition. We start out by thinking of ourselves and wishing ourselves to be well and happy. Then we think of friends and wish them to be well and happy and free of distress. Then we move on to strangers, then to people whom we do not know and develop that same wish for them. Then finally we think of people we do not get along with and really think, “Wouldn’t it be wonderful if they had happiness and the causes of happiness? May I cause them to have these.”

You might be visualizing and thinking about other sentient beings and opening your heart to them. What you concentrate on is your feeling of love. So the meditation on love is not thinking of the definition of love and holding the definition of love in your mind with single-pointed concentration. That is not the meditation on love. It is not that you develop a concept of love and focus on that. Rather you do this whole meditation of really wishing others well and imagining them being well and happy. You develop the kind of joyous, buoyant mind that is full of love, then you remain single-pointed on that feeling of love. You go through the whole meditation to cultivate the feeling of love and then you develop single-pointedness on it.

In this meditation, start with yourself and think, “May I be well and happy. May I be free of attachment to my body and all the craziness in my life and my mind that makes my life crazy.” Then you spread it towards the people you care about. Think of specific people. Then think of relatives. Then spread it to strangers, people whom you don’t know, and wish

the same thing for them. Then spread it towards people whom you don't like very much and with whom you do not get along. Really think, "How wonderful it would be if they had happiness and its causes," because if they were happy we would probably like them a whole lot. Basically, it is because they are unhappy that they do things that we find distasteful. So this meditation on loving-kindness helps us alleviate our hatred. This is why it is called the meditation for purifying hatred, anger and aversion. It is a very nice meditation to do.

### **Purifying obscuration**

The third one in this category is for purifying obscuration. Obscuration is ignorance, the mind that does not understand things very well. So here what we do is we meditate on dependent arising, and we meditate on how things that exist arose from causes, and how things that exist now become causes for future results. This meditation is quite effective. We begin to see how things do not exist as external, objective entities, but that they arise simply because the causes for them exist. We begin to see that there is no creator of the universe and manager of the universe that brought things into existence, but that they come into existence because the causes for them exist ...

*[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]*

### **Purifying pride**

The next one is the object for purifying pride. Pride is an over-inflated view of self, the big “*I am so wonderful,*” or the complementary “*I am so terrible.*” [Laughter.] Either way you look at it, it is the big ‘I.’ We are making this “I” big and solid, so what we do to purify it is to meditate on the constituents, the different factors that compose the body and mind. You dissect the body and the mind into its constituent elements.

You think of the warmth element in the body, the solid element, the fluid element and all these different qualities of the body. Or you think about the different consciousnesses and sense organs that enable us to perceive objects and so on. We start looking at ourselves as basically a composition of many constituent parts instead of a big solid ‘I’. As we start analyzing the various constituents the feeling of pride goes away because we realize that there is no big ‘I’ that is in charge of the whole show. It really helps to settle the mind down.

Another method for eliminating pride is to meditate on the twelve links, twelve sources, eighteen constituents & other difficult subjects. Trying to understand these can be difficult, and that automatically makes our pride go down because we recognize that we are not so big and smart after all.

Also, what I find effective for pride is remembering that everything I know, or everything I have, came from other people. It is not mine to begin with or end with. It is just something that is in transit, so what is there to get so proud about?

## **Purifying discursiveness**



The next one is the object for purifying discursiveness. This is used if you think too much, or if you have lots of concepts. In Tibetan the term is 'nam-tog' which means preconceptions or superstition. Basically this is when you have a brain that does not shut up. These thoughts or concepts may wind up as the object of meditation. What is recommended for discursiveness, or this chattering mind, is meditation on the breath.

Here we come to the breathing meditation and cultivating single-pointedness on the breath. Actually, the Tibetans do not emphasize meditation on the breath very much. But many of the Westerners that I have talked with agree that it is quite important for us (Westerners). We think that the Tibetans do not always understand how noisy and chatty our minds are and how helpful it is to do the meditation on the breath.

On the other hand, I have met people who tell me that when they meditate on the breath, they cannot concentrate at all. But when they use a visual object, like when they visualize Tara or they visualize the Buddha, then they can concentrate much better. So what we are getting at is that people have different dispositions and that is why the Buddha taught a whole bunch of different objects to use for meditation. Different people are going to have different things that work better for them. You can either meditate on the breath or a deity if you have a problem with discursiveness.

You can also meditate on the breath if, in your personality, all the other defilements are about equal and you do not have a special problem with any of

them.

### *Ways of meditating on the breath*

There are different ways to meditate on the breath. One way is to count the breath. You can count the inhale as one, exhale as two, inhale as three, exhale as four, until you get to ten and then count backwards down to one. Or you can count a whole cycle of in and out as one, another cycle of in and out as two, and so on. Or you can do a cycle of out-and-in as one, and out-and-in as two, and so on. Counting in this way makes it quite different. Also you can count up to ten and then start over. Some teachers say count to twenty-one and then start over. If you get distracted in the middle of it, start over at one. If you get to five, you are doing really great. [Laughter.]

I have heard of teachers in Thailand who say that when you are inhaling, to say “Bud” and when you are exhaling, say “dho”. So you are going “Bud-dho”, “Bud-dho”. I don’t know why it’s not “Bud-dha”. They say “Bud-dho”. Saying that in your mind is a way to help you to focus on the breath and stay on the breath. After you get focused then you do not need to count or say “Bud-dho”.

In Mahasi Sayadaw’s tradition you concentrate on the abdomen and say to yourself, ‘rising’, ‘falling’, ‘rising’ and ‘falling.’ Other traditions have you say ‘in’, ‘out’, ‘in’, ‘out’. The purpose of saying all these is just to help you concentrate on your breath. Every so often you will find yourself saying ‘rising’ but you are in the process of exhaling and then you realize you have been distracted and come back to your

breath. Or you are saying “out” when you are breathing in and that helps you realize you have gotten distracted.

So if you happen to be using any of these methods, you silently say something to yourself as you breathe. It is a silent kind of noting or checking. You do not say it out loud. It is just a small part of the mind noting the rising and falling.

Again, there are different ways to meditate on the breath. One way is that you concentrate just on the whole process of the air entering and leaving, the process of the air coming in and filling and then going out. So the concentration is on the movement, or on the whole feeling of the breath. That’s one way.

Another way is, you concentrate specifically at the nostrils and the upper lip and focus more on the sense of touch, the sense of pressure as you exhale and the breath touches your lip. Or you can focus on the sense of heat and cold as the breath is going in and out. If you are focusing on your abdomen, then you are watching the rising and falling of the abdomen, the feeling of the belly against the clothes, the internal feeling of the abdomen rising and falling.

Gen Lamrimpa recommended starting out just on the whole process of the breath coming in and breath going out which is the first of these that I described. He recommended just focusing on the process of the movement of the air in and the movement of the air out and then after a while, shift the focus to the nostrils. That is what he recommended, but you will find other teachers who will do it in other ways.

### *Getting drowsy*

One thing that works if you are getting drowsy while you are observing the breath, is to imagine that the dull, heavy mind is leaving in the form of smoke as you exhale, and the mind that is bright and alert is entering in the form of light as you inhale. It can really help you to overcome the drowsiness.

### *Getting angry, anxious or fearful*

If your mind is getting angry and full of anxiety or there is much fear, then you can imagine exhaling that in the form of smoke, and inhaling a peaceful, tranquil mind in the form of light that fills your body and mind.

It is important when you imagine exhaling things as smoke, that the smoke is not filling up the room and choking everybody else in the room. One time somebody asked, “What do I do with the smoke because it is all around me?” [Laughter.] They were quite worried about polluting the room. I assured them that it was quite okay. Nobody was going to be choked by it.

### **Summary**

For purifying attachment, we meditate on the ugly aspects, particularly of the body.

For purifying hatred we meditate on loving-kindness.

For purifying obscuration we meditate on cause and effect.

For purifying pride we think of the constituent elements of the body and mind.

For purifying discursiveness or chattering, preconceptions or superstition, we meditate on the breath.

These are all included in the category of objects to meditate on to purify behavior.

Are there any questions?

*[Audience: inaudible]*

You analyze until the object gets clear to you, then when the object is clear you remain single-pointed on it. If we are doing the meditation more for the purpose of understanding, we will emphasize the analysis. When we are doing general *lamrim* meditation and thinking about a topic, we use more of the investigating mind. But at the end when you get some kind of conclusion, feeling or experience, you then single-pointedly hold on to that. That helps the understanding sink into your mind and become part of you.

For instance, if you are meditating on the ugly aspects of the body and you come to a conclusion of, “Wow! What am I doing being so attached to this body when I have this incredible human potential?” That kind of thought can bring a really strong feeling in your mind. Then you just hold that feeling. The longer you can hold that feeling, the more it becomes imprinted in your mind and part of you. In this way we are retraining our minds and re-conditioning our minds.

We are going through the teachings on calm abiding. These teach us how to develop a very firm

concentration in our meditation so we can keep our mind on the object of meditation for as long as we want without it rampaging or falling asleep. Last session we talked about various objects we can focus on to develop calm abiding. I specifically dwelt on one category of objects, the objects to eliminate afflictions or to subdue bad behavior. We also talked about different meditations one can do by meditating on different things and thereby develop calm abiding according to our own level of mind. For instance if we have a lot of attachment, we might want to develop calm abiding using the unattractiveness of different objects as our object of meditation. Or if we have a lot of superstition, conceptualizations, chattering mind, we would use the breath.

## **USING THE IMAGE OF THE BUDDHA AS OUR OBJECT OF MEDITATION**

### **The benefits**

In the Tibetan tradition they quite often emphasize using the Buddha as the object of our meditation. In other words, we would meditate on the visualized image of the Buddha to develop calm abiding. Instead of the breath, or the ugly aspect of something, or metta, or something else of that nature, we visualize the Buddha. This has many advantages to it. By using the visualized image of the Buddha as the object of our meditation, we continually remember the Buddha and in that way we create a lot of positive potential on our mindstream. This is because the visual form, the physical form of the Buddha, is itself virtuous.

## ***Psychological benefits***

We can see psychologically the effect visualizing the Buddha has on our mind. It makes us settle down and it makes us remember our own Buddha potential and thereby encourages us on the path. Just visualizing the image of the Buddha leaves a good imprint on our mind and is good for our mind, whether or not we are actually able to develop calm abiding by using it.

## ***Purification, accumulation of merit and preparation for tantric meditation***

Also, by continually remembering the Buddha through meditation, when we are dying it is then very easy to recall the Buddha. This is extremely important because, when we die, what we are thinking about at the time of death is really going to influence our future rebirth. If we're dying and we are really angry, or we are thinking about, "Who is going to get my embroidered things that have been passed down in the family for three centuries," or thinking about any of this kind of stuff, it is really going to adversely affect our mind. Whereas if we spend a lot of time trying to make the mind single-pointed on the image of the Buddha, then it is very easy to make that arise at the time of death. This automatically puts the mind in a virtuous state and so prevents the ripening of negative karma and in that way, ensures a good rebirth.

Very consistently visualizing the Buddha also helps in other aspects of our life. When we are in danger or nervous, it becomes much easier to remember the Buddha and thereby remember our object of refuge. It

also helps us to purify our mind and to accumulate a lot of positive potential. If we have had some practice visualizing the image of the Buddha, then doing tantric meditation later on becomes quite easy because we are familiar with visualization. When we visualize Chenrezig, or Kalachakra, or Tara, or whomever, it is very easy for that to come into the mind.

### ***Remembering our own Buddha potential***

Visualizing the Buddha also helps us to remember the Buddha's qualities and thus our own Buddha potential, which gives us a lot of inspiration and encouragement along the path. It also helps us to create a lot of positive potential to actualize the Buddha's form body ourselves. When we talk of the Buddha, we talk of the form body of the Buddha and the mind of the Buddha and visualizing the Buddha's form helps us to create the cause to be able to attain it ourselves one day.

### ***A positive, strong imprint***

Another part of our practice involves visualizing the field of positive potential, making offerings and doing confession, which once again involves visualizing the Buddha. We develop a lot of positive, strong imprint from visualizing the image of the Buddha, so when we do offerings, or prostrations to the thirty-five Buddhas, or something else, those practices become stronger because it is easier for us to visualize. We can get the feeling that we are really in the presence of the



Buddha and doing these practices with the Buddha. So if the level of your other afflictions is about equal, then it is good to use the image of the Buddha as the object of concentration.

## **Advice on the visualization**

### ***Where to visualize the Buddha and the size to visualize***

We usually visualize the Buddha in the space in front of us. They say to visualize the Buddha about five to six feet in front of us. Try visualizing it small, because if you visualize a really enormous Buddha your mind is going to get distracted and way out there. You are going to have this huge thing that you are trying to keep in mind. So they say the smaller you make it, the better. You do not want to make it so small that your mind gets really tight and you get a headache. They say the size should be like that of a barley seed. If that is too small, then make the size like the top joint of your thumb. If that is too small, make it the size of your thumb. And if that is too small then make it four fingers width. So you can kind of play around with it. Some people think that they have to imagine a huge Buddha. When the mind tries to imagine something very big, it gets very distracted. So keep it small.

As to what height to visualize the Buddha at, this is going to depend a lot on your mind. If you visualize the Buddha real high, then it tends to make the mind veer toward excitement and agitation. The mind gets too high, too flighty. If you visualize the Buddha too low, then it is very easy for the mind to get lax and

tired and to start falling asleep. So they usually say to visualize it at about eye level, but you can vary the size of the Buddha according to your own particular mind.

If you find that doing it at eye level makes your mind too excited, then lower the image a little bit. If your mind is getting lax, raise the image a little bit. But remember it is only a visualized image. You do not want to visualize the Buddha so low that you start looking down [lowering your head], or visualize the Buddha so high that you start looking up [raising your head]. Remember that this is just a placement in your mind's eye. You are not really looking at anything out there at all.

### *Using a picture*

To start with, it is very good to have a picture of the Buddha that you look at, one that you find particularly pleasing, or you can also design the artistry yourself with the exact expression on the Buddha's face, etcetera. But if you have a picture that really appeals to you, look at that. Then, close your eyes and try to remember the picture.

### *Making the image come alive*

Visualization basically is a kind of creative, or imaginative, aspect of the mind. You do not want to visualize a postcard like image, or a statue, or something like that. You want to really make it live.

When you visualize the Buddha, think of him as having a body of golden light and that it is three

dimensional. You do not want to visualize a three dimensional statue, or a two dimensional postcard-like image that is painted. You want to visualize something that is made of light, that is three dimensional and that is a living Buddha. You want a real feeling of communication with the Buddha and his qualities. This has a really nice impact on our mind.

### *Visualizing the details*

After you have looked at your picture and visualized a three dimensional Buddha, then go over the details of the Buddha's body. That is why descriptions like the one in *Pearl of Wisdom* Book I, have a lot of detail of what the Buddha looks like. So with an analytical mind, you look at all the details of your visualization as if you are painting a picture. What does the Buddha's hair look like, the earlobes and the long narrow eyes?

I think it is especially effective to spend some time on the Buddha's eyes because they are very compassionate and for those of us who feel unloved and unappreciated it is very helpful to imagine the Buddha who actually appreciates and cares for us and even remembers our birthday. [Laughter.] This helps our mind a great deal. Look at the robes and the hand gesture, the hand position and the lotus flower. They usually have you start at the bottom with the throne, the lotus, the cushions of sun and moon and then the Buddha seated on top of that. But you can go over the details as it feels comfortable to you. Then when you have done that, focus on the entire image.

Do not squeeze the mind to such an extent that you

are thinking, “Ok, I have got to get every detail of the Buddha exactly correct.” Because if you do this, you are going to drive yourself totally nuts. Rather, go over the details to get the general image and then, however clear the general image is, be content with that and hold your mind on that. Try at the beginning to focus more on stability and getting your mind stable on whatever image you have, rather than focusing on trying to get the image really precise and clear.

We tend to do it backwards, we want to get the image real crystal clear and then hold the mind on it. It is good to go over the different qualities to get the basic image, but then focus more on stability and hold the mind on whatever image you get. Really develop a sense of being satisfied with that instead of being so self-critical thinking things such as, “I cannot see every single one of the Buddha’s toes!” [Laughter.] Really, some people do this. They start getting involved in visualization and thinking things like, “Well how many folds does his robe have, how many patches going across here and where exactly is the belt?” They just drive themselves nuts with it. So that is why I say to focus much more on stability in the mind and then slowly, slowly you can go over the details again and again to become more and more familiar with the image.

Develop some sense of contentment with your own ability. Do not expect to see anything. Do not think, “Okay I am visualizing the Buddha so the Buddha should appear in 3-D, living color like I am having a vision.” It is not like that. I use the following example: if I say “pizza” everybody has a very good image in their mind of pizza. If I say “your home”, do you have

an image in your mind? Yes and it is very clear; you know exactly what the image is even though your eyes are open. It has nothing to do with your eyes being open or closed. That image is in your mind.

We all know very, very well that we can talk to somebody and think about something else at the same time, usually an object of attachment! [Laughter.] So visualizing is the same kind of thing. When our attention is good, the little bit of light coming through our eyes or even some sound, is not going to disturb us so much because we are really going to be focused on the Buddha. It is just basically making our mind more familiar with the Buddha's image than with the image of pizza, or the image of Mickey Mouse.

We can visualize Mickey Mouse very easily. This just shows we are more familiar with Mickey Mouse than with the Buddha, because when we start to visualize the Buddha we think, "Well, how is he sitting? What does he look like?" So it is basically a thing of familiarity. As we train the mind, we get more and more familiar with the image of Buddha.

Some people are very advanced meditators and they might use the mind itself, or emptiness as their object of meditation. But those are much more abstract and difficult for us to focus on. So using the visualized image of the Buddha is something that is more "physical" to us even though it is not physical. It helps our mind, which is so entrapped by color and form, to really focus on something. Whereas if we start focusing on emptiness or the mind itself, we might get really, really spaced out because we have a hard time even recognizing those objects.

### ***Keeping the whole image in mind***

Sometimes when you are visualizing the image of the Buddha, one aspect of it may become really clear to you, maybe the eyes, or the robes, or some other particular aspect. At that point in your meditation it is okay to put most of your attention on a particular quality, but not to the exclusion of the other qualities of the Buddha. Do not just focus on the eyes and forget that the eyes are attached to the body. Do not just visualize the Buddha's eyes as if they are appearing in empty space. If you were looking at a person you might really look at their eyes, or you might look at the mole on their cheek, but you recognize that there is the rest of them there. In the same way, if one particular aspect of the Buddha's body becomes more vivid in your mind, then focus on that but do not have it appear in a vacuum. It is still attached to the rest of the body.

### ***Keeping your image stable***

Sometimes when you are trying to focus on the image of the Buddha, your mind might start to play games and it might start to move around. The image might start out at a proper size and then the Buddha gets off the throne and he starts dancing. Or instead of being gold in color he turns to blue, or instead of the Buddha you get Tara. Our mind does all sorts of different things. So whatever you choose as your object of meditation, keep it like that. If the mind starts changing the image and joking around with it, then just remember that it is not the image that is

changing. It is not that the Buddha's there and then standing up. It is our mind that is making the image change. Be real aware of that.

Gen Lamrimpa says, "If the Buddha gets up, tell him to sit right back down again." [Laughter.] If the Buddha changes into Tara, say "Come back, Buddha." If you use Tara as your object of meditation and if Tara changes into Buddha, then you say "Come back Tara". But whatever it is that you have chosen, keep to that. The mind can become very creative and do things.

### *Be a part of the visualization yourself*

Another thing that I found very helpful when you visualize the Buddha is to imagine a whole scene and that you are a part of it. I really saw this when I went to these caves in China—the Dunhuang caves—because the artistry of the murals on the wall was such that you, as the viewer, were involved as part of the scene. It was not like you were just looking at an image out there. The way the artistry was, you became part of the scene. I find that it is better to meditate as if you are part of the scene, rather than visualizing a postcard type scene. Thinking, "There is the Buddha and there is Shariputra and Moggallana," makes you feel very separate and excluded. But if you visualize the Buddha and make a very pleasant scene, maybe a lake and a mountain, or whatever you find pleasant, you can make the scene all around you and in that way you become part of that environment. This makes it much easier to imagine the Buddha and it makes it much more alive for you. So try this as

well.

### ***Managing the image***

If, when you are first starting, the Buddha seems to change a lot, or float, or move around, then for a few days you might imagine the image as if it is heavy. Even though you are imagining it as made of light, you might imagine it as being kind of heavy in some way in order to help your mind stay there with it. But do not continue that for too long, because if you keep imagining the image as being something heavy, your mind is also going to get heavy.

So that is a little bit about using the Buddha as the object of meditation and it is nice to try especially for those of you who do the meditation on the Buddha in *Pearl of Wisdom* Book I. When you do that practice, before you say the mantra, it is very good to spend some time creating the image of the Buddha and holding your mind as single-pointedly on that as you can. And when the mind gets restless, then start doing the purification and say the mantra and imagine the light coming. That helps your mind gain some stability on the image before you proceed with the whole meditation and it is very effective that way.

## **USING THE MIND AS AN OBJECT OF MEDITATION**

Another object that we could use to develop calm abiding on is the mind itself. I wanted to talk briefly about this even though it is not highly recommended for those of us who have very scattered minds. Some



people can develop calm abiding on the mind itself and it can be very beneficial, but it is more difficult because the mind itself is very abstract.

## **Two qualities of the mind**

The mind has two qualities: it is clear and it is knowing or aware. The mind does not have any kind of physical form. So first you have to discern the clear and aware aspects, or qualities, upon which the mind is designated. You have to be able to discern these and then keep the mind focused on them. If you do can this, it can be very helpful for really understanding the nature of the mind.

## **Care to be taken when using the mind as a focus for meditation**

But the danger is that instead of actually apprehending the clear and knowing nature of the mind, what we get instead is our concept of the mind and we focus on that. That is one danger. Another danger is that we think we are meditating on the mind, but in fact, it is just an image of nothingness. Because the mind is clear and knowing, it does not have form so there is nothing to visualize and we can just get a little spaced out concentrating on our image of nothingness, thinking that we are meditating on the mind, when in actual fact we are not.

They say that in the past some people have tried to develop calm abiding in this way and they think they have developed calm abiding on emptiness, but in actuality it was basically just blank mindedness, the

absence of concept. Or some people think that they have attained enlightenment when they get very blissful feelings, when in actual fact they are just basically spaced out in their meditation. They think that they have the mind as their object of meditation, but they really do not. Or they think that they are meditating on emptiness, but in fact it is a mere non-conceptual state on which they are meditating.

The Tibetans are quite strong on emphasizing this. They emphasize that the object of meditation is not just to free the mind of concepts. We can certainly see that all of our concepts in our very busy mind are a huge obstacle to our developing single-pointedness, but just getting rid of those is not necessarily developing single-pointedness on a virtuous object. After all, cows do not think very much and they do not have a lot of concept, but we do not want to really translate our mind into a cow's mind.

So just freeing the mind of concept is not meditating on emptiness and is not meditating on the nature of mind. We have to really know very specifically the objects we are meditating on. This has been something that has been the subject of debates for centuries. I find even in teaching people nowadays, it is still very much something that concerns people. I will sometimes go to teach at some new age this or that and people think that basically if you just get yourself in a non-conceptual state, that is great! But that is not necessarily it. It is very true that we do need to go beyond the chattering conceptual blah, blah, blah mind, but we need to have the object we are meditating on very clear in our mind and know the process for doing that.

## Questions and answers

### The non-conceptual mind

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Well we do need to become non-conceptual at a certain point. I am not saying that we should keep our mind chattering. But I am saying that just getting the mind non-conceptual is not necessarily realizing the conventional nature of the mind, nor is it emptiness.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Getting the mind non-conceptual is better than just sitting there thinking about salami, bologna and cream cheese because at least you are doing something with your mind. But they say that some people only meditate in a non-conceptual state and their mind becomes very dull and they are then reborn as animals.

*[Audience:] Is there any way to check?*

That is the reason you need a good teacher. Right? [Laughter.] That is why when you are doing calm abiding meditation in a really serious way, you do it under the guidance of a good teacher. That is also why you do some study before hand about the different ways the mind can go off so that you know the various pitfalls and can check your own mind too.

### Zen meditation and koans

*[Audience:] In Zen meditation, are koans used so that the mind does not become too conceptual?*

I think that the Zen idea of koans is to push the mind to a certain point where our usual tendency to make things into nice neat categories just does not work and you need to drop your old way of thinking. I think it is geared towards that because we tend to see things as very inherently existent and solid and we confuse the label with the object itself. I think a lot of the puzzle-like questions in Zen are designed to help us see that that kind of very rigid conceptual mind is just not where it is at.

## **Tantric meditation**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

What you are doing in tantric meditation, for instance when the Buddha dissolves into you and then you dissolve into emptiness, is trying to recall your meditation on emptiness and to generate that same feeling again.

*[Audience:] So you mean that what you are recalling is what you have been practicing in calm abiding?*

Not necessarily. You have been doing analysis on emptiness and you try to develop some stability and calm abiding on that. You do not necessarily have calm abiding. When you visualize the Buddha dissolving into you and you dissolving into emptiness, you are trying to recreate the experience that you had

before when you were actually able to ascertain the lack of inherent existence of something.

Westerners have a very solid sense of self, “I am this person, I am this body, I am this nationality, and this gender and this, this and that is me.” In order to loosen that really rigid way of thinking, Lama [Yeshe] would say, “The Buddha dissolves into you and you just let go of all your concepts and stay in this open space.” He left it very open like that and that is really good for us Westerners.

As we get more familiar with this, we then have to make our understanding of emptiness much more precise and not just get the mind free of concept, but actually be able to discern what is emptiness. But for a start, it is helpful for us to just drop all of our concepts of ourselves, because that is basically what emptiness is at a much coarser, grosser level.

### **The role of calm abiding in realizing emptiness**

*[Audience:] So there are two different ways of understanding emptiness—through the calm abiding or through dissolving into emptiness?*

You need to do all of it, because the dissolving that you do in tantric meditation, as soon as you understand emptiness correctly there, then you hold that with calm abiding.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Calm abiding is what allows you to remain single-pointedly on emptiness. Calm abiding itself will not

help you to discern the object of emptiness; only the analytical meditation will help you discern it. But once you have discerned it, the calm abiding is really necessary to keep your mind on it. Instead of going: “emptiness-chocolate-emptiness-chocolate-emptiness-chocolate”, you are able to stay on emptiness. That is what the calm abiding does.

### **Calm abiding alone does not lead to liberation**

That is why they really emphasize that calm abiding alone will not get us to liberation. Calm abiding just enables us to keep the mind single-pointedly on the object of meditation. Non-Buddhists have this ability as well. They say it can be very blissful. But the thing is, if you do not have any wisdom with it; if you do not have refuge, bodhicitta and the determination to be free, then even if you can stay in samadhi day and night for ten years, you are still going to get reborn in cyclic existence. That is why in our meditation practice we are trying to develop many kinds of meditation and many kinds of understanding.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

You can get very attached to your calm abiding, and then you get reborn in the form and formless realms and have a few eons of bliss. But when that karma ends, kerplunk! Therefore, this is why our motivation is very, very important.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

First of all, someone who would meditate on the nature of the mind probably would be someone who has done a lot of purification, collected a lot of merit and has the ability to discern clearly the mind. If you are meditating on the nature of the mind and feel like it is slipping away and you are going into some kind of spaced-out blank-mindedness, they say to let an emotion arise. You do this because an emotion is the nature of the mind; it is clear, it is knowing, and this brings you back to the mind. You do not focus on the emotion, but you use it to help you recognize the mind as something that is clear and knowing.

*[Audience:] So let us say you let anger arise to bring your mind back. But then you become angry, so then what do you do?*

[Laughter.] See, this is why you have to be very skillful to do this meditation, because it is not about bringing anger back so that you can then become angry. It is letting the anger arise in the mind for an instant so that you can recognize the mind. The sages say that when meditating on the mind—that is, on the mind's nature of clarity and awareness—it's easy to lose the object and slip into a spaced-out state in which your mind is focused on a vague type of nothingness instead of on the clear and aware nature of the mind. Since emotions are a type of mind and have that clear and aware nature, by letting an emotion arise, a meditator can again recognize the clear and aware nature of the mind and return to it as his or her object of meditation.

Later on when I explain the meditation on

emptiness, one of the ways there to recognize the object to be refuted, in other words the ‘I’ that does not exist, is to let anger or another powerful emotion arise and then to observe the way your mind grasps the self or the ‘I’. But it’s important to do this skillfully, so that while one part of your mind is grasping at a solid “I,” another part identifies the object to be refuted, an inherently existent “I.” While doing this, you don’t want the anger to take over your mind so that you get lost in the story, “He did this and that to ME!” For this reason, identifying the object to be refuted involves a delicate balancing act for us beginners.

### **The need for both stabilizing and analytic meditations**

Are people real clear about the difference between the meditation to develop stability and the meditation to develop understanding, analytic meditation? These are two different things and we need both of them. Just developing stability does not necessarily give you the understanding of the object and just developing understanding does not necessarily give you the stability and the ability to concentrate on it. So that is why we need both the stabilizing meditation and the analytic meditation. Calm abiding, in general, falls under the category of stabilizing meditation. Vipassana or insight meditation, in general, falls under the category of analytic meditation. But we need both of them. I am trying to give you a global understanding so that you can fit lots of things together and understand how it works.



So this has all been about the object of our meditation. Are we ready to move on?

## **Purification and positive potential**

*[Audience:] Where do purification and the creation of positive potential fit into all of this?*

Purification and the collection of positive potential—both of those are really important. It is not like you just do purification and creation of merit or positive potential and do not do the others. In the process of doing the purification and creation of positive potential, you are also developing very slowly these other two: calm abiding and insight. But if you just try and jump into these really difficult meditations without purifying your mind, it will be real difficult because our mind is so habituated with garbage that the garbage is just going to keep coming up again and again and become big obstacles. That is why even the great meditators do so much purification practice. For instance, in the more complex tantric meditations there is a whole psychology applied and in the beginning there is always purification and the creation of positive potential before you have the meditation on emptiness and self-generation of the deity.

## **Calm abiding and Vipassana**

*[Audience:] How is calm abiding meditation different from Vipassana?*

Vipassana in general is under the analytic meditation

and calm abiding in general is under the stabilizing meditation. Real Vipassana, when you have actualized Vipassana, is actually a combination and you have calm abiding at that time. But this is when you have real Vipassana, not just simulated Vipassana.

*[Audience:] I just went to a ten-day Vipassana retreat and all we did was look at the breath. So how can that be analytical?*

Well, because what they are having you do is look at the breath but then as other objects arise in your mind, you also concentrate on them. If the itch in your leg gets too strong and it takes you away from the breath, then you go to the itch. Then the anger comes and that takes you away from the itch, so you focus on the anger. So there you are moving basically from one object of meditation to the next.

The idea, where the analysis comes in, is that at a certain point, first you recognize that it is all impermanent and all these events that are happening are all changing, changing and still changing. Second, you begin to realize the suffering nature of cyclic existence. Third, you begin to see there is no solid self controlling the whole process. It is just all these different mental events, from the breath to anger, to itches, to regret, to this and that, to attachment, etcetera. You begin to see it is just these events and that there is no central controller “I” that is running the show. That is where the insight is.

*[Audience:] How come they never explained all that at the retreat I went to?*

Well often when they teach beginners Vipassana, they cannot give you the whole big teaching in only ten days. So they give little chunks that help us learn to recognize the breath and recognize different things going on. So you are not going to get the full instruction in a ten-day course.

## **Acceptance and understanding**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Well that is one important part: just accepting all that stuff is not going to free us from it. Only the understanding of emptiness frees us from cyclic existence. Nothing else does.

But to get the understanding of emptiness, we have to become a little bit more accepting and patient with ourselves. As all this stuff comes up in us, we have to learn to have an attitude of, “Well here it is. I can tolerate it and it is not going to run me over. This is what it feels like and it will go away.” We definitely need to make friends with the junk in the sense of accepting it, but we do not want to make such good friends with it that we think, “My anger is my best friend. I need my anger. I cannot give it up.” We do not want to be that kind of friend with anger and say, “Anger is my best friend. It never fails me. It is always right.” [Laughter.]

## **Actual Way to Practice Calm Abiding**

Now, in the next section if you look at your outline,

we are going to start talking about the five faults or the five interruptions to developing calm abiding and the eight antidotes to those. Yes, I know that there are five interruptions and eight antidotes—they are not the same number. Somebody once said, “Symmetry is stupid. Do not expect it all to fit together nicely.” There are eight antidotes because the first interference has four antidotes and the others all have one. Let me just list them and then we will go through and explain them more in depth.

## FIVE HINDRANCES TO CALM ABIDING

### Overview

The first fault is our old ‘friend’ **laziness**. Laziness has four antidotes. First we develop faith or confidence to oppose it, then aspiration, then joyous effort, and then finally pliancy or flexibility. I will go back and explain all these. We are just doing an overview right now.

Once we have gotten over laziness and are able to get ourselves on the cushion, the next thing that happens is that we **forget the object of meditation**. Our mind gets distracted. It goes to cream cheese, or chocolate, or whatever you happen to prefer. Here we need to invoke mindfulness as the antidote. I must say here that all these words in the context of calm abiding have very, very specific meanings. We throw the term mindfulness around left, right and center but you cannot even find it in Webster’s dictionary. Here in the context of the calm abiding meditation, it has a very specific meaning, as do all these different terms and that is why it is helpful to hear the teachings so

you can identify these mental factors very clearly in your own mind ...

The next thing that happens is that the concentration gets interrupted either by **laxity or excitement**. These are actually two different hindrances, but they are categorized under one here. Remember 'symmetry is stupid' so two can be counted as one. The antidote to these is the mental factor of introspective alertness. Sometimes this word is translated as alertness, sometimes as introspection and sometimes as vigilance. There are many different translations for this particular word.

The next hindrance, after we begin to deal with our laxity and our excitement, is **failure to apply the antidotes**. With introspective alertness we have begun to notice the laxity and the excitement, but we do not apply the antidotes. So this next hindrance is non-application and the antidote to that is application.

The next thing that happens is that we apply the antidote, but we over apply it and so **over-application of antidotes** becomes a hindrance. The antidote to that is equanimity, letting the mind be. I will go back and explain these.

## 1. Laziness and its antidotes

The first one is laziness. We went over this one a lot when we talked about the far-reaching attitude of joyous effort. So I will not go into it in too much detail here. Do you remember the three kinds of laziness? They are: sloth; distraction and busyness; depression and discouragement.

These are the three kinds of laziness that really

interrupt our meditation. They are what prevent us from getting ourselves on the meditation cushion in the first place. They prevent us from going to teachings on meditation, from getting on the cushion, from staying on the cushion and everything else. This is because we either just like to sleep and block everything out and procrastinate, or because we keep ourselves incredibly busy running around doing all sorts of things, or we keep our mind totally preoccupied with putting ourselves down and telling ourselves how lousy we are and getting thoroughly discouraged. So laziness keeps us from doing anything.

### ***Confidence or faith in the benefits of calm abiding***

The real antidote, the real cure to laziness, is the mental factor of pliancy or flexibility. This is a mental factor that allows both our body and our mind to be incredibly flexible and relaxed and tuned in. But because we do not have much flexibility and pliancy right now, although it is the real antidote, we start with something that is going to help us develop the flexibility. So we start first with developing faith or confidence, then we move on to aspiration, then we move on to joyous effort and then all that results in having the flexibility or pliancy.

So to come back to the first antidote: gaining faith or confidence. This is talking about the mind that is able to first of all have faith or confidence that such a thing as calm abiding exists. For us this can be a big issue. If we doubt the existence of calm abiding, then for sure we are not going to get on our meditation

cushion and try to develop it.

We Westerners have lots of if's, ands or buts. We hear about single-pointed concentration and we go, "Well yeah, but I want to see it statistically, with somebody's EEG, that there is some change here." Actually this is quite an interesting point because His Holiness has given his approval to a group of scientists who are involved in doing research like this. They are testing the GSR of some of the yogis, as well as attention response and all sorts of other things, to see what happens when somebody develops concentration and measure them in scientific terms. His Holiness has consented to this research because if they can prove something, then for Westerners it gives a way for us to say, "Oh yeah look, here are all these statistics. Calm abiding must exist." Whereas if we just hear stories about people who have calm abiding, we might scratch our head and say, "Well I wonder."

### ***Gen Lamrimpa comments on calm abiding***

So as Gen Lamrimpa said—it was so cute in the book the way he said it—we hear stories about calm abiding and we can choose to believe the stories and practice, or we can choose to not believe the stories and we do not practice. It is completely up to us. He was saying if you happen to believe the stories of people who have gained calm abiding, then it is going to inspire your own mind to practice because you have that conviction that calm abiding exists. And based on that conviction that it exists, you can begin to notice its good qualities and you can begin to see the disadvantage of not having it.

## ***Disadvantages of not having calm abiding***

Now I think we can already see in our own experience a little bit of the disadvantages of not having calm abiding. Without calm abiding, when we sit down to meditate on anything, our mind drives us completely buggy. If you do not have any feeling for the disadvantages of calm abiding, just do a week-long retreat and see what goes on in your mind. See how the mind just takes you all over and creates these incredible fantasies and makes you so upset, so depressed, so ecstatic, and none of it is real because you are sitting there in one room on a cushion. But your mind makes everything very real and very solid. So we can already begin to see the disadvantages of not having calm abiding by looking at our own experience.

## ***Advantages of calm abiding***

What would be the advantages of developing calm abiding? Well number one, you could sit down and have some peace of mind. I could actually control my mind and if I do not want to think about chocolate, I am not going to think about chocolate. If I do not want to think about what somebody did to me fifteen and a half years ago and get depressed about it again for the umpteenth time, then I am not going to think about it. So some ability to control the mind is one of the profound advantages of calm abiding.

Another advantage to developing calm abiding is it makes all the other meditations more forceful. Because we can control our minds, it helps to



eliminate the gross levels of the afflictions. When we meditate on loving-kindness, or on bodhicitta, or anything else, if we can do it with calm abiding then that meditation is going to sink in and go into our heart.

Calm abiding can also be very blissful; so for people who are looking out for bliss, this is a good advertisement.

It can also help us develop psychic powers, which can then be used to help other people.

It can help you do the tantric meditations where you have a lot of visualization and different things to do. Also for meditations on the subtle nervous system, it is very helpful to have calm abiding and the ability to concentrate.

It also helps all of our other practices become stronger. For example, when we do purification or collect positive potential, if we do these with calm abiding then those practices become stronger which then helps us to free our mind from the negative karma and to create positive karma. This really aids us in getting a good rebirth and it helps us be reborn in a place and at a time where we are able again to meet the Buddha's teachings and do the practice.

When we develop calm abiding and tie our mind to an internal object, it ceases a lot of the external harms we used to experience. When we develop calm abiding we are really concentrating the mind on something important, so all the other things that usually preoccupy us as being harmful, they fade away and no longer appear to our mind as being harmful or as enemies. This really helps calm our life down a bit. It makes the mind very clear and very

powerful. Then whatever meditation we do, we can really have an experience of it.

Sometimes we go through the other meditations and it feels like we are just going through it and we are not getting anywhere and the mind is not very powerful or clear. If we have calm abiding and then do the meditation on loving-kindness, or taking and giving, or whatever, then the mind is so powerful that you generate a real strong experience in the meditation because of having developed calm abiding. So it really helps us to gain the realizations and then, of course, as we have the realizations of the path, we progress along the bodhisattva's stages and become closer to liberation and enlightenment.

If we really think about all the advantages of calm abiding and how it helps us in this life, but more importantly, we think about how it helps us in our practice and helps us have good future rebirth, attain liberation and enlightenment, be of service to others and how it pacifies and smoothes out our own mind and helps us work out a lot of our junk, the more we see these advantages of calm abiding, the more faith we have. And because we now see the qualities of calm abiding, this leads us from this first antidote of developing faith and confidence, to the second antidote which is aspiration.

### *Aspiration*

When you see the qualities of something advertised on TV, the next thing that happens is that you have the aspiration to have it and the thing that happens after that is that you have the energy and the effort to

go get it. So it is a similar kind of process that is working here. First, to develop faith we really spend some time thinking about the advantages of calm abiding and the disadvantages of not having it. Then from that we develop the mind of aspiration, which is the mind that really takes interest and yearns for calm abiding and wants it. So that mind of interest and aspiration leads us to put effort in the practice.

***Joyous effort and pliancy/serviceability of body and mind***

Effort becomes the third antidote because effort is the mind that takes delight in doing what is virtuous. We will really have interest and delight, propensity and eagerness regarding the practice. Then automatically, as we practice more and more, we develop the flexibility of body and mind and that actually completely eliminates the laziness.

So it is a progression that we go through in doing this. It is a progression, but do not think that you have to fully master faith before you get any aspiration or effort or pliancy, because it can happen that you do. Sometimes as baby meditators we get some kind experience of pliancy—it lasts for maybe ten seconds—and then, just from our own experience, this makes us go, “Oh hey, wow, this feels good and is similar to what they might be talking about in the books.” So that initial experience, or flash, helps increase our faith and confidence and therefore increases our aspiration which therefore increases our energy or our joyous effort, in doing the practice.

So do you see how these four are connected?

Although there is a progression it is not like they are real solid steps. You can go back and forth and one can really affect the other. So it is not that once you get aspiration, you stop having faith and once you get energy, you stop having aspiration. It is not like that. It is really seeing how they affect each other and how they build on each other and how they really help us go some place.

***We have what we need, we just need to increase it***

The whole purpose of talking about all these things is because all are aspects of our own mind. All the interferences are aspects of our own mind; all the antidotes are aspects of our own mind that we already have right now. The only problem is, our faith is small and our aspiration is tiny. [Laughter.] Our energy is low and our pliancy is diminutive too. They are all still small, but we have all these qualities right now in our mind. It is not like we have to go and get the qualities somewhere else. It is just a matter of taking what is there and really increasing it. In the same way, all the interferences are mental factors too. We use the positive mental factors to smooth out and subdue the interfering ones.

This is really talking on a very psychological level. The whole purpose of doing this is so that when we sit down and meditate, we can begin to identify the different mental factors in our own meditation. What does laziness feel like? What is my mind like when I am lazy? We want to be able to recognize laziness when it is happening. What does faith feel like? What does aspiration feel like? How can I cultivate those?

Sitting and praying, “Buddha, Buddha, Buddha, please give me these four antidotes,” will not do it for us. We have to be able to recognize these things in our own mind and the teachings say exactly how to develop them. If we want pliancy, develop effort; if we want effort, develop aspiration. If we want aspiration, develop faith; if we want faith think of the positive qualities of calm abiding and the negative qualities of not having it. If we do that, it then leads us to develop all these other mental factors that really transform our mind.

*[Audience:] Why is pliancy important?*

Because pliancy is a flexibility of body and mind that enables the mind to remain flexible and relaxed so you can put it on an object of meditation and it stays there. When you have pliancy the winds in the body have been purified, so your body does not start aching, complaining and groaning when you are meditating, and your mind does not get bored, distracted and tired of the whole thing. So it is with this flexibility and pliancy that everything becomes workable or serviceable.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

That is exactly it, because laziness is just being stuck. The mind is totally inflexible when it is lazy. You are right. Laziness is the total opposite of this flexibility we are talking about in which the mind is very serviceable.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Calm Abiding helps us to not just get the psychic powers (which are called the common attainments), but the real important thing is that it helps us get the uncommon attainment of liberation and enlightenment, which are what we are really after.

So let us sit and meditate for a few minutes now.

## **Review**

We were talking last time about the eight hindrances ... sorry ... I meant the five hindrances. Nobody corrected me? [Laughter.] I remember one time when Serkong Rinpoche said something that was a slip of the tongue and no one corrected him. When he realized what he had said, he looked at us and asked, “How come nobody corrected me? You are going to let your teacher say something that you know is not right?”

We were talking about the five hindrances and the eight antidotes to those hindrances. The first hindrance has four antidotes. The first hindrance is our old pal laziness. This is the laziness of getting discouraged, or the laziness of liking to hang around and sleep, or the laziness of keeping ourselves super busy.

## **The antidotes to laziness**

### ***Developing faith or confidence***

To counteract laziness, we first develop faith or

confidence in the existence of calm abiding and in the advantages of developing it and the disadvantages of not developing it. This is the same psychological process that is behind watching a commercial. We see the good qualities of something and our mind becomes interested.

### *Aspiration*

Aspiration is the next antidote. This is where we want to attain it because we see the advantages of having it.

### *Joyous effort*

From there we go to the third antidote, which is joyous effort. The interest increases to where we really want to go out and do something about it.

### *Pliancy*

Then what we do about it is the fourth and actual antidote: flexibility, serviceability or pliancy—there are different translations of this word. What this term means is having an extremely flexible body and mind which enables us to do with our mind what we want to do. It also means that the energy in our body settles down so that we are not so distracted by it when we meditate.

The above is just a review of laziness, the first hindrance that we talked about last time.

## **2. Forgetting the object of meditation**

After we have overcome the laziness and get ourselves seated, the second hindrance then comes up and is our next biggest problem. This is when we forget the object of meditation. Let us say we are trying to use the breath as our object of meditation. You take two breaths and then your mind is off in never-never land. Or you visualize the image of the Buddha and then, “goodbye”—it disappears or changes.

The mind just totally goes off the object. It does not have the ability to stay on the object because there is no stability in the mind. The mind just constantly forgets it.

This kind of forgetting is a specific mental factor and it has a specific meaning here. It is not the same as forgetting where I put my keys. Rather it is forgetting in the context of calm abiding. What happens is, our mind forgets the object of meditation and instead is distracted towards something else.

The antidote to forgetting the object of meditation—or sometimes translated as forgetting the instruction—is mindfulness.

## **Antidote: Mindfulness and its three qualities**

Mindfulness is another mental factor and here it has a very specific meaning. It has three qualities.

### ***1. Familiarity***

Mindfulness is familiar with the object of meditation. Whatever our object of meditation, whether it is loving kindness, or the breath, or the image of the



Buddha, or the ugly aspects of phenomena, or whatever it is, our mind is familiar with it. In other words, we cannot have mindfulness or the memory of an object if the mind is unfamiliar with that object.

## ***2. Holding onto the object***

The second quality is that mindfulness holds onto the object so that the object is not forgotten. So the mode of apprehension of the object is something that is continuous. The mind does not forget the different aspects and does not forget what it is doing.

## ***3. Prevents distraction***

The third quality is that mindfulness prevents distraction. By being familiar with the object of meditation and having a continuous memory of the object, it functions in such a way to prevent distractions so that other thoughts do not intervene.

## **Illustrations of mindfulness**

Sometimes you will see a little drawing about the different stages to develop calm abiding. Mindfulness is symbolized by having a rope around an elephant and tying it down. It is depicted that way because that is the first big thing that we have to do: learning to tie the mind to the object of meditation.

Another illustration: losing the object of meditation is like a child running wildly around and running out the door. Your kid is running out the door and runs here, there and everywhere. Mindfulness is bringing

that child back into the room and saying, “Look here.”

### **With practice, the thoughts will settle**

As we keep practicing mindfulness and keep bringing the mind back to the object of meditation, after a while the thoughts get tired of running around all the time. I am not saying that this is necessarily going to happen in one meditation session but, as you practice, over a period of time as your memory and mindfulness gets stronger, the thoughts that instantaneously take you away from the object of your meditation are going to become less strong and they begin to take a rest.

### **Sticking with one object of meditation**

It is important to stick with one object of meditation when we are developing calm abiding and not change objects all the time. The first of the three qualities of mindfulness is familiarity with the object. If we keep changing the object of our meditation for calm abiding, then our mindfulness does not get a chance to function.

Of course, if you are doing practice during the course of the day, you may choose to be mindful of many different things. Sometimes you might meditate on Chenrezig, or Tara, or the breath, or loving kindness and in all those different meditations you are mindful of each of the objects of meditation. But when you are really setting out to develop calm abiding on a specific object, you want to develop an

especial familiarity with that object.

What we are doing a lot in our daily practice is developing familiarity with a lot of different facets. That is good and we need to do that. I am just saying that when we are actually going for developing full calm abiding, we have to stick with the same object each meditation session. This is because if one session you are focusing on the rise and fall of your abdomen and the next session you're focusing on the breath at your nostrils and the session after that, you are focusing on the Buddha, and then next you are at Tara, and the next session you are at loving kindness, your ability to be mindful of one object to the point of developing calm abiding on it is quite limited.

## **Questions and answers**

### **Samatha retreat**

*[Audience:] When we go on a samatha retreat, do we stay with just one object of meditation throughout the retreat?*

You basically do. If you have commitments like tantric commitments or something else, you do your commitments. But your basic meditation is just doing the samatha meditation when you do that retreat.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Basically yes, or you incorporate your commitments in the calm abiding session. For people who do the six-session guru yoga, you would incorporate the guru

yoga and do that as part of the calm abiding session. Because in the calm abiding session, you would take refuge, do the seven limbs and other preparatory practices. You could do the guru yoga at this point. It would be like a preparation for the calm abiding that you do right after. But basically, when you do a samatha retreat, you are really sticking with one object and one kind of meditation, and not doing your commitments in elaborate form. In fact, they even say that as your mind gets more advanced, more concentrated and single-pointed, then there is a way to really shorten your commitments, or rather transform your commitments into the calm abiding meditation. There is no cheating on our commitments.

### **Day-dreaming and obsessing**

*[Audience:] If I am constantly thinking about someone and cannot get them out of my mind, is this the same thing as mindfulness on a single object?*

It is the diluted form of mindfulness. The kind of mindfulness that we are trying to cultivate here is on a virtuous object. But that kind of thing you are speaking of is more an obsession.

You will notice when you are visualizing the object of attachment that you are not completely single-pointed on it. The object is changing and moving as you are fantasizing and having a whole video show. So you are not being totally single-pointed on the object. You might be focused on that wonderful person, but the image is not one hundred percent right there, because

first you visualize that you are at the beach, then you are at the mountains, then you are doing this and then that. So it is not real single-pointedness.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

When your mind is concentrating on something in calm abiding, we call it a virtuous mindfulness. When it is concentrating single-pointedly on your enemy—when you are holding the image of your enemy in your mind without thinking any thoughts and without getting distracted about what you are going to do to him—that is kind of a diluted mindfulness.

When we talk about introspective alertness and all these things, there is a diluted form and a pure form. They have similar qualities but are distinguished by how they are functioning in terms of the object and by the motivation behind them. Even though there are some similarities between diluted forms and pure forms of introspective alertness, they perform very different functions depending on the motivation and the object.

## **Concentration is not mindfulness**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

We have to really think in depth what mindfulness means. We need to differentiate between mindfulness and obsession, between calm abiding and what we, in our worldly way, call concentration. Concentration is like playing computer games, or a kid playing Nintendo. They are completely glued and we would

say they are ‘single-pointed’; they are totally ‘concentrated’. But if you look at it, this does not have the characteristics of calm abiding. In calm abiding you are focused on the object. Your mind is not moving and the object is not changing. You have complete control of your mind.

When you are a kid playing Nintendo, you are not distracted by your mom yelling at you and telling you to shut it off, but your mind is not single-pointed because you are shooting that one and shooting this one and switching games back and forth. The mind is changing objects and there is a lot going on there. So although we say that is concentration and it seems like mindfulness, if you really look at it, it is not.

This is similar to when you are thinking a lot about your vacation and you are getting obsessed about it, or thinking about some wonderful person. In each of these instances your mind is thinking about a lot of different things. You are not just holding the image of the beach single-pointedly in your mind and nothing is moving—not your mind, not the beach, not the waves. A lot is moving. There is a whole drama going on and so it is very, very different.

## **Meditative absorption and sand mandalas**

*[Audience:] What is meditative absorption? Is that what happens when one is doing something like building a sand mandala?*

That is not the way we would use that term in the illustration you gave of somebody working to build a mandala. They might be very absorbed in what they

are doing, but it is not what we would call meditative absorption. Meditative absorption is referring more to the calm abiding where your mind is not thinking about a lot of different things. When you are working on the mandala, you are working with physical things and you have to think about the sand and the little funnel and the thing you are rubbing here and all this different stuff. You are very focused on that general thing that you are doing, but within that general thing, your mind is going to different things.

You are developing the ability to concentrate, but it is not the single-pointed concentration that you develop when you are really doing calm abiding. It is similar in the sense that your mind is not thinking about chocolate cake, but still, your mind is thinking about many things within the mandala as you are making it.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

When you are doing the Theravada vipassana meditation, you are really focused on the subject and labeling the different mental factors and attitudes going on within you. Whereas when you are building a mandala you are concerned with the blue and the red colors and these sorts of things. At the same time you are visualizing them as deities and you are thinking of the blessings of the guru and a whole lot of other stuff. With vipassana meditation you are focused on internal objects; when you are building the mandala, your senses are working. I am not talking about visualizing a mandala, but building one with sand. If you are building a three dimensional thing,

your senses are working. That is very different than doing calm abiding or any kind of meditation where you are not paying so much attention to your senses.

*[Audience:] How can the mind stay focused on one object (for example, the image of the Buddha) if everything, including the mind itself, is changing moment to moment?*

Everything is changing moment to moment, but you are focused on the image of the Buddha (and the image is not moving). The Buddha is sitting (still) there in the image that you are focusing on. The mind is changing moment to moment, but it is staying focused on one thing.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

There are different ways of interpreting ‘changing.’ Everything is changing moment to moment. There is no way to stop that. But there is gross impermanence, which is very different from subtle impermanence. Your mind is changing moment to moment (subtle impermanence), but it is not having the gross impermanence of the mind being in New York one split second and being in D.C. the next. There is some stability in the mind and continuity on the object. In distraction there is no continuity of the object—everything is changing all the time. Whereas what we are talking about here, there is a real continuity moment to moment so that it appears the same. It is similar moment to moment.



*[Audience: inaudible]*

But that is when you are meditating on subtle impermanence. When you are meditating on calm abiding, you are not doing subtle impermanence. You may do it later after you have developed calm abiding. Then you might switch and use that precision mind to meditate on subtle impermanence. But when you are developing calm abiding on the image of the Buddha, you are not focusing on the moment to moment change of the mind, because the moment to moment change of the mind is not your object of meditation. The image of the Buddha is the object of meditation.

## **Preliminary practices**

*[Audience:] What about the practices where you are physically moving or doing stuff: does this make it harder for us to learn to focus on an object?*

You are asking about things like learning to build a mandala where we put piles of rice and rings here and chant the prayer, and then we knock it down, and build it up again. Or like when you do prostrations to the thirty-five Buddhas. You are doing something physical. So you are asking, is that not contradictory to trying to make the mind stable on one thing?

The thing is our mind is not really capable of remaining stable on one thing in its present state. I cannot speak for you but my mind is not capable of that.

The Buddha was incredibly skillful when he

thought of all these preliminary practices. A lot of these preliminary practices are very physically oriented and that is because at the beginning of the practice, we are very physically oriented. We cannot sit still. The body has too much restless energy in it. The mind has too much restless energy. So a way of channeling all this mental and physical energy is through the practices the Buddha developed, where you are really doing physical things. In this way you are using up a lot of energy. You are prostrating up and down, up and down. You are doing things with your mandala rings, the sand, the grains and the beads, and you are dumping it over. Or you are doing 100,000 water bowl offerings and you are moving. This is the skill of the Buddha in taking our tendency to be movement oriented and physically oriented, and transforming that into something virtuous. By that we purify the mind. We collect a lot of positive potential. The restless energy begins to calm down and that really helps us when we sit down to do calm abiding meditation and focus on an object.

So, all these things get fitted together into one practice. Tibetan Buddhism teaches many, many different practices and we do all of them because there are many, many aspects of ourselves that we need to develop, refine and reform.

*[Audience:] Why couldn't we just go directly into a cave to meditate and skip all those preliminary practices?*

Because otherwise what you are going to do is, you are going to move into your cave and you are going to

start interior decorating. Really! You will first interior decorate your cave, then you will plant a garden outside your cave and then you will build a fence of stones and do lots of other stuff because the mind has all that restlessness in it.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Setting up a line of seven bowls full of water—there is nothing particularly virtuous about that. It is not like bowls and water are virtuous, but what we are trying to do is think of the Buddha. We are developing the wish to make this offering for the benefit of sentient beings. We are developing some simulated bodhicitta. We are developing a generous mind that makes offerings. We are imagining the Buddha and offering all these things. By the power of our thought that is conjoined with physical action, it then becomes something really healthy for the mind.

Otherwise, at the beginning stages of the practice, if we go and sit in a cave, our mind will do a whole movie. That is why they really emphasize purification, collection of positive potential. As you are doing purification and the collection of positive potential, you slowly develop some single-pointedness, some mindfulness. When you are doing prostrations, you can hold the image of the Buddhas more continuously as you are prostrating. Or when you are making offerings, you can hold the image of the Buddha more in your mind when you are offering. And you can hold the image of the mandala more so that you are also developing some more ability to concentrate.

## **Choosing the object of meditation depending on the predominant affliction**

### ***To counter attachment, anger, wrong conceptions, or pride***

We talked a little bit about choosing an object of meditation to develop calm abiding. The Buddha taught about many, many different objects for meditation.

I talked before a little bit about meditating on ugliness. If your problem is with attachment, you meditate on ugliness as the antidote.

If your problem is with anger and aversion, you develop calm abiding by meditating on love.

If you have a lot of wrong conceptions, you meditate on dependent arising to free your mind from that.

If you have a lot of pride, you meditate on the eighteen constituents, the twelve sources and the six objects. If you are saying, “What are these?”, well that is exactly the point. Because as you meditate on them, you realize you do not know very much and your pride decreases.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

For instance, you visualize all the different components of the body and once you have done that, you hold that image firmly in your mind. Or you visualize a corpse and you hold that image firmly in your mind. Or you do a meditation to develop love and think of the kindness of others.

Once that feeling of love comes and your mind gets transformed into love, then you hold that feeling in your heart. So you have to cultivate the object of meditation in a sense.

### ***To counter mental chatter***

If your mind has a lot of discursiveness, a lot of mental chatter, then meditating on the breath is recommended. Meditation on the breath is used in all the Buddhist traditions. There are many different ways to meditate on the breath. They all work; they are all valid. The breath is a very common object of meditation.

### ***When the afflictions are about equal***

Then it is also recommended that if all your afflictions are equal and if you feel up to it, you could use the visualized image of the Buddha as your object of meditation. They say that this has special advantages. It helps you develop the ability to visualize and the image of the Buddha remains really strong in your mind so it increases the feeling of refuge. It also helps that image come to mind at the time you die, or when you are in trouble, or when there are difficulties. It helps to increase that spirit of faith and connection too. It also serves as a good preparation for doing tantric practice later on where a lot of visualization is done.

That is why in the Tibetan tradition, they often emphasize that if you can do it and if it is comfortable to you, use the image of the Buddha as your object to

develop calm abiding. But there are many other objects of meditation too and it is completely up to the individual because we all have different temperaments, different dispositions.

## **More advice on cultivating mindfulness**

### ***Our mind is like a kid in kindergarten***

They say that we have to keep renewing our mindfulness because our mind is like a little kid that goes to kindergarten—he enters the classroom but runs right out. You have to bring the kid back. Then the kid runs out again and you have to bring him back. He runs and you bring him back. Likewise with our attention. It keeps running out and it is on anything else but the object of meditation. So we have to keep bringing it back with mindfulness.

But then, just like the child eventually gets the point and gets tired of running here and running there and decides to stay calm and do some work, they say that with our mind too, eventually all of our wild thoughts will settle, our mind gets a little calmer, the mindfulness gets steadier and we are able to focus more continuously. This comes from just this process of constantly bringing the mind back again and again.

### ***Do not get angry with yourself***

It is really important that when your mind gets distracted during meditation, you do not get angry with yourself. Getting angry when we're distracted is another big mistake that we make. We think that we

are going to develop concentration right away. But when we sit down, we lose the object of meditation right away and we get angry with ourselves. We spend the rest of the meditation session telling ourselves how awful we are and how we are never going to progress and how everybody else from the Dharma group is certainly better. We waste a whole lot of time that way.

So do not get into this whole thing of being judgmental and critical. Just bring the mind back. Just bring your attention back.

If you are able to apply what we have learned on a daily basis, you will experience for yourself if it works. If you put into practice what we are learning, you will be able to have very specific questions that have arisen from trying the meditation. Also, if you practice daily, then when you receive the teachings, the teachings are going to make some sense to you. If you don't practice, then when I describe all these mental factors, they will seem like a bunch of gobbledygook technical categories. But if you try and practice the teachings, you will be able to see these different things in your own mind.

## **Review**

We are in the middle of talking about the five hindrances to developing calm abiding.

### ***1. Laziness***

The first one was laziness. The grossest kind of

laziness is just the inability to get ourselves on the cushion. You overcame that by being here!

## ***2. Forgetting the object of meditation***

The second obstacle that arises is forgetting the object of meditation. For example, you are using the visualized image of the Buddha as your object of meditation. In your meditation, you try to recall the image of the Buddha, but your mind goes blank. All of a sudden you can't remember what the Buddha looked like. Or, you try and put your mind on the object, but in a moment [snaps fingers] your attention is gone. There is no mindfulness. The mind isn't able to hold the object for longer than two breaths.

Some of you might be using the breath or some other object of meditation—that is fine. I am just using the image of the Buddha here as an example.

The way to overcome this obstacle is by generating our mindfulness again and again. The meaning of mindfulness here is not exactly the same as that in the Vipassana tradition. The word 'mindfulness' has different definitions.

In the Theravada tradition, mindfulness is basically being aware of what's going on in the mind and bearing witness. This is very much what it means in the Burmese tradition.

But here, mindfulness is remembering the object of meditation. Remembering the object of meditation—for example the breath or the image of the Buddha—in such a way that the mind is able to remain continuous on it and distraction is prevented. We have to develop some ability to keep the mind continuously



on the object. That's our next job after we sit down on the cushion.

### ***3. Laxity and excitement***

When we are able to overcome the first two obstacles to a certain extent—at times, we may still not be able to get ourselves on the cushions or hold onto the object of meditation, but in general, we are able to—we will be able to develop some mindfulness on the object of meditation. At this time, we will get other interruptions, of which the two basic ones are laxity and excitement. The third hindrance actually consists of these two hindrances.

In some books laxity is translated as dullness or sinking, and excitement is translated as agitation. I'm going to describe what these mean because the English words don't give you an accurate feeling for these two mental factors.

## **Two main qualities required for developing calm abiding**

### ***1. Stability***

When we are developing calm abiding, there are two main qualities we want to develop. One is called stability. This is the ability to keep your mind on the object, to make the mind stable. It's the continuity of mindfulness on a chosen object. To have stability, you need mindfulness. You need memory of the object. You need concentration or samadhi to keep your attention there for a continuous period of time. With

stability, the mind is somehow engrossed with the object. It's captivated by the object. The mind is kept stable on it. It's not bouncing all over the universe.

## *2. Clarity*

The other quality that is required for developing calm abiding is clarity. Now, we usually think clarity means the object of meditation is clear, but here, clarity actually refers more to the subjective mind being clear. It means our perceiving mind is clear; the mind has some quality of vividness or lucidity. By having this mental clarity, we slowly get the clarity of the object, and then we intensify this clarity.

Now, there are certain instances when the mind is quite clear, for example, when we have very strong afflictions. When we have a lot of attachment, our mind is not dull. It is not falling asleep. When we have a lot of jealousy or anger, there is a certain lucidity or vividness of mind. This lucidity or vividness of mind is what is used in tantra when we talk about transforming the afflictions. That is a subjective quality of the mind state, and we use that in a positive way to develop concentration. That is one way that we transform the afflictions.

When our afflictions arise, there might be a certain subjective clarity, but this does not mean there is always clarity of the object. Sometimes there is. When you are attached to chocolate cake, your mind is vivid and the image of the chocolate cake is vivid. But sometimes, we get this other kind of attachment or this other kind of anger where the object isn't very vivid, but the mind has a lot of energy. In this case,

you have the subjective clarity but not the objective clarity.

It can also happen, for example, when we meditate on the image of the Buddha. Our mind is clear; we have a lot of enthusiasm and gusto for doing the meditation. But the image of the Buddha isn't very clear. That might happen because we are not used to visualizing the image of the Buddha. Slowly, through practicing again and again, we will be able to get the clarity of the object.

Sometimes we may have the clarity of the meditation object, for example, the image of the Buddha, but our mind isn't completely alert and vivid and lucid on the object. The analogy that they give is, you are driving on the highway, you see the sign for the next exit and you know that it's your exit, but you drive right past it anyway. [Laughter.] That kind of quality comes up in the meditation too. You are there, but you are not completely there. In that case we have the objective clarity but not the subjective clarity of the mind. We need to work on this.

Those are two qualities that we need to develop in our meditation. We need to have strength in both of them.

### **Laxity and excitement: hindrances to stability and clarity**

Now the things that interrupt the stability and the clarity are the laxity and the excitement. Laxity chiefly inhibits the clarity and excitement chiefly inhibits the stability. When there is laxity, your mind is spaced out; the clarity of your mind isn't so strong.

When there is excitement, the mind is quite restless; it is very easy to lose the object. The mind isn't very stable.

Laxity and excitement are two mental factors among the twenty secondary or auxiliary mental factors. Laxity is not explicitly listed among the twenty, but is included in them.

There's another mental factor called lethargy that is listed among the twenty. Lethargy comes from ignorance. It is a branch of ignorance and it's a heaviness of body and mind. It's a state of being very close to sleep. It is different from laxity. Laxity is when you're spaced out.

Lethargy is when the laxity has become extreme and you are (falling asleep). You know how you get into that state: you start out in your meditation and your mind is kind of clear; then after you meditate for a while, your mind gets a bit vague and a little bit spaced out, but you are still kind of on the object; and then as you watch, the mind becomes vaguer, and vaguer like you are falling asleep, and you might even have other images. You get into this dream-like, trance-like state and then all of a sudden, you fall asleep. Have you had that when you meditate? [Laughter.] That's lethargy. The mind and body are getting really heavy.

While laxity can sometimes be neutral or even virtuous in nature, like if you are focused on a virtuous object, lethargy is either neutral or unwholesome or non-virtuous. It causes unserviceability or inflexibility of the body and mind.

*[Audience:] If the image of the Buddha isn't so clear,*

*can we visualize something more familiar like a flower or a baseball?*

[laughter] There is a special advantage to using the image of the Buddha because it helps you generate refuge. It helps you recall the Buddha's qualities. Visualizing a flower or a baseball doesn't have that effect. By visualizing a baseball, you're putting that image in your mind again and again. You do not want to have this image in your mind all the time. Usually it's not recommended to switch to another object that you are more familiar with unless it's Chenrezig or Tara, or the breath, or one of the other objects that we've talked about.

If you're working on the image of the Buddha and it isn't clear, either switch to another object that the Buddha recommended or look at a picture of the Buddha before you start. Have one picture that you use regularly, and spend some time looking at it. Then close your eyes and recall it. Like after you have looked at your bills, you can see them even when you close your eyes. [Laughter.] Sometimes when you take tests you know which side of the page on the text the answer is on and what things look like. It's that same kind of faculty.

Look at a picture or a drawing or something, and then just close your eyes and remember it. Keep working at it like that. One of the chief difficulties why the image of the Buddha is not clear is because we are not used to thinking about the Buddha. We are more used to thinking about baseball and ice cream. But now, we want to recondition our mind.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Yes, you can remember that. It is good to remember that the Buddha's body is made of light and it's not heavy. It is good to have a feeling of the Buddha's qualities, but the main thing you are concentrating on is the visual image. You don't need to block out all those feelings, because those feelings can be quite enriching and can help you make the image more vivid. For example, when you feel the kindness of the Buddha very strongly.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Try to do both. It is like being able to look at somebody and saying: "I love you," at the same time. You can do that, can't you? You can look at somebody and feel love at the same time.

### **Coarse and subtle laxity**

Now, when we talk about laxity, there are two main degrees of laxity—gross laxity and subtle laxity. Actually there're all sorts of different gradations of laxity in between. Don't think it's just either/or. It is like the dimmer switch that you turn to adjust the level of light you want.

Coarse laxity happens when the clarity or the lucidity of your mind decreases. You are still on the object. You have some stability, but your mind is getting spaced out. The mind is depressed. The clarity is on its way out. The object doesn't appear as distinctly. You have stability but things are fading. If

you are not on top of the situation, you will go into lethargy and then soon you are going to fall asleep. [Laughter.] This kind of laxity is easy to recognize but difficult to oppose, as we know.

When you are able to eliminate the gross laxity, the mind may get into the subtle kind of laxity where you have stability and (subjective) clarity, but it is not very strong. They say that this subtle laxity is a very dangerous pitfall because it's very difficult to recognize. Once you've recognized it, it is easy to eliminate. You just need to tighten your concentration. But it is very difficult to recognize.

This is not the main thing that we have to worry about at the moment, but it is good to understand it. Sometimes people can be so concentrated that their breath stops, but they still have this subtle laxity. Or they can remain concentrated on the object of meditation for a day without moving, but the strength of the clarity of the mind is not completely strong.

They say the subtle laxity is real dangerous because many meditators mistake this for calm abiding. They think they have reached calm abiding when actually they are being very subtly 'spaced-out'. This is dangerous. You think you have gotten somewhere when you haven't and it is very easy to become complacent. If you become complacent and you just continue meditating in this subtle laxity, then what happens is that your wisdom decreases, your memory starts to go, your intelligence decreases, and you can even have an animal rebirth afterwards.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

This is when you have stability and you have clarity, but the clarity isn't real strong. There's something missing. It is not completely there. It is like you are watching the TV set, but part of your mind is somehow still a little bit spaced out. The clarity of the mind isn't complete. They say the apprehension of the object is slightly slack. The clarity remains, but your grip on the object is a little bit loose. This actually comes a bit later on the path after you've eliminated the coarse laxity. My guess is that the coarse laxity is much more what we have to deal with now.

### **Antidotes to coarse laxity**

I want to give you some remedies for the coarse laxity as they are quite practical.

#### ***Make the object of meditation interesting***

What happens with the coarse laxity is you have some clarity but your mind is actually vague about the object. Your mind has become too withdrawn inside. What you need to do is to make the object more interesting. For example, if your object of meditation is the breath, make the breath more interesting: "What does it feel like when I start to inhale? What does it feel like in that space between the breaths?" Enlarge the scope of your object. Make it more appealing.

If you are working with the image of the Buddha, make the colors more vivid. Brighten it up. Make the Buddha appear gorgeous. Brighten stuff up. Make it interesting. Imagine him being made of light or go



over the various features. Look in detail at all the parts of the Buddha. Maybe look at the Buddha's eyes and feel the Buddha's compassion. This is where the feelings that you were talking about help make the object more interesting. The Buddha isn't just this flat image. It is a 3-D thing. It's a person who is looking at you. There's some kind of relationship there and this is interesting. The mind wakes up.

### ***Temporarily switch the object of meditation***

If that doesn't work try to temporarily switch your object of meditation. For example, leave the image of the Buddha or the breath, and switch to doing some analytic meditation on a topic like the precious human life or the advantages of bodhicitta, or refuge and the qualities of the Buddha. In other words, doing some kind of analytic meditation that is going to make your mind happy and buoyant. When there is coarse laxity, what has happened is that the mind has gotten flat or dull. It isn't energized. Do analytic meditation on one of the lamrim topics that's going to make your mind excited.

This is why it is very good to do the analytic meditation on the lamrim topics on a regular basis. Then when you just think about the precious human life, some feeling comes. Or you think about the qualities of the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. Or you think about the advantages of bodhicitta and what it would be like to be a bodhisattva. All of a sudden your mind gets jazzed and it seems good. Once you have woken your mind, you can switch back to your object of meditation: the breath or the image of the

Buddha, or whatever it is.

### *Visualize the syllables*

If that doesn't work, another thing to try is to use a forceful way to remove the laxity. With this technique, you visualize your mind the size of a white pea, or as a white letter "AH" at your heart. You say the syllable "PEY" very loudly and you imagine that the white pea, in which is your consciousness, shoots up and comes out of the crown of your head, splits open, and your mind dissolves with the infinity of space. Do you see how this visualization is completely contradictory to that withdrawn sunken-in mind of laxity? This helps to broaden the scope of the mind.

### *Break the session*

Now if all these techniques don't work, then break your meditation session. Stop your session. Go out, put cold water on your face, take a walk, look at long distances, get some exercise, drink a cup of coffee—they didn't say this in the scriptures. [Laughter.] Sometimes our mind is in a state that is withdrawn and sunken in. It just doesn't do any good to sit there and push ourselves, saying: "I've got to concentrate. I've got to do this right. Everybody else is doing it right, but I'm so horrible. Look at me!" This usual thing that we get into and is completely useless. It is better to break the session. Look in the distance. Don't go sit in your dark room to read a book. That's going to make your mind more dull. You have to get outside, get some exercise, look up, look out. Cold water is great.

It is interesting that throughout all these calm abiding instructions they really emphasize: don't sit there and squeeze and force your mind. I realize that is something that we tend to do. I appreciate these instructions. Before I heard these, what I used to do whenever my mind gets sleepy and dull is, I would think about death and suffering: "I have a precious human life but it's going to end very soon. I'm going to die." But that wouldn't wake my mind up at all. And then I heard these teachings and they say: "No, when your mind is dull, you have to think about something that makes your mind joyful."

You think about death and suffering when you have too much excitement and attachment, but when your mind is already suppressed, don't think about those things. Think about precious human life, bodhicitta, the Triple Gem. This is pointing out the fact that we have to be very skillful with our mind and know how to recognize the defilements and exactly which antidote to apply. If you apply the wrong antidote you will go nowhere.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

The subtle laxity: the hard thing about it is noticing it. Once you have noticed it, just tighten the mode of apprehension of the object a bit. Tighten the mind on the object. It is a very delicate thing, like tuning a guitar string: if you make the attention too tight, excitement can start coming in. But if you make the apprehension or the attention too loose, the mind starts getting lax. It is a matter of learning to balance. But if you are going to err, it is better to err on the

side of making the mind slightly too tight. When you do that, you can see the excitement very clearly and counteract it. Whereas if you err by holding the object too loose, you get into this subtle laxity which is more difficult to detect. But we should really concentrate more on the gross laxity and the lethargy.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

That's lethargy, not laxity. It usually happens when you are sitting in the front row of teachings in front of the high lamas. You fall asleep. Repeatedly falling asleep in your meditation can be a karmic obscuration. One of the things that causes it, is mistreating Dharma materials: leaving them on the floor, putting your teacup or your prayer beads on top of your Dharma books, using them to earn money, selling them to earn money, using them to line your wastepaper basket.

Look what the communists did to the sacred things in Tibet and China. They put them right on the floor and made people walk on them. Karmically it can result in this kind of obscuration where the mind gets dull. I'm not saying that this is the only cause of falling asleep during teachings. There are many other causes too.

Another action that can cause it is to do the following out of ignorance: avoiding the Dharma, criticizing the Buddha's teachings, saying that Dharma practice is useless. In previous lives, we might have said: "Dharma is useless. It's worthless. It's much better to go horseback riding and ice-skating, and have a good time. We don't need to go to teachings."

What happens is that when we finally and miraculously have the opportunity to listen to teachings again, that karma ripens and the mind shuts down.

You can see cause and effect working there. If this is happening a lot, then doing some purification can be very helpful, and I think specifically prostrations can be good for this. You can see that prostrations is the opposite of laxity.

*[Audience:] Were you saying that even though there is laxity, that it could be considered a virtuous action if you're meditating say, on the image of the Buddha?*

It is virtuous in the sense of the Buddha being the object of meditation. But from the point of view of your mind falling asleep, if your mind gets bogged down and completely dull, that's not a virtuous state of mind.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Right. I think sometimes it is very good to make an effort to sit for a certain amount of time. Don't take what I was saying as: "Oh okay, the next time the knee hurts, I will get up and take a walk," because then you are never going to develop any concentration. There is no endurance. What I was talking about is when you have really been making an effort, but still, your mind is just totally ... you have totally lost it, then it is time to take a break.

*[Audience:] If you've been making an effort for some time ...*

It's hard to say what 'some time' is, and again it depends what kind of meditation you are doing. Doing your morning prayers is different from being in a retreat to develop calm abiding. If you are doing your morning prayers, then keep yourself on the cushion and finish the session. If you are in a retreat developing calm abiding, and you are going to be doing many short sessions throughout the day, then it is better to end that session and come back five minutes later for another session.

This isn't saying that you end your daily prayers early and don't do any kind of meditation for the rest of the day. It's referring to situations where your mind is completely out of control. In such cases, give yourself a break, but come back soon after for another session.

Sometimes it does us good to sit there and look at our mind. We don't have to get tight, but rather: "My mind's going bonkers. Well, I'm going to sit here and look at it. What is my mind going bonkers about?" Instead of getting all wrapped up in the objects that your mind is going bonkers about, start to notice and give labels to those objects. "I'm going bonkers because I have ten million things to do and nobody's helping me." "I'm going bonkers because somebody criticized me." "I'm going bonkers because I feel rejected." "I'm going bonkers because ..."—whatever it is. It is good to develop some ability to notice what's going on in our mind and give it a label, instead of developing the habit of getting off from the

cushion the moment we have a little bit of mental discomfort and going to the refrigerator. Namō [homage to] refrigerator, Namō TV. [Laughter.]

*[Audience: inaudible]*

It makes a huge difference. That is why we say it is very good to do some purification every day. That is why in the evening, before you go to bed, it is so important to look over what happened during the day. Do prostrations. Do Vajrasattva. Do the Shakyamuni Buddha meditation with the light and nectar coming and purifying. It does make a difference. It is important. This is why the preliminary practices are so important, why the seven-limb prayer is there. We do a very short version of it, but why it's there is because it purifies, it creates positive potential. Why do the masters recommend that we do a hundred thousand prostrations or a hundred thousand Vajrasattva? It is not because a hundred thousand is particularly this or that, but it is just to get us going, to get us to do that purification. It really does work; it does make a big difference.

## **Excitement and its antidotes**

The other part of the third hindrance to calm abiding, is excitement. It is sometimes translated as agitation. Excitement is a kind of distraction or wandering, and it can develop at other times, not just during meditation. Whereas laxity happens more specifically in meditation than in other activities. Outside of meditation, we tend to have lethargy rather than

laxity.

Excitement focuses on a sensual object that we are familiar with, had some previous contact with, and the mind is scattered outwards. The mind grasps onto the object with a feeling of clinging, craving, wanting. So there we go. It obviously functions to obstruct calm abiding since it is very difficult to have calm abiding when the mind is thinking about chocolate cake, pizza and this very good looking person that you have just met. The mind is looking outwards; it is not on the object of meditation.

Excitement is slightly different from scattering. Excitement is directed towards an object that you have an attachment or attraction for, and is a form of attachment. Excitement is a type of scattering, but scattering can include other things. For example, when you are sitting and meditating, all of a sudden you remembered the guy who criticized you, or you remember what happened ten years ago, and you get very angry, or you get jealous or resentful. These are examples of scattering, but they are not excitement. Excitement is referring specifically to instances where objects of attachment come in the mind.

Scattering can also happen with virtuous objects. For example, you are meditating on the Buddha and all of a sudden Tara walks in and you want to switch the object of meditation. Or you are meditating on the Buddha and you think: "Oh, I got to meditate on bodhicitta instead." You are distracted by a virtuous object, which is certainly better than being distracted by pizza or Rock-n-Roll music, but still, it is distracting the mind from your main object of meditation.



They usually emphasize the excitement more than the scattering because when our mind gets distracted from the object of meditation, it is usually due to an object that we have attachment for. Watch out for this when you are meditating. You will get a good idea of the kinds of things that your mind has difficulty with. You get an idea of the things that you are attached to, because you watch where the excitement arises from.

When you start daydreaming of something that's wonderful, what are you daydreaming about? Those are usually the things that we are attached to. When we see what they are, we can start applying the antidotes to them. We remember their impermanence. We remember that they have limited ability to bring us happiness. We remember that even if we get them, they are going to bring a whole new set of problems and we will probably still be dissatisfied.

This is a very good way to get to know yourself. We are always saying: "I don't know myself. I don't know who I am." Just watch your mind when you are trying to concentrate. You'll get a very good picture of yourself.

When we start observing the kinds of things that our mind scatters to, we will notice that it is not just objects of desire that distract us. We also dredge up all the old memories of past hurts and pains and grudges, resentment, jealousy and the feeling of incompetence, discouragement, etc.

When these things come up, recognize that the mind is scattering. Recognize that you are distracted from your object of meditation. In this way, you can get a good idea of the things that the mind is clinging to, the things that have not yet been resolved. And

again, apply the antidotes to them. Meditate on loving-kindness. Meditate on patience. See the disadvantages of the anger and so on to balance out your mind.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

The mind becomes very obsessed and goes beyond the bounds of compassion into obsession, or righteousness. Something like that. This is very common. When we do a meditation retreat, we come out with the best remedies to save the world. We design all sorts of social action things. We design orphanages and welfare projects. We know how we are going to build a monastery. We have the whole visit of the Dalai Lama planned out. We do all of these in our meditation because they are all virtuous. But we must recognize that they are not the object of our meditation. We have to be very careful not to get scattered by them too.

When you are in your meditation session, those are not your object of meditation. The creativity should be on the object of meditation. Otherwise what will happen in your meditation is: one day you are bringing the Dalai Lama to Seattle, the next day you are building a huge Dharma center, and the next day you are working for refugees, and the next day you're doing something about welfare rights. When you get up from your meditation session, it is all gone anyway. You may act on some of them, but you haven't developed any stability in your meditation.

It is true that sitting and thinking about those virtuous things is better than thinking about being

violent, which I often distract myself with. But still, it is not the object of my meditation right now. It is actually going to please His Holiness much more if we develop some concentration, and like you said, make peace with ourselves, develop that kind of mental stability, and then in our break times when we are off our cushions, we can think about all those virtuous things and actually act upon them.

I have a friend who keeps a notepad by his meditation cushion. He gets very good ideas when he's meditating. He writes them down, then he can say: "Okay, I won't forget it and I'll think about it later." But the disadvantage of that is when the mind is very active that day, you'll find yourself writing all the time. [Laughter.] We have incredible creative capacity, you see.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

What you are saying is very good because it pinpoints the difference between what a bodhisattva might feel and what emotional suffering is, and what we need to work at to be a bodhisattva. Often in our development of love and compassion, we confuse them. Bodhisattvas have this incredible kind of mental stability or mental peace and the ability to be continuous with their activity. It's different from us in instances when our mind gets so 'compassionate' that it becomes obsessed with something; we are really hot on it for a while but then we quickly get disillusioned and disappointed, and we burn out.

We will continue with "excitement" in the next session. Let's sit quietly for a few minutes.

## Review

We have been discussing the hindrances. We discussed the **first hindrance** to developing calm abiding, which is laziness, not being able to get ourselves on the cushion. What do we do to combat laziness? Faith, aspiration, joyous effort, and pliancy are the four antidotes to laziness. Laziness is when we are too busy or distracted with other things, when we are just hanging around, or when we are very discouraged. To combat laziness we need to develop faith by thinking about the advantages of calm abiding. By thinking about all the advantages of developing calm abiding, our mind gets excited about practice. Once we have a sense of faith, the aspiration that wants to practice and get the results of practice arises. From this we get effort to put into the practice. That leads eventually to having pliancy of body and mind, which makes it very, very easy to practice.

The **second hindrance**, which we also discussed in a previous session, is forgetting the object of meditation. What is the antidote to that? Mindfulness. Mindfulness means remembering the object of meditation, going over the details, fixing it in the mind so that distraction doesn't arise.

## Laxity

The **third hindrance** is laxity and excitement.

That's what we were talking about the last time we met. We went into a big discussion about laxity, the gross laxity and the subtle laxity; how if you don't take care of those, then you get lethargy, which is

when you are falling asleep. When we start falling asleep, we have definitely lost the stability. There is no stability. We have lost the object. If our mind gets super excited and runs after something else, we have also lost the object; we have also lost the stability. Lethargy is when we are on the verge of sleeping. Laxity is when we are just spaced out. So there is stability with laxity. With the gross laxity, there's not a whole lot of clarity, but with the subtle laxity there can be a lot of clarity. (Remember, "clarity" means clarity of the subjective mind, not just clarity of the object.)

You can see this sometimes in your own experience. The first big challenge you have to get through is getting yourself to sit down. Then when you've gotten yourself to sit down, the big challenge is remembering the object of meditation and getting yourself to focus your mind on it to start with. Sometimes after we have finished saying the preliminary prayers, the mind starts wondering even before we could hit the object of meditation. So we have to remember, "Breath," or "Buddha," or whatever it is that we are meditating on. We need to make that mindfulness strong so at least at the beginning we can get our mind on the object and have some stability there. (At the beginning it's really much more important to just focus on trying to keep the mind on the object. Don't worry so much about the clarity. Worry more about keeping your mind on the object. When distractions occur, just keep bringing the mind back, and bringing it back, and bringing it back.)

### **Antidotes to laxity**

Once your mind is on the object, sometimes either laxity or the excitement interrupts. You are just getting there, you just have kind of an image of the Buddha. Maybe it's not super clear, but you are on it for more than two seconds, and then whammo—maybe laxity hits and you can feel your mind start to get slightly spacey, and the mind just doesn't feel completely present. It doesn't feel vivid. It feels somehow foggy, veiled; something isn't right. When we are experiencing laxity, this is the time to use the antidotes we discussed previously: visualizing your mind as a small white pea at your heart, saying the syllable “PEY,” and imagining shooting it up and out and blending with the sky. That expands the horizon.

Or, if the mind is too depressed, you temporarily shift your object of meditation and you think about something that's going to uplift the mind. You could meditate on the precious human life, bodhicitta, or the qualities of the Triple Gem—something that you have meditated on before, something you have become familiar with. When you think of these subjects the mind can get happy, and that wakens the mind. It refreshes the mind. If none of those things work and if you are in a retreat situation, then you can temporarily break your session. Go take a break, take a walk, splash cold water, look off into the distance, and then come back and have another session. In terms of your daily practice, if every time you started to get lax you stopped your session you would never have a daily practice. So sometimes in spite of it all we have to hang in there with our daily practice and keep going.

## **Excitement**

The other thing that takes us away from the object of meditation is *excitement*. Excitement is basically a form of attachment caused when our mind starts going toward something that's pleasurable, something that we want that's going to bring us happiness: it could be food or sex or money or beaches or flowers. Our mind can get attached to almost anything! So this is the predominant thing that leads our mind away from the object of meditation. When a lot of anger, resentment or jealousy comes up, that is also a form of distraction. We get all of these distractions when we meditate. We get all sorts of different emotions.

Sometimes we might even be distracted by a virtuous object. We might be trying to meditate on the figure of the Buddha and all of a sudden we want to think about bodhicitta instead. Or, like we were talking the last time we met, we start planning all these great Dharma centers we are going to build, and Dharma activities we're going to do.

During this session I want to talk more specifically about excitement, because I think this is probably one of the things that we confront a lot. Just as with laxity (where we discussed gross laxity and subtle laxity), the same is true with excitement. And in the same way with the laxity (where it wasn't just two types, but it was a shade, a gray between the gross and the subtle), so too with excitement. There's gross excitement, then it shades into the subtle excitement.

## **Gross excitement**

Gross excitement is when some desirable object pops into your mind and off you go. You are off the object of meditation and you are daydreaming. Everybody knows what I am talking about? Gross excitement is fairly easy to recognize, but to recognize it we have to use another mental factor called alertness, or introspective alertness.

Introspective alertness is the same factor we use to recognize the laxity. This is the one that's like a little spy. It comes from time to time and checks up to see if we are concentrating or not. When we don't have strong introspective alertness, then our mind goes off in excitement. We start daydreaming about something, and then ten minutes later we hear this [sound of bell] and we go, "Oh, wow." Because we didn't even realize we were distracted. We didn't realize we were daydreaming. That happens because the introspective alertness is very, very weak. What we need to do is strengthen that introspective alertness so that it can catch the wandering mind sooner. Instead of catching it when the bell rings maybe we can catch it after a minute or catch it after a few seconds. So introspective alertness is very, very important.

Introspective alertness is going to be very, very useful in our lives. It helps us to get to know ourselves. Sometimes you get in the car, you drive from home to work, and if somebody asked you when you got to work, "What did you think about in the car?" you couldn't tell them. You know that you were thinking about things the whole time in the car but you can't remember what they were. Well, that again is because there is no introspective alertness coming up. The introspective alertness is what pops up from



time to time and surveys the situation and says, “What am I thinking? What’s going on here? Is my mind doing what I want it to do?” The reason that our mind so often just rambles all over the place and we don’t know what is going on in it is, to a great extent, due to this lack of introspective alertness, this lack of the little spy that pops up from time to time. If the spy pops up and sees that we are wandering, then we can renew the mindfulness.

In meditation we renew the mindfulness by returning our mind to the object of meditation. In our daily life we renew our mindfulness by going back to—let’s say you are driving the car—reciting the mantra. Or going back to remembering what your precepts are. Or going back to thinking about the teaching that we have had. Or going back, when you are in a traffic jam, to thinking about the fact that all these sentient beings want happiness and none of them wants suffering. So you renew your mindfulness about some virtuous object that you are contemplating. This is using the events of daily life so that you can take advantage of everything that’s happening in your life to practice.

### **Antidotes to gross excitement**

So we notice the excitement with introspective alertness. With gross excitement, because the mind is too elevated, it’s too hyped up, it’s too excited and has too much energy, what we need to do is think about something very, very sobering. We can think about suffering. We think about death. We visualize skeletons.

This is really great. When you get the giggles in meditation and you can't stop, just visualize skeletons. It works really well. I have tried it many times. When your mind is completely bananas all over the place, then just sit and imagine corpses; think about the death of your loved ones, think about your own death, think about the transient nature of life. Visualize yourself as an old person and what it's going to feel like. Visualize yourself as being sick and what it's going to feel like. Think about something that just sobers the mind down. Again, don't think of these things when your mind is already slightly depressed, when you are having laxity or lethargy. When the mind is depressed, you think of something [uplifting] like the precious human life or the qualities of the Buddhas to uplift the mind. When your mind is too excited with attachment, then you think of something to bring it down. Are you with me?

### **Subtle excitement**

Subtle excitement is when you haven't completely lost the object of meditation; you are concentrating on the object but something else is going on, too. There are different analogies used to describe subtle excitement. One example is that it's like a fish under the water. The water is smooth, but something is going on underneath the surface. The fish swims under the water. So in the same way with your meditation, you are mindful of the image of the Buddha, you are mindful of what you are meditating on, but you are aware that something else is going on. You can feel the energy of excitement and you are about ready to

give birth to a really good attachment here. The mind is about ready to go off on some tangent. So the subtle excitement is when the mind is about ready to go off.

Or another example is when you are on the object but you keep going off and on, off and on. It's like you are saying the mantra but you are also daydreaming at the same time. Or you are kind of there visualizing the Buddha, but you are also planning things at the same time, thinking of what you are going to get and how you are going to spend your money. But the Buddha is still kind of there. Or the breath is still kind of there. You're kind of with the breath, at least you are getting "in" when it's going in and "out" when it's going out [laughter] ; you are not saying "rising" when you are exhaling. So you are kind of with the breath, but you are not completely there because the mind is just getting distracted and wants to go off on something else.

### **Antidotes to subtle excitement**

That's the subtle excitement, and that's a little bit more difficult to recognize; but again, we use the introspective alertness to recognize it. There are various ways to deal with subtle excitement. One way that's often encouraged in the vipassana meditation as taught in the Burmese tradition is just to note it, just to observe it. Give it a label. Label it "excitement". Label it "attachment." Label it "restlessness." Label it "daydreaming." Whatever it is, be aware of it but don't feed energy into it. Instead let it peter out and shift your attention back to the breath. For some people that works really, really well.

For other people the labeling technique doesn't work so well. What they need is to do this much more sobering meditation of thinking about death and suffering and impermanence; or thinking about the disadvantages of attachment; or asking themselves, "Even if I got what I am attached to, would it make me happy? What other problems would it bring?" So for some people, they need much more of an analytic approach to really see how the subtle excitement is an affliction and something worthy to be let go of.

With the subtle excitement, what we need to do there is loosen the mind a little bit, relax the mind a little bit. We don't necessarily need to meditate on death or something like that because the problem isn't quite so serious, but the subtle excitement comes because we've tightened the concentration too much. Our mind's getting a little bit pushy, a little bit tense. We are trying too hard, and so it's this delicate balance in the meditation between making your attention too loose and making it too tight. If you make it too tight, the mind is going to get excited. If you make it too loose, the mind is going to get lax.

I find this teaching extremely helpful. I mentioned before that when I would start falling asleep in meditation I would think about death, which is the absolute wrong thing to do when you are falling asleep. Similarly, when my mind would get excited, I would tell myself, "I have to concentrate stronger. I have to concentrate stronger." That's the exact opposite of what you really need to do, because you don't need to push yourself at that moment. What you need is a certain kind of relaxation in the mind, not something that increases the tension. It's interesting,

isn't it?

Another way to deal with the excitement is to meditate on a black drop at your navel chakra. When the mind gets too excited, if you lower the concentration level in the body, the energies of the body lower. In the same way, when the mind is too lax we visualize something white at the heart and shoot it up and out. Here, the mind is out all over, so we visualize something dark, lower on the body, and small. We bring the concentration inward. So that can also act as an antidote to the excitement.

### **Introspective alertness**

Introspective alertness is described as an antidote to both laxity and excitement. It is an aspect of wisdom; it is the nature of wisdom. It's not listed specifically as a separate mental factor, but it's included within the mental factor of what is sometimes translated as "wisdom," or more often translated as "intelligence." It's that mind that can discern what's going on, that can discriminate when we are on something skillful and when we are on something not skillful. It's the mind that can tell when our mind is going in the right direction and when our mind is going astray. That's why it's an aspect of intelligence, because it can discriminate. It's very helpful because when you are meditating and you don't know if what's going on in your mind is something to practice or something to abandon, then you get really confused. Introspective alertness helps us to discern that, then we can apply the antidote. The introspective alertness itself isn't what removes the laxity or the excitement. It just

notices them, then other aspects of the mind follow suit to apply the antidote—either loosening the concentration or tightening the concentration, switching to another object temporarily, or something like that. It's the introspective alertness that notices, and then we bring in other antidotes.

An analogy is given that's quite good: your hand is holding the glass and your eyes are looking at it. The glass is like the object of meditation and your hand is the mindfulness. Your mindfulness is on the object of meditation; then every once in a while you look at it to make sure you are not spilling it. So with the introspective alertness it's a fine balance here. You don't want to use it too much, because if you sit there and look at yourself all the time you are going to get so nervous you are going to drop the whole thing. In the same way, we need to be real skillful with the introspective alertness. It comes up from time to time, not too often; but if it doesn't come up enough then it's like holding the glass but not watching what you are doing, and sooner or later you are going to spill it. So that's one analogy describing how mindfulness and the introspective alertness play together.

Another analogy is the example of an elephant. (Maybe our experience is more with dogs.) If you are walking an elephant down the street, you are going to be concerned with keeping the elephant on the street; but you also have to pay attention that he doesn't go off the street. The street is our object of meditation and the elephant is our attention; the mindfulness is having the elephant stay on the street. That's the principal thing we have to do, to have that stability of mindfulness so the elephant doesn't go somewhere

else. The main thing is to keep him on the street, but you also look to see he doesn't go somewhere else. That is like the introspective alertness, where it comes up and sees, "Am I going somewhere else? Am I falling asleep? Am I spaced out? Am I daydreaming? Am I planning the rest of my life?" Whatever it is.

All these different things—like mindfulness or introspective alertness—are mental factors, so they are already present within the mind. Some of the mental factors may not be very strong, but they are there. If we practice, we increase them. We shouldn't think that they are not there and we have to create something that's not there. This is the whole idea of Buddha potential: the factors necessary for enlightenment are already present in us. What we have to do is bring them out and make them grow. So we learn mindfulness. We learn introspective alertness. The way they are learned or developed is simply through practice. We're habituating our mind, making new habits.

At a conference we just had with His Holiness, somebody asked him what strengths and weaknesses he saw in Westerners, and he said, "You are very practical. You want to do something and you want to see results. Whereas we Tibetans, we believe in the bodhisattva stages, we believe in Buddhahood, but we are a little bit complacent and we think 'Yeah, they are there, but they will come later.'" He says, "Therefore the Tibetans don't get the energy to practice. They have the faith. They have the belief but there isn't that kind of energy. With the Westerners, the faith and belief may not be real stable, but there is a lot of energy." He said that we are practical; we

want to see results. We have to take that practical mind that wants to see results and make sure that we use it, but use it consistently. That's the whole idea of practicing again and again.

He also made the comment that with the Tibetans there is not too much danger that they are going to give up the practice because they think, "Bodhisattva stages, yeah, it comes a long time in the future, so I am not expecting to get them now. I'll just do my practice and they will come when they are ready." Whereas the down side of our practical mind that wants results is that we are sitting there digging up the flower seed every day to see if it's sprouted yet. We are so eager, we want to get somewhere in our practice; then that eagerness becomes an obstacle. We need to focus on continuous practice. What he was talking about is this merging between east and west, where you have the Westerners' effort to do the practice but the Easterners' long range vision to be able to stay with it. It's this whole idea of being able to practice again and again, that things aren't going to drop like bombshells out of the sky: "Now I have perfect concentration. I slip into samadhi and there I remain." Maybe in the movies but ...[laughter].

#### **4. Non-application and its antidote**

The **fourth hindrance** is called non-application. This refers to noticing with your introspective alertness, for example, that you are starting to fall asleep, or noticing that you are day dreaming, but you don't do anything about it. We know that one too, don't we? Finally we notice, but then we say, "Um ... it's kind



of nice to think about this. I don't want to go back to the breath. I don't want to go back to the Buddha. My boyfriend is much nicer." [Laughter.] So we don't apply the antidote. Or we get angry in our meditation. The introspective alertness comes up and we notice there is anger, but then we don't do anything about it. We just sit there and we get angrier and angrier and madder and madder as we think more and more about what that person said, how they looked at us, and how obnoxious they are. So non-application is the fourth hindrance.

You see how there is a series here. The first hindrance is laziness; then forgetting the object; then laxity and excitement; then finally your noticing the laxity and excitement but not doing anything about it.

The remedy for non-application is application. So do it; apply the antidote. We have been talking a lot about the different antidotes, so apply them. Make an effort to do that. It is very interesting to watch our mind sometimes. With the introspective alertness, we may notice a defilement, but then we don't do anything about it. We get a certain amount of ego mileage out of our defilements sometimes. It's kind of interesting to watch.

## **5. Over-application and its antidote**

The **fifth hindrance** is called over-application. We discussed non-application and how the antidote to that is application; but then if we keep applying this antidote even when we don't need it, then we are doing it too much, and we are driving ourselves nuts. The analogy for non-application is our not doing

anything when a child in a classroom runs out. That is non-application. The antidote to that is application: we call the child back into the classroom, sit them down, and get back to the lesson. But then if the kid is already seated, and we are still hanging over them saying, “Do this,” and “Do that,” and “Don’t you dare go out of the classroom again,” we are going to become an interference to their concentration. That’s what over-application is. Although your mind has come back to the object of meditation, you continue to apply the antidote. For example, your mind wandered off and got attached to something. You noticed that and started thinking about death and impermanence. You recovered your concentration and could go back to the object of meditation, but you didn’t. You kept batting yourself over the head with “death and impermanence.” You over-applied the antidote. The antidote becomes a kind of distraction because it begins to interfere with our own ability to concentrate.

So, when we fall into the extreme of over-application—that is, in our meditation we are applying the antidote when we don’t need to—then the antidote is equanimity. Lay off. Be relaxed. Just be equanimous. Let your mind be. Don’t drive yourself nuts.

## **Questions and answers**

*[Audience:] Could you explain how to apply the antidotes to excitement?*

How do you apply that? First of all, use the

introspective alertness, and note that the hindrance is excitement. Actually, right away this is a good thing to do, because part of the reason why we go off thinking who to tell about our far-out meditative experiences is because we have not really been able to discern this process as a disadvantage, as a defilement. We are so excited and caught up in it that we think it's really good to be so excited about how we are concentrating. We haven't been able to discern that excitement is itself a lack of concentration, because we are no longer on the object of meditation, we are now daydreaming about who we are going to tell, and how well they are going to think about us, and how much status we are going to have because of our far out experience. So you see, we are no longer on the object of meditation. This is very common. Very common. [Laughter.] We do this all the time.

The antidote we have to use in this case is introspective alertness. We notice, "Oh, look at me. Let's come back to the Buddha." And if that mind persists—we keep getting distracted by it and we keep thinking, "But I really want to tell so and so"—then we need to recognize that as attachment to reputation and approval. We then need to ask ourselves, "Well, so what if I tell all these people? Is that going to make me a better person?" Or we ask ourselves the question, "If I let myself get all inflated and proud about this, am I practicing the Buddha's teachings properly?" Usually putting these kinds of questions to ourselves will pop the bubble of pride.

## **Dealing with interesting feelings and experiences/visions**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

We need to remind ourselves, “This interesting feeling is not the purpose of my meditation. It’s a distraction.” And we have all sorts of incredible interesting feelings all the time. People tell me so many incredible things that have happened to them in meditation: visions and sensations, and this and that, and bodily things and mental things and all sorts of stuff. Every single time I asked one of my teachers (and I’ve asked this several times, because people tell me really far-out things and I often check with my teachers about what advice to give to those people) my teacher inevitably said, “It’s no big deal. Go back to the object of meditation.” If this experience helps the person and gives them more energy for meditation, great, but if it doesn’t and it just makes them more proud and more excited, it actually becomes a hindrance for their spiritual path.

You just have to have a little bit of equanimity with it, to not let the mind get all carried away. One of my friends, a Westerner, was telling me a story about one Tibetan lama he knew. This Tibetan lama just said, “Well, one day while I was meditating, Tara came and said something to me, and it was helpful.” And that was it. My friend was saying how this person wasn’t all involved in, “Oh, I saw Tara and this is fantastic and now I am getting somewhere in my meditation!” But it was just, “Okay, Tara was there.” It wasn’t even like he was sure that it was really Tara. It might just have been a vision appearing to the mind, because lots of times we have visions due to the physical elements or due to karma. It’s not necessarily the case

that you are having a pure perception of Tara. But it was like he wasn't even wondering if it was this or it was that. It was just, "Well, there were some things that were useful for my meditation, so that was good. I put them into practice, and I went back to my meditation."

I find this contrasted sharply with a lot of the stories that I hear where people are so excited, "I saw Chenrezig!" We are driving down the highway in Singapore and somebody's telling me about their vision of Chenrezig. And that's very different from the way this particular monk happened to put it. So it depends how you relate to these things. Try not to get distracted by them, even by visions; because lots of times when visions come, it could be a spirit interference, it could be just a karmic appearance or it could be due to the airs or winds in the body.

### **The bottom line**

I asked one lama about this because somebody was talking a lot about it. I asked, "How do you tell if it's a real vision or not, since people are telling me these stories. Do I try to help them determine if it was a real one or not?" He said, "I don't know." His basic conclusion was, "Well, if the person can interpret it in a way that gives them more energy to practice, then that's useful. If they can't and it just becomes a cause of evil or a cause of complacency, then it's useless." So in his eyes it wasn't even important to discern whether it was a real one or not. The whole point seemed to be: How do you use it? Do you use it to continue your practice or do you get distracted by it?

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I don't even know sometimes how we can determine them, because I think sometimes what people call visions are actually thoughts. I don't know what the difference is. I think maybe once you get to be a really high practitioner, like when you reach certain levels of the path, then you can see the Buddha in the sambhogakaya form. That's going to be something. The Buddha appears to you in your meditation. But I think that's different from our having a clear visualization, or having a strong feeling, or a thought about a particular Buddha. We often get things really confused. Sometimes we might think very much of somebody and we think that person's actually there. We often get our thoughts confused with reality, and we have to remember that thoughts are just thoughts.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Well, we are not making a schism between heart and mind. In fact there is one Tibetan word that refers to both of them. So we are not pushing the mind out. We are not seeing it in this dualistic way of heart and mind. We are just saying that if a certain experience helps our mind go more in the way of the Dharma so that our body, speech and mind (our thoughts, words and deeds) correspond more to what is taught in the teachings, then we're going in the right way. If our thoughts, words and deeds are going contrary to the teachings, then we are going the wrong way. And that's why we really need some wisdom sometimes to be able to discern the difference. That's why they

always say first we hear the teachings; then we contemplate them; then we meditate on them. If you hear the teachings, it gives you a tremendous amount of ability just to start to discriminate between what's constructive and what's destructive. Before we hear teachings, we often do not know what is constructive and what is destructive. We think inflating ourselves up and projecting our good qualities to the whole universe is good. We think that getting angry and laying down the law to somebody is good. So already, just starting to hear teachings is beginning to give us a little bit of wisdom to discriminate. Then we have to think about what we have heard and try and understand it. Then we have to meditate on it and really put it into practice.

So that's the bottom line. In our meditation practice or in our daily life, are our thoughts, words and deeds corresponding with what the Buddha taught or not? And when I say this, it's not like what the Buddha taught is some kind of rigid, fixed thing that we have to squeeze ourselves into. It's not like we are trying to squeeze ourselves into some dogma. It's just we need to be able to discriminate with our own intelligence that what the Buddha said makes sense, that the Buddha knows what he talks about. Therefore, we are using his ruler to evaluate our own behavior, because he knows what he is talking about. It's not that we are using his ruler because Buddha is "right" and Buddha is "good" and we've got to make ourselves do what Buddha wants, otherwise he is going to hit us with that ruler.

### **Laziness of discouragement**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

No, then you've gone back into laziness. Because one of the types of laziness is discouragement, putting ourselves down, feeling like we are incapable of doing the meditation.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

It's a preconception. It's a harmful preconception that we happen to cling onto and hold very strongly, and this is also another real big problem for us: thinking that we just can't do it. "Buddha gave all these wonderful teachings. I heard them all and I still can't concentrate for more than two breaths. I'm a catastrophe!" [Laughter.] We need to safeguard against that mind, too, because that mind just totally zaps our energy. And again, we need to use introspective alertness to recognize, "Now I am getting discouraged." Instead of just having the discouragement and letting the mind develop it, and really thinking ourselves into a rut, we have the introspective alertness come up and say, "Ah, discouragement. This is the hindrance listed under laziness. This is the first of the hindrances. This is a non-virtuous state of mind. This is not reality. What this mind is thinking—putting myself down, telling myself that I am incapable—this mind is false."

Now the key is just to recognize that. It really starts to help us counteract that mind of discouragement, but then again, don't go to the other extreme and say, "Okay, I won't be discouraged. Now I am wonderful. Everything is great!"



*[Teachings lost due to change of tape]*

... I mean, this is really practical stuff. This is why when you set up a regular daily meditation practice, it helps you so much to begin to get to know yourself. Because you begin to sit there and observe what's going on in your mind. "Look at what I'm thinking about. Look at how I approach situations." Usually we are sitting right there in the middle of it acting out this thought, acting out that thought, getting so involved in all the stuff. Just getting ourselves to sit down on a day-to-day basis is helpful. Getting ourselves to sit there and just try to do something constructive and notice what comes up that gets in the way. We begin to get to know ourselves and we begin to get to understand how the mind works. We begin to develop some compassion for ourselves, because we can see that we do have some sincerity and some honesty. We do want to progress along the path. It is unfortunate that we have these negative mental states that get in the way, so we generate compassion for ourselves, wanting ourselves to be free of this kind of suffering. We cultivate some patience with ourselves, recognizing that, "Yes, I do have this good motivation and I do have this junk that gets in the way. But I can be patient. I don't have to get angry at myself because there is junk. That's the way it is."

Then as we start to develop this patience and compassion for ourselves because we've gotten to know ourselves better, it becomes much easier to have that patience and compassion for other people. Why? Because you see that what other people say and do is basically the same as what you say and do.

So we begin to have a little bit of a feeling of compassion and understanding for other people; the judgmental, critical mind goes down. We will feel such a sense of relief when the judgmental, critical mind goes, such a sense of relief to be able to breathe again.

This all comes from just taking the time on a daily basis to sit and try and follow one of the practices, to do the prayers, and just try and watch what the mind does. It's really beneficial. His Holiness always says, "Don't look and compare yourself to the way you were last week or last month. But look a year ago, look five years ago and then you can see what difference your Dharma practice has made." You think back to the way you were a year ago and compare yourself to how you are now; then you can see the change. Then you can see the benefit of listening and thinking about the Dharma.

## **NINE STAGES IN PRACTICING CALM ABIDING**

The section that we are now on is the nine mental abidings. If you look at your main lamrim outline, we have talked about arranging the proper circumstances, the five deterrents and the eight antidotes. So what we have left are the nine stages that we practice to develop calm abiding. These are the steps in developing calm abiding.

In the nine stages you practice six mental powers and four types of engagement that help you go through those nine stages. We should not think of these as concrete self-existent stages. They are just

categories that are described to give you a feeling of the kind of flow that you go through as you are developing calm abiding. They are the progression of steps in which the mind gets trained and subdued in order to actually reach calm abiding.

## **1. Stage one—setting the mind**

The first stage is called setting the mind or placing the mind. There are various translations for these terms so what I say may not be what you read in a book because different translators use different words. The first stage is called setting, or placing, the mind and this is when you are first starting out and you are just struggling to get the object of meditation.

For example, say our object of meditation is the image of the Buddha. We sit down and try to get the object but most of the time our mind is in distraction. We get the object for a couple of seconds and then the mind goes away. Then you bring the mind back to the image of the Buddha and the mind goes away again. So in this first step the time spent in distractions are much more than the amount of time you actually spend focused on the object.

Sometimes when you are on this stage it appears that the thoughts become worse than they used to be. People very often say when they start to meditate, “My mind is crazier now than it was before.” It is not that it is crazier now and that there are more thoughts; it is just that we are probably noticing them for the first time. When you live by the highway all the time, you do not hear the cars, but when you go away on a quiet vacation and then come back, the noise can

seem like thunder. It is the same when we finally sit down and try to concentrate: the distractions seem like they get worse, but be rest assured they are not.

### ***The power of hearing***

The power we are basically practicing here is the one of hearing. We had to first hear the teachings from our teacher, then we try to remember them, then we need to think about them. So we try to recall all the teachings on calm abiding, think about what the object of our meditation looks like and then try to focus on it.

### ***The engagement is forceful***

The type of engagement is called forceful; other translations render this word as painstaking [laughter]. In the beginning the mind is really uncontrolled and so the kind of force, or mental engagement, that is necessary is one that needs a little more force to it because it is right at the beginning when the mind is so bananas. We are just starting out with mindfulness, with memory and with trying to get the object of meditation. So this is the first stage.

## **2. Stage two—continuous setting**

Then the second stage is called continuous setting or continuous placing. Once again on this stage the concentration is constantly interrupted by scattering. So on these first two stages, although laxity and excitement are present, scattering is the predominant

thing that happens to us because the mind is very soon off onto one thing or another, or somewhere else, or getting angry, or planning our future, or thinking of our past and so on.

So scattering is going on in the second stage but the thoughts are beginning to take a rest. Because of the force used during the first and second stages of continually bringing the mind back, the mind begins to rest. It is as if your child keeps running away and you just keep bringing him back and he runs away again and you bring him back again. After a while the kid gets the point and does not run away quite so often and when he does, he does not stay away quite so long. So there is some progress here, you can begin to see it. You can stay on the object a little bit longer and the length of the distraction of the scattering is not as great as before. That is the difference from the previous stage.

### ***The power of thinking/ the engagement is forceful***

Here the engagement is still forceful, but the power is the one of thinking because you are doing more thinking, more reflection and more recalling of the object of meditation. In the first stage it was a matter of just hearing the instructions and remembering what you heard. Here in this stage something is beginning to get integrated because you are thinking, mulling it over, going over it again and again recalling what the Buddha looks like.

### **3. Stage three—resetting**

Then the third stage is called resetting and here we still have scattering. Remember scattering can be towards a virtuous object or non-virtuous things. An example of scattering towards a virtuous object would be like when we are trying to focus on the Buddha and instead we start thinking about precious human life, or we start thinking about Tara. But when we start getting really angry, resentful, jealous, comparing ourselves to other people, getting proud, or something of that sort, that is scattering toward a non-virtuous thing.

Scattering is happening during all the first three stages, but in the third stage of resetting, scattering is recognized much quicker. The mind goes off but you are much quicker to recognize the fact that it is off. In the earlier stages, the mind would go off and you would not recognize it until the meditation bell rang [laughter]. Now in stage three the mind goes off and you are beginning to recognize it on your own and bring it back. Mindfulness is increasing in this stage and so is your introspective alertness. Previously, the mind could not return to the object readily once it was distracted, but now when you bring it back to the object of the Buddha it is more compliant and goes back quicker.

***The power of mindfulness/ the engagement is interrupted***

In the third stage the engagement is called interrupted. You are over with the forceful engagement and it is now either “interrupted” or “repeated,” because you are repeatedly renewing your attention. Your attention

is interrupted and engagement is not completely smooth yet because there are still interruptions with scattering, laxity and excitement.

The power that you are emphasizing here is the one of mindfulness. It is not that you did not have mindfulness before, you did have mindfulness in the first and second stages and because of that, your mindfulness is getting a little bit firmer now.

An important point to notice as we are going through these six different powers is that in each stage there is a particular power that is predominant. But that does not mean that you do not use that power in the other stages, it just means that at this stage it is the predominant one. Simply because one distraction, or one hindrance, is more prominent at each stage does not mean that you do not have the other ones; it just means that it is the chief one that you are focusing on. But there is some progression and the mind is getting a little bit tamed in this stage.

#### **4. Stage four—close setting**

Then the fourth stage is called close setting, or close placing. Here the mind is much more familiar with the object, much closer to the object and you are better able to set the mind on the object. At this point you do not really lose the object anymore. This one sounds really good to me, imagine getting to the point that you do not really lose the object. Sometimes you might have subtle excitement where your mind is thinking about something else under the surface, or there is subtle laxity, or you get spaced out, but you never really completely lose the object and go off in

never-never land. That just does not happen anymore, your mind is always somehow close to the object. You can really see that you are beginning to get somewhere at this point.

### ***Engagement is interrupted/ power of mindfulness***

The coarse dullness is actually the biggest problem on this stage. Where we have stability we have some clarity, but not so much clarity. The mind gets spaced out. This is the coarse kind of laxity. The engagement here is still the interrupted one because our concentration is not smooth. It still has interruptions from laxity and excitement and the power is one of mindfulness because the mindfulness is getting really strong. It is the strength of the mindfulness at this fourth stage that allows us to remain on the object without ever really losing it again.

## **5. Stage five—disciplining**

Then the fifth stage is called disciplining, taming, or controlled. There are different translations, maybe taming is the nicer translation. What happens here is because of the fourth stage, your mind was getting pretty stable on the object and you were not really losing the object any longer, but now the mind gets too sunk into the object. So laxity, specifically the subtle kind of laxity, becomes a problem. Somehow the mind gets too withdrawn. Remember I said that subtle laxity was when you had stability and clarity, but your clarity was not very intense. So the mind somehow is not quite altogether there. This was the



one I said to really be careful about. This is the chief fault on the fifth stage.

***Engagement is interrupted/ power of introspection.***

Here the engagement is still interrupted. Obviously, we are interrupted in this case mostly by subtle laxity, but of course we are also sometimes interrupted by excitement and other things. But mostly in this stage the interruption is by subtle laxity. The power here is the one of introspection. If you remember when we went through the hindrances and were talking about laxity and excitement, the antidote was introspective alertness. This is the mental factor that pops up and checks from time to time, “Am I still focusing? Am I spaced out?” We had that before on the earlier stages and we were developing it all along, but on this stage it is the one we are chiefly relying on. By having that introspective alertness and by getting that fine-tuned, we are able to recognize the subtle laxity. Only by having a more finely tuned introspective alertness can we discern the subtle laxity and then tighten the mode of apprehension on the object and tighten the concentration to remedy it. That is what happens on the fifth stage.

**6. Stage six—pacifying**

Now the sixth stage is called pacifying, or pacification. On the fifth stage because of the subtle laxity, we were tightening the concentration to get the strength of the clarity back and what happened is we went over the balance point a little bit so now the

mind is a little bit too tight and subtle excitement becomes the problem. You can see within this whole progression how it is always a thing of finding a balance.

They always compare developing concentration to tuning a guitar. We are not to tune the string too loose, nor too tight, but the correct tuning is somewhere in the middle. You can see here the attention has gotten a little bit too tight, so agitation becomes a problem. The subtle kind of agitation is when we are on the object but part of the mind is thinking about something else, or part of the mind is about ready to jump out on a full-fledged attachment. We are not completely there, but the mind is half day-dreaming about something that we really like.

***The engagement is interrupted/ the power of introspection***

The engagement here is still interrupted—we are obviously interrupted by the subtle excitement—and the power again is introspection. That is the introspective alertness that checks and sees, “Oh look, there is subtle excitement.” Then we apply the antidote of bringing the attention back by making the mind more sober by thinking about death, or visualizing the black ball at your navel, or making your room a little bit darker. So we bring the mind in a little bit more and loosen the concentration a bit, because if the mind gets too tight that is what makes the excitement come.

**7. Stage seven—thorough pacifying**

The seventh stage is called thorough pacifying. Even though different afflictions may arise in the break time between one meditation and the other and you rely on the antidotes to get rid of them in between your sessions, now when you are concentrating, the mind is pretty stable and you do not fall prey to the afflictions so much. This is really one of the nice things about developing concentration. Now when you are in meditation, these twenty secondary afflictions just do not come up so much. They really start to lose their energy.

Concentration takes away the manifest afflictions in this way, but it does not cut them from the root, we need the wisdom to do that. But at least now in the seventh stage during the time when you are concentrating, you are not getting angry at your colleague and you are not worried about the abuse you had when you were a child, you are not planning your retirement, or worrying about how many points you have on your social security system and you are not thinking about your taxes, or about getting your car repaired because it got dented.

It just occurred to me after I listed all those things that when they used to meditate a few hundred years ago, they did not have those things to think about, did they [laughter]? We are so lucky. We have such a bigger variety of things to get distracted by now. Of course, back then maybe you got distracted about what your water buffalo was doing, or the hay that was on top of your roof and getting that repaired, or getting the hole in your water bucket fixed. I guess they had problems too.

So in the seventh stage the mind is much, much

more pacified. That is why this stage is called thorough pacifying. In meditation you are not having the gross afflictions. At this point you still have some subtle laxity and some subtle excitement, but they are not super big problems because your introspective alertness is strong enough by this point that you can notice them fairly quickly, apply the antidote and re—center yourself. Things are coming up but they are not super big problems now. You can really see how your confidence is beginning to grow at this point.

### *The engagement is interrupted/ the power of effort*

The engagement is still interrupted. The laxity and excitement do not really interrupt so much now but they are still there, you have not completely gotten rid of them. The power that we rely on is the power of effort and that is the effort to continually keep the mind away from the laxity and the excitement. And of course we are still using introspection, we are always using it but it is not the chief thing. It is not emphasized so much here because by this time introspection is pretty strong.

## **8. Stage eight—single-pointedness**

Then the eighth step is called making one-pointed, or single-pointedness. ‘Single-pointedness’ is a better translation. On this stage what happens is when you sit down to meditate, you just go over the details of the object of meditation and the mind will be on the object. It takes some effort at the beginning of the session to go over the detail, but once your mind is on

the object it is firmly on the object and you can just relax. You do not need to worry about the excitement and you do not have to worry about the laxity because the mind is pretty one-pointed at this stage. So, at the beginning of your session you might use a little bit of effort against laxity and excitement, but after that it is like clear sailing.

Before in the preceding stages, sometimes not applying the antidotes was a problem. Maybe you would get the laxity or the excitement but you would not apply the antidote. Do you remember that not applying the antidotes is one of the obstacles? You have kind of gotten over that one by the time you get to the eighth stage and that is no longer a problem. Now the problem is we have swung to the other side. Now we are applying the antidote a little too much.

That is the difficulty at the eighth stage: over application. Here we need to have some equanimity. So again, especially before stages six and seven, maybe we really had to put some effort forth to apply the antidote. Even before that, more effort was especially required to apply the antidote. But by the eighth stage, you are so much in the habit of applying the antidote that you are doing it even when it is not needed. What is needed now is some equanimity.

***The engagement is uninterrupted/ the power of effort***

The engagement now is uninterrupted because the subtle laxity and excitement do not arise anymore and the engagement with the object is uninterrupted, it is consistent. You sit down, you get the object and you

go on. The power of effort has matured at this point, it is really, really strong and very clear at this point.

## **9. Stage nine—setting in equipoise**

Then the ninth stage is called setting in equipoise. Here you can basically maintain your concentration without any effort; even though you still do not have the actual calm abiding. Again, at the beginning of the session maybe a tinge of effort is needed, but basically it is effort in the sense of just making up your mind that you are going to concentrate. It is effort in the sense of turning your mind to the object of concentration, but once you turn your mind to the object of meditation, your mind is on it like a completely obedient child. This stage sounds really good.

### ***The engagement is spontaneous/ effortless***

Meditation is really a breeze at this point because just a very minute amount of effort is needed to turn your mind to the object of meditation and then the rest, because of the previous training and the force of the habit of concentration, just very naturally flows. The engagement is called spontaneous engagement or effortless engagement in the sense that now your effort, your engagement with the object, is effortless. You do not have to strain and it is spontaneous. That is why they say that many people as they are developing more and more concentration, they begin to look younger, more youthful, more radiant and more relaxed because the mind is more relaxed, well

tamed and pacified. It is so relaxed that you do not need to make an effort to concentrate.

That is interesting isn't it? We usually think of concentration as, "I have got to make a lot of effort and squeeze," but this is really showing us that our tendency to push and squeeze is not what causes the concentration. The concentration comes about through a relaxed mind. But we are not talking about relaxation in the way our mind is usually relaxed. We usually think of relaxation as meaning totally spaced out, or daydreaming about anything you like, or spaced out and then going off to sleep. This is not that kind of relaxation. It is relaxation in the sense that your mind is so well tamed that you do not have to worry about it anymore.

### **The power of familiarity**

I guess it would be like when you are bringing up a child. At first you take your child over to your relative's house and you do not know what in the world your child is going to do that might be really embarrassing. But by this stage your kid is just a breeze and you do not have to worry about him at all. It is kind of like that, you are just totally relaxed, with complete confidence and the concentration really flows. That is why the engagement is spontaneous and the power is familiarity; we are just so familiar with the object now.

At this point you still do not have calm abiding, even though you are looking more radiant and youthful. You feel light and vigorous and your dependence on coarse food is decreasing. You do not

need to eat so much and that is actually why when we sometimes do the eight offerings on the altar, the offering of the food symbolizes the offering of samadhi, the offering of concentration.

They often talk about being nourished by the food of concentration, the food of samadhi. I think it is an interesting analogy because I think in one way it is quite literal. As the concentration develops the need for so much coarse food decreases. The person does not need to eat as much and not just their body, but also their mind, their heart and everything else, is completely nourished by the concentration. I think that emotionally also, there is not a feeling of poverty and neediness either, the mind is also completely fulfilled in that sense.

I think it is nice to hear about these higher states because it gives us some kind of idea about the potential of our mind and where things can go if we work at it.

### **Way to Develop Actual Calm Abiding from This**

So now we are at the ninth stage and we still do not have calm abiding. Now there are some more things that we need to do to get to full calm abiding. Calm abiding is a single-pointed concentration that is conjoined with the pliancy of mind and body.

Remember when we were talking about the first hindrance, the first obstacle of laziness, the actual antidote to that was pliancy, or flexibility, which is a serviceability of both the body and the mind so that you can use your body and mind however you want



to. This is where you do not have to face aching knees, a bananas mind, a hurting back or restless energy in your body where you cannot sit still because you feel it jumping all around. There is none of that anymore. The body and mind are completely pliant.

### **Mental pliancy**

Mental pliancy is the mental factor that we really need to develop here. When that is complete and we have the single-pointedness, then we have actual calm abiding. As you go from the ninth stage to the calm abiding you familiarize yourself with concentration. The bad physical states which are due to different kinds of energy (the Tibetan word *lung*, or the Chinese word *chi*) begin to become subdued because the concentration is getting stronger. So at a certain point, some of these kinds of energies leave the head through the crown and sometimes there might be some sensation at the crown of the head as these bad winds, or energies, are leaving. As soon as that has happened then one has mental pliancy. So the first thing that you get is mental pliancy. The mind is really flexible now, completely flexible, you can do with your mind whatever you want and the mind is totally serviceable. You can put it on the virtuous object and it stays there. There is a lightness and clarity of mind and an ability to use the mind in any way that you want to.

### **Physical pliancy**

By the power of having this mental pliancy you then

get a wind, or energy, in your body that is called physical pliancy and this is a physical serviceability. Physical serviceability is a physical quality where your body is now completely serviceable and it ceases to be a problem as you are meditating. It does not get in your way and there is no sense of hardship when you are meditating. You can use your body for whatever you wish; there is no kind of coarseness, or of being uncomfortable, or any bad physical states. So the body, they say, feels very light like cotton and all the internal winds are pretty mild and subdued. The body is very light and very flexible and they say you feel like you could ride on your own shoulders.

### **Bliss of physical pliancy**

This physical pliancy now leads to what is called the bliss of physical pliancy, which is a very blissful physical sensation. You have the mental pliancy that gave the physical pliancy, which now leads to the bliss of the physical pliancy. As you remain in concentration, you get the feeling that your body has just melted into the object of meditation and there is no sense at all of other objects. At this point you have a bliss of mental pliancy which is the next step.

### **Bliss of mental pliancy**

The bliss of mental pliancy is when the mind is very joyous and you feel like you can concentrate on every atom in the wall. You do not have to make any effort. You can just concentrate. You feel like your mind is so fine-tuned that you can concentrate wherever you

want to. But the mind seems so joyous, almost as if it is going to explode and it can no longer stay at the object of meditation. It is almost as if the joy is a little bit too much, so it peaks and settles down and it becomes more stable. So the intensity of that bliss of the mental pliancy settles down, calms down and becomes more stable.

### **Full calm abiding**

At this point you get what is called an immovable, or an unchangeable, mental pliancy. This is where the bliss is very stable, the pliancy is very stable and at this point you have actually attained full calm abiding. You feel like you can completely absorb yourself in the object and it is called 'calm' because the mind is totally calm from distractions and totally calm from any kind of agitation or distraction to external objects. It is 'abiding' because the mind abides on this internal object, whatever your object of meditation is, so this is full calm abiding.

This is what is called a preparation to a form realm concentration. I am not going to go into describing that but in the Abhidharma there are descriptions of the four form realm concentrations and the four formless realm concentrations which are all different levels of samadhi that you gain. This is a preparation to the form realm concentration, but it is also a very, very good mind for meditation because sometimes if you get on the really high formless realm of concentration, it is not so good for meditating on emptiness. They say that this kind of calm abiding on the preparation level is much more effective for

meditating on emptiness. Although many people still like to attain these higher levels of absorptions (and you can hear all about them and the descriptions are pretty incredible), I think we have enough to work with right now. [Laughter.]

## **Signs of having attained calm abiding**

Some signs of having attained calm abiding are that you have mental and physical pliancy so that the body and mind are totally pliant, completely cooperative. You can meditate as long as you want without any kind of physical or mental discomfort.

Also, there is no longer an internal civil war to do anything and during your meditation, during meditative equipoise, the sense of appearances vanish and the mind is filled with incredible spaciousness. There is no narrow tightness in the mind; it is incredibly spacious.

Then another quality is that you can abide firmly and steadily on the object and even if a sound is made nearby, like a cannon goes off, or one of those jets that breaks the sound barrier goes by, it does not faze you at all; it does not interfere with your concentration at all.

Another quality of calm abiding is that there is great clarity and you feel like you could count all the particles in the wall.

The mind is so finely tuned ...

*[Teachings lost due to change in tape]*

... the manifest are gone. The manifest afflictions are

gone, but the seeds are still there and that is why you need the wisdom. It becomes very easy to mix, let us say, your sleep with concentration. You do not have so many things making the mind muddy and murky so even when you sleep, you can be meditating.

Then they also say that when you arise from equipoise, there is a sense of getting a new body and even though you might get some of the afflictions in your break time rising in a manifest way like a little tinge of anger, annoyance, or something like that, nothing really takes hold. It is just there and then it is gone. The mind is pretty smooth.

## **Other religions practice calm abiding**

This state of calm abiding is something that is in common with other religious practices. This whole teaching on concentration is not a specifically Buddhist teaching. People in other religious traditions practice it also. But sometimes people actualize calm abiding and because the mind is so peaceful and calm, they mistake it for liberation. It is not liberation. That is why they say calm abiding is not a strictly Buddhist practice and that is why having the determination to free ourselves from cyclic existence is so incredibly important.

If we do not have the determination to free ourselves from cyclic existence, we might just get the calm abiding and stay there with the calm abiding. If you stay with the calm abiding you can have a great time for the rest of your life and create a lot of good karma from doing that. If you actualize some of the form and formless realm absorptions in this lifetime,

then next time if you leave this human body you might even be reborn in the form realm and the formless realm. You might stay there for a few eons, hang out, be blissful and have no problems. But because the mind still has the seed of ignorance in it, once that good karma of concentration has worn off, then the only place you can get reborn is somewhere lower and that is definitely going to be more painful.

Serkong Rinpoche said, “When you go to the top of the Eiffel Tower, the one direction you can go from there is down.” He would say that if you attain these form and formless realm absorptions that is what happens; when that karma runs out—plunk! That is why it is so important to have the determination to be free conjoined with our calm abiding. That determination to be free actually moves our mind so that we get the wisdom teachings and meditate on wisdom and actualize the wisdom. It is the realization of emptiness that is actually going to free our mind from all of this confusion in samsara. When you have the wisdom combined with the concentration, then that is what leads to actual liberation.

In general, the concentration is very, very helpful for all the other meditations we do. For instance, if we could meditate on the four immeasurables and have full concentration, we might actually have some sustained feeling of love, compassion, equanimity, or joy in our heart for some period of time. If we were able to meditate on bodhicitta with calm abiding, then the bodhicitta could really sink in. So it is the ability to concentrate that makes the other understandings really integrate in the mind because the concentration keeps that understanding there and that imprint is

always getting made because the concentration is there. But the concentration alone is not sufficient.

## **Questions and answers**

### **Gross excitement**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Your introspective alertness is what notices that there is gross excitement. If you are sitting there meditating on hot fudge sundaes [laughter], or you are thinking of your next holiday in Venezuela, or thinking about family and so on, at that point the introspective alertness is what notices that the mind is off the object of meditation. Then depending upon how severely off you are, how long you have been off and how intensely you have been off, then you are going to see which kind of antidote to apply and some of the antidotes you might apply right there in the meditation session.

So in the case of the gross excitement, let us say your mind is way off and you realize you have been daydreaming for a few minutes. Then you have to shift your object of meditation temporarily and meditate on something that is really going to sober the mind and make the energy of the mind go lower. So sit and visualize corpses and think how everyone that you saw on that lovely vacation is going to become a corpse, all those people are going to become corpses. Everything is going to decay and fall apart. Think about death. Think about your own death. Think about impermanence. Think about the suffering in

cyclic existence and taking one rebirth after another. Think of how many lifetimes you have been in the same places with however much pleasure you had and now here you are and you are doing it again and there is still no happiness. Again and again and again all this attachment just causes one rebirth after another rebirth, after another rebirth.

So when you have gross excitement think about something that is really going to sober the mind. Wake it up to the reality of the situation. Make it sober. When the mind is more sober then you can shift it back to the image of the Buddha, or to the breath, or to whatever is the object of your meditation.

## **Emptiness and calm abiding**

*[Audience:] Which comes first, the calm abiding or the understanding of emptiness?*

Regarding the order of calm abiding and emptiness, you can understand emptiness before actualizing calm abiding, but you cannot enter into the paths. When you have the special insight or what is real vipassana—the special insight into emptiness, that special insight is combined with calm abiding. Then when you have special insight combined with calm abiding on emptiness and you have already generated the bodhicitta, then you enter into the second of the bodhisattva paths. Now before that time you can have a realization of emptiness, because a realization of emptiness does not necessarily mean that you have single-pointed concentration on emptiness.

Realization is a vague word once you get down to



it. It basically means that you can have a correct conceptual understanding of it and in that sense have a realization, but that is a very gross level realization. You can have that before you actually develop calm abiding, but that alone does not have the force on your mind because it is not linked with the calm abiding.

## **Psychic powers**

*[Audience:] Can you explain why people would attain psychic powers when they have the calm abiding?*

I cannot speak from my own experience, so I will tell you my guesses. With the clairvoyance and the clairaudience, because the mind is concentrated the field of awareness is much broader. Our mind is so busy with all of our internal chatter that sometimes we cannot even see where we are walking and we fall down the stairs. It seems to me that as the distractions in the mind cease and the mind gets clearer, as the clarity of the mind is there and the concentration is there, then the field of what is possible to perceive just very naturally expands.

These powers though, they can later get lost. If you get it but then you do not practice it, then these things can be lost. Some people have psychic powers not because of calm abiding but because of karma, but the psychic powers that people have because of karma are not as reliable as the ones that you actually get through meditation. The powers obtained because of karma can be much more inaccurate.

## **Eating less food**

*[Audience:] Can you explain why people would eat less when they have the calm abiding?*

Regarding the gross food, I think what happens is that the whole energy in the body is changed. The energy in the body is so closely related to the mind. You can see that when your mind is agitated, the body is agitated. They really go very much together. So as the mind begins to pacify, the energy in the body gets pacified and then the body does not rely so much on gross food. It does not have to eat so much because it is not expending all that energy in a lot of the useless stuff that we normally burn up our energy on.

## **Regarding physical sensations**

Oh, I should say one thing that commonly happens: people hear these teachings about how you get some tingling on the head when the bad airs are leaving right before you get some mental pliancy. So beginning meditators often think when they get a little tingling or different symbols, “Oh boy, I am going to the big time now. I must be almost to calm abiding!”

They say you can tell who is a bodhisattva because sometimes their compassion is so strong that the hairs on their body stand on end. So then one day you have a little compassion and your hair on your arm tingles and you think, “Maybe I am almost a bodhisattva.” It is very natural to get some part of a little sign and think we almost got the whole thing. Do not worry about labeling which level you are at, the basic thing

is just to practice.

You can have experiences when you are meditating. Even though you are basically at the beginning stages you can have a few moments of pliancy. There is nothing that says that you cannot. Sometimes your compassion can be really strong and your hair stands on end. But what I am saying is that having a little bit of something does not mean that you are near to having the whole thing. Those experiences, nonetheless, can be very encouraging, because when you are meditating and have those few moments when your mind is really peaceful and calm, even if it does not last very long it gives you a whole new perspective on what your potential is and what is possible and you begin to think, “Wow, even if I had this for only five seconds, my mind is capable of experiencing this. So if I train some more maybe it will come again and stay longer.”

When you get any kind of experience like that when you are meditating, use it in that way. Think, “Oh this is a capacity I do have in my mind,” and use that to energize yourself to really train so you can make it more stable. Do not make the mistake of thinking, “I got that quality now. Wow, isn’t that wonderful! I have to go tell a lot of people. I must be almost there!” Do not use these experiences to inflate the ego.

## **Calm abiding is not a goal**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

They say in the teachings that if you have all the

conducive circumstances, depending on your karma and if you practice well, then it is possible to attain calm abiding in six months. For some people this gives them enthusiasm to practice. But I have talked to people who when they heard that, started practicing and even did retreat for six months, afterwards their mind was still bonkers and they got completely discouraged. They were so totally focused on the goal that actually, that teaching had completely the opposite effect than it was intended to have.

I was thinking about other examples too in the teachings of how sometimes they tell different stories and say different things that are meant to illustrate one point, but because of our Western culture we get a completely different point out of it. An example of this is when we get goal oriented after hearing things in a teaching.

## **Different approaches**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

There are different ways of viewing things. If your mind is getting too tight, then they teach about not having a goal and they talk about how it is all here right now, that there is nothing else to see anyway. But when your motivation is too loose, they start talking about developing the good qualities and the stages to do that. So it is good to understand that there are different approaches.

In other words, here is a practice and there are stages to do it and we do have to train to do this, but we should not evoke our Western grasping, goal-

oriented mind in doing it. If we are doing that and we have the motivation of, “I am going to meditate real hard and get calm abiding so I can say I got it,” then we are going to get it and we are going to lose it afterwards. That would be as if you just wanted to attain calm abiding to say, “Ok I did it. What else is next?” That is why the determination to be free, bodhicitta and all these things are really important, it is not like going for a prize. You do not want calm abiding because calm abiding is real good, far out and you can tell people you got it. But rather, you want calm abiding to benefit sentient beings and if your mind is bananas and not concentrated, how can you benefit other people? So calm abiding is not like getting a prize.

### **After getting the calm abiding**

*[Audience:] When you attain calm abiding what happens then?*

You have to keep meditating to keep it. I think it probably depends on the person and how much you are meditating. It would seem to me that if you went and you did a retreat and you got yourself to calm abiding, then you went back to your job and back to meditating five minutes a day, you are going to lose it. It does not seem to me that you would be able to keep your full calm abiding with five minutes a day of meditation. But it seems to me that if a person were going for the calm abiding and got it, that afterwards, they would keep meditating and use the calm abiding to meditate on emptiness and meditate on bodhicitta.

They would not just say, “Now I’ve got it. I am going back to work.” You are trying to get the calm abiding so that you can use it in your other meditations and to keep it, you have to keep using it.

*[Audience:] That sounds like you have to be a monastic to get calm abiding and that a layperson couldn’t achieve it.*

Why not? Milarepa was a layperson. Marpa was a layperson. But we should not think, “Ok I cannot work and get calm abiding at the same time, therefore I will not even try to do anything.” It is ridiculous to say, “I’ll just stay home and complain because I can’t have both of them at the same time.” No, we should start practicing and put into our daily practice the teachings that we have heard that could be put into practice right away, and our daily practice can really start improving. If we use all these instructions that we have heard, we can begin to see some improvement in our daily practice. So even though you may not have calm abiding during your morning coffee break, still you are getting more improvement. You can see a change in your mind and that will help the other aspects of your practice too because you can concentrate better and when you go and do retreat, you are going to be able to concentrate better there too. We should not have an all or nothing mind either.

*[Audience:] So does that mean that once you achieve calm abiding you always have it even if you do have to go back to work?*

No, you can always backslide. I mean that is part of the whole thing—you get born in the upper realms, you lose it, you fall back down. When you are on the bodhisattva stages, then maybe you do not backslide, but it is my understanding that it is basically like any other skill—you have to keep practicing it to keep it at top level. It seems to me that if you have got the calm abiding that is necessary for entering the path of accumulation of the bodhisattva, then because you have bodhicitta, you are going to keep up with the meditation. So at that point you are going to keep it up, but it is always possible to lose it if you do not practice.

Let us sit quietly for a few minutes.

## **CHAPTER 12**

### **Wisdom**

#### **Three Levels of Dependent Arising**

Things are dependent in three ways:

1. Causes and conditions
2. Parts
3. Concept and label

#### **1. CAUSES AND CONDITIONS**

Thinking about their causes and conditions is often the first way. It is the easiest way. Thich Nhat Hanh, in his writings, emphasizes this a lot. For example, he says if you look at a piece of paper, in the piece of paper you can see the tree, the sunshine, the logger and the mill. He does not mean that the logger is inside the paper or the tree is inside the paper. The tree is the cause; the cause does not exist anymore. The logger is the cause; the logger does not exist in this piece of paper now. The sunshine and the tree do not exist now; they are the causes; they existed before. But when we look at the paper, we can see that the paper is the cumulative result of all of those causes and conditions coming together.

Likewise, when we think of our body, we can trace it back to all its causes and conditions. I was talking



about the sperm and egg, and you can trace back your genes and chromosomes ad infinitum.

The same with our mind—our mind arises due to causes. It does not exist as something that has always been there—as some permanent thing. But it arose due to the causes that are the previous moments of mind. We can trace the mindstream back, back and back. The cause of something cannot be also its result. They exist in a continuum, but once the result has come, the cause is long gone. The tree that caused the paper does not exist anymore; the paper is the result of it. The sperm and egg that came together many years ago in your mother's womb, do not exist anymore, but our present genes are the results of those. Similarly, our mindstream today is not the same as our mindstream yesterday or fifteen years ago or when we were in the womb, but it is a continuation of that. The things that exist now, that function and change, all arise from causes.

## **2. PARTS**

Anything you look at is not a single unitary thing, but it depends on parts. For example, there are different ways to look at the parts of a piece of paper. You can look at the North, South, East and West parts of the paper. You can look at the top and bottom parts of the paper. You can look at the parts of paper like the whiteness as one part, the rectangular-ness as one part, the hardness as one part and the thinness as one part. All of the different qualities that compose the paper are also considered its parts.

So there are different ways to look at parts. It is

interesting. Instead of looking at the parts of the paper as being cut up in squares or something like that, you can think of all the different qualities—whiteness, square-ness, hardness or the smell—these are all parts of the paper. Then, you look into them. Are any of them the paper? Quite interesting!

### 3. CONCEPT AND LABEL

All phenomena also exist in dependence on the consciousness that conceives of it and gives it a label. Before this thing is called paper, there is no paper there. Before our mind looks at those qualities and conceives of those qualities together as one object and gives it a label, you cannot say that there is one solid distinguishable object here.

This is something quite interesting to think about. When we look at things, they appear as if each is one object—they all look discrete, kind of like distinct objects out there. But if you think about it, none of them are one object. They are all made up of lots of little parts. The only thing that makes it one object, is the fact that our mind gathered all those qualities together, in terms of its concept and gave it a label. But aside from that, there is nothing inside here holding everything together to make it, “it”.

What is real interesting to think about is your body. Your body is just all these different parts. That is all. A continuation of these different parts that have been together over a period of time, but it is not like our body is one thing. It is all these different things. But when we think about it, we feel *my* body like it is one thing, as if there is some kind of body-ness that is

pervading and keeping all the parts stuck together.

### **Some kind of glue that makes the body stick together**

There is no glue that makes the body stick together. They are just all these parts and the way they are in relationship to each other. They happen to be near each other at the same time, and it is only because our mind then looks at these parts, frames them in terms of a concept and gives them a label, that it then becomes a body.

### **Why Is It Important to Learn about Dependent Arising?**

Now the question may come: why is thinking about all of these important? It is fun to talk about, but what does it have to do with anything? Actually, it has a lot to do with a lot of things. We have to go back a little here in order to understand why thinking about dependent arising and the lack of independent existence is important.

### **Our unsatisfactory experiences**

Let us come back to our experience. Here we are, there is a body and there is a mind. If we look at our experience during our life, there are many unsatisfactory things going on. We get born. We get old. We get sick and we die. In between, we try and get the things we want, but we are not always

successful.

There are some things we like, but then we get separated from them. We encounter all types of problems. Things we do not want come automatically to us. This is the very nature of our existence.

This is the first Noble Truth, looking at what existence is—the nature of our body and mind. They are changing. There are lots of unsatisfactory experiences. Even the happiness we experience does not last very long and it changes into something else.

So we have to ask what makes us arise? Why are we here experiencing this instead of experiencing something else? Why do we have a body that gets old and sick and dies? Why don't we have a body that is made of light, that does not get old and sick and die? And why do we have a mind that is full of anger, attachment, pain and resentment? Why don't we have a mind that is easy going and lets things go—that goes with the flow? We have to trace the causes of these experiences.

### **Ignorance: the root cause of our unsatisfactory experiences**

The Buddha traced the causes of our unsatisfactory experiences to the internal attitudes of attachment, anger and ignorance. If we look especially at anger—the anger that we have, the anger that wants to destroy things, get away from things, or distance ourselves from them—it is very much related to our attachment. The more attachment we have, the more anger we have. The more we are clinging on to something, the more upset we get when we don't get

it. The attachment comes from the ignorance, the ignorance that makes everything very solid.

We have to understand what this ignorance is. It is the source of the attachment, the source of the anger. These three together are what makes us create actions or karma. The karma determines what our next rebirth is going to be. The attachment at the time of death makes the karma ripen, because as we are dying, we are thinking: “I want this body. I don’t want to separate from it.” And when it seems like we have to separate from it, we freak out and grasp at another body.

So, it is that grasping at the time of death, that attachment that makes the karma ripens, that throws us into another body. We get this cyclic existence of going from one body to the next body, to the next body ...

Because of the karma we have created under the influence of attachment, anger and ignorance, once we are in a body, we encounter a whole range of different experiences. Some of them are great and some of them are awful. But the great ones do not last long. The awful ones do not last long either but they do change into other awful ones. So, after you think about it, you think there has got to be another way.

Do you see how the ignorance is the source of all the undesirable experiences? This is a key point. If you don’t see how ignorance is the source of all of these undesirable experiences in your life, there is no way to see how realizing emptiness is important. The ignorance creates the attachment and anger. It creates the karma. The ignorance creates the attachment that makes us grasp for another body at the time of death.

It makes the karma ripen.

What is this ignorance and how does it create the attachment? How is it the basis for the whole experience? They use an analogy to illustrate ignorance. You go in a room that is very dimly lit, so you cannot see well. In a distant corner, there is something that is coiled and it is striped. In the dimness of the room, you see the thing that is coiled and striped, and you think it is a snake! You freak out and you get afraid. Your mind goes bonkers.

Ignorance is like the dimness in the mind. In other words, it is just dimness. It is a lack of awareness, a lack of clarity in the mind, and within that dimness, within that inability to see clearly, the mind also grasps at something and projects onto it what is not really there.

To go back to the analogy, you have the coiled, striped thing that is a rope. It is a coiled, striped rope. But because the mind cannot see it clearly, it says it is a snake. The mind is projecting something onto the rope that is not really there. But it believes what is projected and then gets frightened.

In a similar way, things arise dependently. But the mind is dim and does not see clearly. It cannot see this dependent existence. Instead what it does is, it projects independent existence (the complete opposite) on top of things. The mind says: "Ah! That is an independently existing thing, therefore it is a real big deal." And it freaks out when something happens to it. We make big deals out of everything. We make big deals out of ourselves. We make big deals out of our possessions, out of our problems, out of our emotions and out of our ideas. Everything becomes a

big deal because we have projected a mode of existence onto everything when such a mode of existence does not exist in reality.

## **Wisdom Realizing Emptiness: The Antidote to Ignorance**

When we talk about emptiness, we are saying that things are empty of the fantasized ways of existence that we have projected onto them. To go back to the analogy, the rope is empty of being a snake. There is absolutely no snake there. The rope is empty of being a snake, but what we are doing is, we are not just imputing things like snakes and lamps, we are imputing a way of existence, an independent way of existence onto phenomena.

In actual fact, these things are empty of existing in the fantasized ways that we have projected onto them. When we realize emptiness, we are not creating some reality that was not existent before. This is a very important point. When we realize emptiness, we are just seeing what has always been there, which is the lack of all the garbage we have projected onto it. Realizing emptiness is not creating a reality somewhere. It is just perceiving the way things have always been. But we have not been able to see that because we are so busy projecting things. When you are so busy projecting snake onto rope, you cannot see the rope.

Those of you who have kids will probably see it very clearly. The kids see something and they get afraid, and you know it is nothing to get afraid about.

You know it is not even what they see, but they are so freaked out about it you cannot explain it to them. We could probably remember similar experiences from our childhood. It is the same thing with our mind. Our mind is so busy projecting independent or inherent existence on everything that we cannot see the emptiness that is there. We cannot see the dependent existence that is there.

I remember somebody asking Lama Yeshe: “Lama, how do you realize emptiness?” He replied: “Just realize that everything you are perceiving is a hallucination.” Just realize that reality is all around you. That’s all. You do not have to create anything. You do not have to do anything special. Just realize what is already there. Stop creating more stuff to put on top of it, which is basically what we are doing, the way our minds perceive things.

The tricky thing is that it is very difficult for us to identify this independent or inherent existence that we are projecting on top of things, because we have been doing this projection since beginningless time. We are not even aware that we are projecting. We are not even aware that our minds are tangled up in this mess. We just automatically believe that the way we perceive things is the way they exist.

It is like (if you could imagine) a baby coming out of the womb wearing sunglasses. They grow up into an adult thinking that everything is dark, because since the first time they have ever perceived anything, everything has been dark. So, they do not realize that what they perceive are not the way things exist, because they are so used to it.

It is the same way in terms of how we project an



independent existence onto everything. We are so used to this projection that to us, everything appears to exist “from its own side”. We do not even see it as a false perception on our part. We are just so completely used to it.

So the difficult thing is recognizing what this independent existence looks like, recognizing how things appear to us to be independently existing. There is no such thing as independent existence, but we are perceiving it. We are perceiving something that does not exist at all. That’s why Lama said: “Just recognize, dear, that everything you see is a hallucination.” What we see as the nature of something is not at all its true nature.

They use different examples to illustrate this to us. An object in a dream—it appears very real, but it is not. You can dream that somebody hit you with a baseball bat, but when you wake up, your body is not bruised because the dream object is not a real object. Or they use the example of a reflection in the mirror. Like with your cats or your dogs—they go and stand in front of the mirror and try and play with the cat or the dog inside the mirror. I think kids do that too when they do not know what a mirror is. It looks like there is a real face in there, it looks like there is a real animal, but it is actually empty of being an animal. There is only an appearance there.

In the same way, what we are perceiving are dependent objects. But they appear to us as independent, and we grasp onto them existing that way. From their side, they don’t have an independent existence. There is no real thing there in the objects that we perceive.

So, we see this basic misconception—that with ignorance, we do not perceive things as they are. Instead, we project a way of existence on top of them that they do not have. This way of existence that we project is what gets us into so many problems. Making everything into a concrete, identifiable object is what makes us get angry, get attached and experience all the other problems that follow after that. Through ignorance, we make everything very solid.

I will give you a few examples of how we make things solid because it is very important that we recognize this in our life.

### **Example of a hundred-dollar bill**

Our whole way of relating to money is an excellent example of how we project things that are not there. If there is a hundred-dollar bill, we look at it and think: “A hundred dollar bill! This is something that is very valuable,” especially when we have the label ‘mine’ attached to it. Remember last time we talked about what happens as soon as we give it the label ‘mine’? It all of a sudden becomes really important: “This is *my* hundred-dollar bill, and if you take my hundred-dollar bill, it is a big deal, because this is *my* hundred dollars. It is part of me. I am attached to it. It represents my success as a human being. It represents all the future happiness and everything I am going to buy, and you are taking that. This real thing you are taking from me. It makes me angry.” And, then, maybe I yell and scream, or maybe I throw something at you, or whatever.

So you see how we get the anger and attachment

arising, simply because we view this hundred-dollar bill as so incredibly important. From the anger and attachment, we get the action or the karma that leaves the imprints on the mind. But if we go back and look at what is this hundred-dollar bill that we are so attached to and has all this meaning to us, it is simply paper and ink. It is nothing more than ink and paper. That is all.

But what our mind has done, is on top of this paper and ink, it has, with its concept, designated: “This is one object.” Our mind then imputed all this meaning onto it, for example, thinking: “This is the meaning of my life. This measures how successful I am as a human being.” Or we impute: “This is the cause of my happiness. This is what security is.” When we see a hundred-dollar bill, we do not just see paper and ink, we see success. We see security. We see meaning. We see purpose. We see all sorts of things.

But if we look, none of these things exist inside the hundred-dollar bill. All the hundred-dollar bills are, are paper and ink and a certain design. So, do you see a little bit how we project on top of it? We actually make ourselves tremendously miserable. It is very helpful if we could just see, “Yes, this paper and ink can, combined with the society and the way the society operates, enable us to do certain things because this paper and ink does have a certain function.”

Instead of just seeing it as it is—a relational thing, a dependent thing, something that has a value and an existence imputed on top of it—we see it as the meaning of our life; we see the value coming out from inside of it. This is what makes us so mixed up in

relationship to it. It is merely our mind that is creating all the pain. That is all—completely in the mind.

I often get people who do retreats with me to think about the mind as the source of our happiness and pain. We start to look at some problem that we have in our life, and ask ourselves: “How was I perceiving it? How was I framing it? How was I interpreting it? What was my paradigm?”

When you start looking at these questions and recognize how your way of interpretation or your way of perceiving your paradigm creates your experience of the object, then you begin to see how things are rooted in the mind, not in the external world.

If you get into that meditation very deeply, it leads you into an understanding of emptiness. Understanding how the mind is creating, how the mind is projecting. If we look, there are so many areas in our lives where we get all tangled up because we confuse the dependently existent thing with the name and the label and the meaning that we have projected on top of it.

### **Example of manners**

Manners are another excellent way to see how things are dependently arising. When you go live in another culture, sometimes you are just so surprised at how rude people are. They are so rude and they do such funny things. The Tibetans slurp when they eat. They lick their bowl. On the other hand, we often hear that Americans are very loud. Once you live in other countries, you begin to recognize it is true. You go to an airport and you can always tell who the Americans

are because you can hear their voices above everybody else's. People say: "How rude these people are! They talk loud. There is no sense of propriety."

As you go from culture to culture, think how we judge and evaluate other cultures and criticize them. And yet all this stuff about manners is something that is totally invented by our mind. There is nothing inherently rude about slurping. There is nothing inherently wrong with talking loudly.

There is nothing inherently impolite about trying to save face, for example. In an Asian culture, when you ask people questions, they may give you an answer which is not at all what is happening, but it is the polite answer to give. If you are aware, you know how to take the answer. If you are not aware, you take it in another way and then you think these people are lying. Actually they are not lying. They are just being polite.

What I'm getting at, is this whole discrimination of manners—what's polite, what's impolite—is completely created by the mind. There is no objective reality to it at all.

But yet, look at how hung up we get about it. Look at how hung up we get about people's manners. If they do not say 'good-bye' to us, if they do not say 'thank-you' to us, if they do not look us in the eye when they are talking to us—we are so sensitive about these! We impute so much meaning, and yet it is just a cultural convention. There is no objective reality to it.

I am trying to show you why the realization of emptiness is something important. If you are able to look at the many experiences in your life and

recognize how you experience a lot of difficulty because of this ignorant view that makes things more solid than they actually are, then we begin to see the value of understanding emptiness.

### **Example of “*my* problem”**

Here’s another example. Look at what we consider as ‘*my* problem’. Think of one problem you have. I’m sure everybody right away, in a snap of a finger, can think of a problem. You probably think of five or ten. You think: “*My* problem!” It comes up in your meditation session. It comes up when you are driving. It comes up when you are eating. “*My* problem!” And it appears to our mind as if it is this real big thing. It is really meaningful. This is very serious!

Let’s say I have a problem with Achala [Ven. Chodron’s cat]. Is my problem inside of Achala? Is the problem inside me? Is the problem somewhere in between Achala and me, in the space of this room, so that when you people come in, you are walking through *my* problem? Or when you pat Achala, you are touching my problem? Or when you look at me, you’re looking at *my* problem? My problem appears so real and so existent, and yet when I start to look for the thing that is the problem, what is it? Where is it? It becomes very difficult to get a handle on what is the problem.

For example, the problem is that Achala cleans out my inbox. He goes on my desk in the morning and pulls all the papers out. And he always does this when I’m meditating. So that is *my* problem. Is the problem inside of Achala? Is the problem his paws? Is the

problem the paper and the inbox? Is the problem the inbox? Is the problem this movement [of the paws]? Is the problem his mind? Well, what is his mind? It is just the thought going through his mind. Is this thought going through his mind a problem? When you start to look at what is the problem—*the* thing that is *the* problem—you can't find it. You begin to see that what we call 'problem' is just a whole bunch of different circumstances and we, with our mind, put a concept around them and gave them a label, and then thought that they were something more than just those different circumstances.

Once we gave it the label 'problem', it assumed another kind of reality in our mind than it had before. Before, it was just paws and paper and inbox, and this movement [of the paws]. That's all. But once we say 'problem', boy, then I have to go to a cat psychologist. (They have them too—somebody gave me an ad.)

It is very interesting when we start to look at things. We begin to see how our mind, through this grasping at inherent existence, makes a real big thing out of what is not a real big thing. We are projecting a type of existence and a whole bunch of meaning on to phenomena that they do not have.

### **Example of “*my* anger”**

It is the same as when we say: “I'm an angry person.” Take one quality you do not like about yourself. If we think: “I'm an angry person. This is my identity. Oh, I'm such an angry person. I'm so awful. That's why nobody likes me. I'm always losing my temper. I'm so

angry. I'm so angry. I'm so angry."

If you look at it, what is anger? What is our usual view of anger when we say: "I'm an angry person"? We have a feeling like there's this thing called anger that's right here, like this piece of lead—this is anger. And every once in a while, the anger comes to the surface—this is lead in the shape of a monster. "There's my anger!" And when we calm down, this monster made out of lead goes down a little bit. And, then, later it comes up again, and it goes down. When we think about our anger, it feels like that, doesn't it? As if there is a real thing called anger, and when we get angry, it is simply that this real thing has now come to the surface, and there it is, spewing out its steam and fire all over the place. That is how we feel about our anger. When we say: "I'm such an angry person," we feel so awful, because it feels like a very solid, super-real thing.

Step back for a moment and check up: "What is anger?" All we can find, are some situations that occur sporadically, that have some similarities, some different mental events, different thoughts, different emotions. They are not occurring at the same time, so they are different mental events. But they have some similarity. One happened yesterday. One happened today. One happened tomorrow. The similarity is that they are distorting things and wanting to destroy or wanting to withdraw because they cannot bear them. But all we have are discreet mental events that have some similarity. That's all.

Anger is simply a label that is given on top of these mental events that have some similarity. If you think about your anger as being something that is merely



labeled on top of a bunch of similar events, that gives you a totally different feeling about your anger, doesn't it? Compared to thinking of it as this leaden monster spewing fire that's always there. Do you see the difference? Do you have a different feeling in your mind when you think about anger in these two different ways? There is some difference, isn't there?

The first way, we are seeing the anger as some solid thing, some unitary thing that has its own essence. Seeing it that way, then it seems overwhelming to us—how are we ever going to get rid of it? But if we see anger as just a bunch of events with some similarity, then everything seems much lighter, doesn't it? Much, much lighter. We can see how the way we relate to our own emotions—making them so solid, grasping at inherent existence—creates so much problem.

## **Questions and answers**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

The problem is your reaction of discomfort. But we don't feel like the problem is my reaction. We feel that the problem is what the other person is doing.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

But then if we look, where is that bothered-ness coming from? Is it an independent entity?

*[Audience: inaudible]*

The reason the feeling is there is because we haven't understood that it's not those things. There's something inside of us that's still grasping onto it being those things. But look at the whole dynamics of the thing. There are the paws, there is the inbox, there is the whole history of mothers and fathers back ad infinitum, there is the whole history of the paper, back ad infinitum, the whole history of the plastic of the inbox, and there is all this conditioning in me.

If I weren't sitting in the middle of my meditation, would I be as bothered? If I were standing next to Achala, I'd probably laugh and think it was really cute. It's only because I'm meditating and trying to concentrate that what he's doing is a problem.

So if you look at my response, you see how even my response is not a solid thing. My response is conditioned by all these different parts—by the time of day, by what I happen to be doing. If I were asleep, it's not a problem. My sleep is much more important. I'd just ignore what he's doing. So it's not that my being bothered is this big solid thing that has to be there as a reaction to what Achala is doing. But rather, depending on a whole bunch of different factors and on how I'm looking at the situation and interpreting it, then a certain emotion comes up.

If we're able to stop a little bit, and look at something as not one solid thing but look at it as a dependent arising of a whole lot of other things going on (none of which are a problem in and of themselves) then our mind relaxes a bit. And, maybe, we take away all that heaviness that's associated with the word 'problem'.

[Audience:] *How can we relate this to the experiences of the body, in particular, pain?*

Well, here, there are a few different layers that are going on. It's quite interesting. When you experience pain, one way is to see the pain as a sensation, and recognize how the mind creates so much suffering on top of the sensation by saying: "I don't like that sensation. Oh no, it's pain and I'm worried about it.

Maybe I'm going to have cancer in my knee joint. Maybe I'm going to need surgery. My knees hurt, I'm going to have structural damage and I'm going to be on crutches. How am I going to afford my insurance? Who is going to pay for it? And then I'm going to be fired from my job." You know how the mind just takes off—on the basis of one physical sensation? Our mind can take it and run. Really run. And create all sorts of catastrophic scenes on the basis of one physical sensation.

You realize that so much of the suffering comes not from the physical sensation but from the mind as described above, as well as from the idea: "This is *my* body." It's very interesting when we start to look at it as *my* body. Something happens in our body and we think that we're going to die from it. The mind freaks out because this is *my* body. So much of that suffering is not physical suffering as much as it is the mind going bananas. It's mental suffering. And a lot of that mental suffering is coming simply because we're grasping onto this body with so much attachment, thinking that there's a real *mine* in it, there's a real possession to it.

If you go back and you're able to strip all those

ideas away and just look at the physical pain and think: “This pain exists because the causes for it exist.” It’s very interesting when you can do that because then the pain doesn’t appear to be this solid thing that is always existing, that has its own essence anymore. It’s just that it exists because the causes exist. And as soon as the causes stop, then the pain is going to stop. There’s a certain kind of lightness to it. It’s not like it has its own *raison d’être*, something in it that makes it, “it”. But it’s just there because the causes are there. That’s all.

Another way to look at it is we give it the label ‘pain’, but compared to something else, it may not be painful. And that’s the thing. Sometimes when you start investigating the pain, if you can take away the label ‘pain’ and just have the sensation, then you may realize it’s not so much pain. Or if it’s unpleasant, to see that it’s unpleasant in relationship to something else.

Or you might see that it has parts, because it is something that is changing from moment to moment to moment. There’s a pain in this part. There’s a pain here. There’s a pain there. But when you try and isolate all the different pains in your knee, you can’t figure out where they’ve all gone.

There are many different ways to examine and analyze the pain. We can begin to see how when we say ‘pain’, we project it as this unitary, solid and unchanging thing. Everything’s made of lead, the way we see it, but when we start analyzing, then things become a little bit lighter. We see that it is only existing because the causes exist. And it’s only existing because there are all these different parts, and

my mind has looked at it as a whole and given it a label. Also, the value I associate it with, as being pain or pleasure, only exists in comparison to something else. It's like long and short. There's no inherently long and short. It's only long or short in comparison to something else.

When you are having some heavy-duty emotional experience or another, just step back and see ... the whole trick is remembering to do this, because usually we never remember Dharma when we're in the middle of an emotional plunk.

But if you can actually remember when it's happening, that it's there simply because the causes for it exist, that gives you a whole different feeling about it, doesn't it? It's not something real that's permanent, that's solid, that has to exist. It's something that exists simply because the causes happen to be floating through the universe together. That's all. When the causes are finished, it finishes. Where did it go to once it finishes? Where is last year's anger? Where is last year's depression?

*[Audience:] Why do we still behave in the same old way although we understand this process of dependent arising?*

This is the difference between intellectual understanding and the experience in the heart. We have a little bit of intellectual understanding, and we think that we should be able to be perfect. Our problem is we think that if we understand something, it means that it exists in our heart. (It doesn't.) And then self-judgment jumps in. "You've heard this a

hundred times. You know it's impermanent. How could you not see it? It should go away. Something should change. How come it's not like this? I'm so bad." Those things exist simply because of causes too.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

See, what's happening is you have the physical pain, eons of habit, a little bit of Dharma understanding, and you're expecting your little bit of Dharma understanding to overpower eons of habit without any effort. We have to build up the Dharma understanding slowly, slowly. Gradually, gradually.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

There's the physical sensation, and on top of that, there are all these habits of ways of seeing things and ways of relating to things. There's the habit of 'This is *my* body!' And there's the habit of 'I don't like any bad sensation in my body', and there's the habit of fear of "I'm going to lose this body because of this pain."

There are all sorts of habits that create the tightness in the mind. What we have to do is to slowly enrich our Dharma understanding so as to try and lessen those habits gradually. That is all. But there is no 'I' in that whole thing. See, that is another thing. We are so sure there is an 'I' in that mass. We are so sure there is a 'my'. "My body!" The 'my' feels so strong. The 'my' that is possessing it, and the 'I' that is experiencing it—they both feel so strong. But again, if we start to look, can you find the 'my' that is

possessing it? Can you find an ‘I’ that is feeling it? Where are you going to point to? There is just sensation. You cannot find a ‘my’ or ‘I’ in the whole mass. This is part of the problem—we think there is a real ‘me’ in there.

So, last time we were talking about things being labeled. We talked about manners as something created by our societal conditioning and as being merely labeled. Yet we attach another value on to manners besides the mere actions. For instance, maybe somebody is licking their bowl, or they are slurping, that is just an action and just a sound. But we give more meaning to it than is really there and we think the meaning exists inside the object. We then think that these people have really bad manners.

## **Our Mind Imputes and Projects Meaning onto Things**

### **Manners**

By looking at how we discriminate about good and bad manners, we see how our mind imputes and how our mind projects things onto things. We forget that we are the one projecting things and we think that those things we project have qualities from their own side. For example, when we see somebody slurping or licking their bowl as they do in Tibet and which is a sign of good manners there, we think that the action from its side is a sign of bad manners. But there is no such thing as good manners or bad manners inside the

action, because the slurping is just a sound and the licking is just an action. There is no meaning in it aside from the meaning that we as a collective community give it.

## **Money**

We also talked last time about money and how we give all this meaning to money. It represents success. It represents status. It represents approval. But it is merely paper and ink. This is really talking about us giving meaning to things. These are really clear examples of how our mind assigns a quality to a thing that does not have that quality from its own side.

## **Independent Existence and Inherent Existence**

If we look deeply, we see that we impute this kind of existence to things as if they have some kind of essence from their own side. We see things as independently existent, or inherently existent. This means that we see them as having some essence from their own side that makes them “them” and therefore inherently existent, or we see them as some kind of independent something that makes them the unique object that they are, and therefore independently existent.

## **An objectively existing book?**

Everything we perceive in our life, we perceive in this way. We believe things have some kind of



characteristic, or essence, in and of themselves. When we walk into a room and see a book, it looks to us as if the book is sitting there and from its own side it is a book. It being a book does not appear to depend on anything. We walk into the room and there on the table is an objectively existing book. We can even measure it as this many inches and that many centimeters. It appears to us that it is a book from its own side and we relate to it as if it has some essence of book-ness to it. We think, “It is a book, it is not a kangaroo, or a napkin, it is a book because it has some essence of book-ness in it.”

If we try and look for this essence, this definable quality that makes it “it” and not something else, if we look for this independent essence of book-ness, then we only have two places to look for it—either within the object, or as something separate. Book-ness must be within the parts, or separate from the parts. There is no other place that we can find some kind of essence of book besides one of those two places.

### **Examine the parts**

Then we examine and take the book apart and start looking at each different part of it. As we turn the pages, we cannot say that this page is a book, or that page is a book. The color alone is not the book, the rectangular-ness is not the book. If we took it apart and put all the sheets of paper between the covers all in a different place over there, we would not call any of those papers a book, would we?

So when we try and find one single defining characteristic, or one single part that we can identify

as being the book, we cannot find anything. Yet when we look at this thing, it looks like there is a real book there from its own side. But when we look at the parts, we cannot find anything that is a real book.

Some people may say that the whole collection of parts together makes the book. But if none of the parts itself is a book, how can you take a bunch of things that are not books, put them together and get a book? That is like taking a bunch of things that are not apples, putting them together and getting an apple. It doesn't work. So neither can we say that within the collection of parts there is an inherently existent book, because if we look at the parts of the collection, none of them is a book and the collection itself is just something that is made of parts.

### **Separate from the basis?**

If we look for a book that is inherently existent and separate from the base, that is separate from the covers and the binding and the pieces of paper, then what are we going to point to? Can you find some kind of spiritual book-ness floating around that when finally this thing gets published and bound, then the book-ness sinks into it and radiates 'book' thereafter? There is no such thing. Aside from the paper and cover and things, there is nothing else we can point to as being a book.

When we look for a defining characteristic of book-ness, an essence of book, the book that exists from its own side independent of any other phenomena in the universe, we cannot find that in the parts and we cannot find that separate from the parts.

So then the only conclusion we can draw is that it does not exist. There is no kind of book quality, or book essence either within, or without. Our whole way of perceiving this book, the whole way this book appears to us and the whole way our mind grasps onto this book as existing, is a total hallucination, because when we analyze and try to find the thing that appears to us, we cannot find it at all.

### **A conventionally existing phenomenon**

But simply because we cannot find the essence of book does not mean that there is no book that exists whatsoever. There clearly is something here that is a conventionally existing phenomenon, something that functions and something that we use and talk about. We cannot say there is no book, because we use it. There is a book, but it is not an inherently existent book. Rather, it is a dependently arising book and that makes the book empty of inherent existence.

### **The ultimate and conventional levels of truth**

So we have two things existing simultaneously, the book's emptiness of inherent or independent existence, and its existence as a dependent phenomenon. These two things exist simultaneously together. We call these two things the ultimate level of truth, and the conventional level of truth. The conventional level being that it is a book that depends on causes and conditions, and on parts, and it functions. The ultimate level is that it is completely empty of having any kind of independent essence.

These two things come together and one cannot exist without the other. You cannot have a dependently existing book without it being empty of independent existence, and you cannot have the emptiness of independent existence of the book without having a functioning, relatively existent book.

This is quite important, because otherwise people have the tendency to think that emptiness is some kind of ultimate reality that is out there, that emptiness itself is inherently existent. Again this is refuted because when we look for emptiness as something that we can now grasp onto and say we got it, it again eludes us. We cannot find it. Emptiness also exists by being merely labeled and that is all.

## **False appearances**

Imagine a child who is born wearing sunglasses and therefore, never realizes that they are seeing everything darker, because that is the way things have always appeared to them. It is the same with us.

Things have always appeared to us as inherently existent and we do not realize that we are experiencing a false appearance. We do not realize that our mind is grasping onto something as existing in a way in which it does not exist.

The big difficulty for us is the fact that we do not recognize the false appearance. We do not recognize that the object, the thing that is appearing to us, does not really exist in the way we perceive it. We just assume that everything exists the way it appears to us. It becomes real difficult for us to discern that the element we are projecting, is falsely appearing and

does not really exist there. It is only by dedicating a lot of time and really looking over this that we begin to get a feeling for how things really exist.

## **People Do Not Exist in the Way We Perceive Them**

Let us relate this to a person. Think of some person that you really have some very strong emotions for, maybe somebody that you are incredibly fond of and to whom you are much attached. When you look at, or even just think of that person, it seems like there is a real person there, doesn't it? If we walk in a room and look around, there is Steven, Laurie and Kate. They all look like real people who have an essence of Steven-ness and Laurie-ness and Kate-ness coming from their own side. When we meet people, it seems like there is something inside that makes them 'them' and does not make them anybody else. It seems like there is some kind of permanent person, some unchangeable quality, or something that is the person which carries on from one moment to the next.

If we think of a person that we are very fond of, it really appears to us that there is something that is 'that' person. The person appears as incredibly wonderful, fantastic, trustworthy and talented, etcetera. They really appear to us as inherently existent. But if we start to analyze and look for the thing that really is that person—it is almost like we are looking for a soul—what is the 'them' that you love so much?

When you look at somebody and say, "I love you so much," what is the 'you' that you love so much? Or

when you say, “I hate you so much,” what is the ‘you’ that you hate so much? When we start looking for the ‘you’ in the person, again, there are only two places to look—either within the body and mind of that person, or as something separate from the body and mind. There is no other place. “Self” has got to either be in there, or it has got to be some place else. There is no third place that can exist.

But when we start looking for that thing that is the person and start looking through all the parts—the body and mind—can we find them? We can scan through their whole body and ask, “Is this person any one part of their body? Is this person their brain, their skin, their eyes, their kidneys, or their little toes?” Is there any one part you can grab onto and say, “that is the person”?

## **His Holiness and scientists**

There was a conference of some scientists with His Holiness. His Holiness asked a very interesting question. The scientists were saying there is no such thing as mind, there is only the physical body and that is all. So His Holiness said, “If somebody’s brain was on the table and their brain was just sitting there, would you look at it and say that it is the person?” We would not, would we? If somebody’s brain is sitting there, we would not go, “Hi George!” In fact we might be kind of disgusted, if anything! We certainly would not look at the brain and say, “I love you so much!” [Laughter.]

## **Searching for the person you love**

If we look in any part of the body, we cannot find one part of the person's body that is them and of which we can say is really this wonderful person of whom we are so fond. So we think, "Ah, maybe it is in their mind! It is their mind I love." But again we must ask which part of their mind? Do you love the visual consciousness that sees color and shape? Do you love the auditory consciousness that hears sound? Do you love the gustatory consciousness that tastes, the olfactory consciousness that smells, the tactile consciousness that touches, the consciousness that thinks, the consciousness that sleeps or is it the mental consciousness you love?

Then you say, "Well, maybe it is the mental consciousness that I love." Then we need to ask, which mental consciousness is it that I love? Is it the mental consciousness that is sleeping, the one that is angry, or the one that is dying? Is it the mental consciousness from when they were a baby, or is it the mental consciousness that thinks about mathematics? What mental consciousness do we love?

Then we might think, "Well no, it is not the mental consciousness I love, it is their qualities as a person I love." Which quality of the person do you love? Do you love their happiness? But they are not always happy. Do you love their anger, or their integrity, or their faith, or compassion? Do you love their laziness or their judgmental-ness? When we start looking at all the different mental factors that arise in the person's mind, again we cannot isolate one of those and say, "That is the person. That is the thing that I love so much."

Of all those mental events, none of them are

constant. They come and they go. They come and they go and they are different all the time. If we are looking for this thing that is the person, this essence of the person, it has got to be something that is permanent and unchangeable, because something that is there one minute and gone the next, we cannot say that that is the person. When we look inside their mind, we cannot isolate one particular mental event, or consciousness, or anything at all and say, “That is who that person is, who they always have been and who they always will be. That is them!”

So if the person is not their body and if the person is not their mind, then we think, “The person is separate from the body and mind. The person is some kind of unchanging, permanent soul.” But if there is this permanent, unchanging soul, what is it? If it really inherently exists, if it is out there as an objective entity, then when we analyze, investigate and search for it, we should be able to identify something that is it. If you could point to something that’s them, that means that their body and mind could be here and they could be over there. Have you ever seen that? The person is here but their body and mind are over there? But what are you going to point to when you take away their body and their consciousness, is there something else there?

## **Questions and answers**

### **Past lives and continuity**

*[Audience:] What about people who remember their past lives?*



That happens because there is a continuity like a river, but the river upstream and the river downstream are not the same thing. The river downstream depends on the river upstream so there is this continuity, but they are not the same thing.

Even if we were not talking about previous lives, we can remember what happened to us when we were four or five years old but what is it that is happening? Is there some kind of permanent person that we were when we were four and that we still are now? Is there some kind of permanent person that we were in our previous lives? There is not. It is simply that there is a continuity that occurs but everything has changed. We are not the same now as we were when we were four. We are not the same now as we were when we were in our previous life, but there is a continuity happening.

*[Audience:] Continuity of what?*

There is a continuity of similar things that are ever changing. Look at the river. What is that the continuity of? There is something there and what is in it changes all the time. But it is not like there is a solid, existing thing because the banks upstream are not the same as the banks downstream. They are made out of different molecules. Things rub off the bank and get floated down the river.

But again the continuity is not some findable essence either. It is not like there is continuity floating down the river. Continuity is a label we give on the basis of something having a result that we can trace back to a cause. It is simply because there is

something here that we can trace back and say it used to be like that then we label 'continuity' on that.

But among all those things that went from there to here, we cannot find any that has not changed. We can even see that what we call 'river' isn't the water, or the banks, or any part of it. 'River' is just a label that we have given on top of all these things that have some relationship to each other. But from its own side, there is no river.

### **A "person" exists by being labeled.**

So, it is the same way with the person. There are all these different mental events, mental factors and mental consciousness and there is the body. All these things are going along, all are changing, changing, changing, but on top of all those things, we just give the label 'person'. That is why we say that the person exists by being merely labeled. There is nothing more than a label on top of a basis. Beyond that, you cannot find anything that is the person.

This feels so different to us. We feel, "Hold on, wait a minute, there is something that is 'me' inside and there is something inside the other person that is 'them'." But when you analyze it, you cannot find the 'me', or the 'them'. That is where we say that the person is empty of inherent existence. But the fact that it is empty of inherent, or independent, existence does not mean that there is no person there at all. There is a person. Who we are and what we are is just a conglomeration of parts that exist because there were the causes. On top of this conglomeration of parts that arose because of causes, we give it a label,

attach a name and then we say there is a person.

## **Karma**

*[Audience:] Can you explain how karma fits into this?*

There is almost a feeling like there is an inherently existent ‘him’ that is the owner of the karma. Kind of like, that is Andrew and he’s holding on to his karma. That is how we think, isn’t it? We think, “This is my karma. There is a ‘me’ and then there is my karma.”

*[Audience:] But the karma doesn’t go to somebody else.*

That is true and the leaf, once it is floating down this river, does not jump into that other river. But that does not mean that there has got to be an inherently existent person that never changes. If there were an inherently existent person that did not change, then that person could not create karma and could not experience the result of the karma.

To create karma, you change because you have to act. As soon as you act, you are different. But if you are inherently existent, if you are independently existent, it means you are permanent, unchanging and static. It would be impossible for you to change. In the same way, if there were such a solid person, who would it be that would experience the result of the karma? Because again, when you experience the result, you change.

## A permanent ‘you’?

*[Audience:] No matter how much I change, I’ll never become a car.*

True. Does the fact that you will never become a car mean that you can find something inherently you that is the “you-ness”? We get this feeling there is a Ron that is holding all the pieces of Ron together so that none of them float out and become a car. They talk about this in the scriptures. We think there is an owner to this whole thing that is holding it all together. Are we going to find that there is some Ron holding the body and mind together so that they do not fall apart? Are you going to point to some permanent, unchanging mind that is keeping your changing body and mind from falling apart?

Technically speaking, your body could disintegrate. All your molecules could rearrange and become some of the materials that go into making a car, couldn’t they? Could not some of the atoms, or molecules, in your body eventually become the atoms and molecules in a car? So what kind of permanent you is there that makes those atoms and molecules ‘you’? You are saying, “I am not a car” and it is kind of like saying, “This body cannot become a car,” but the fact is that it CAN become a car. Does anyone own these atoms and molecules?

The fact that you as a person are not also a car, does that mean that there is some essence of you-ness? ‘Car’ is something that is just labeled on top of the parts and ‘Ron’ is something that is just labeled on top of the parts. Aside from being merely labeled, you

cannot find the car and you cannot find Ron. And Ron cannot find his car. [Laughter.]

## **Soul—no soul**

*[Audience:] What about a soul?*

That is exactly the thing that Buddhism refutes: the existence of: the static, permanent, unchanging soul. I think this is a real profound difference between Buddhism and several other religions. In Hinduism you have this concept of atman, some kind of soul or self with a big ‘S’ and you have it in Christianity. This does not mean every Christian thinks this, but a common view is that there is a permanent and unchanging soul. This is one of the fundamental things where Buddhism has a really different view, because Buddhism says, if there is such a thing, find it. If there is such a thing, the more you investigate and analyze, the clearer it should become. But in actual fact, the more you investigate and the more you analyze, the more you cannot find it. So we come back to the fact that things are there simply because there is a basis, and on that basis our concept gives it a label.

## **A sense of ‘I’**

*[Audience:] What is this sense if ‘I’ then?*

It is something impermanent that has the ability to work with different elements and create appearances. But it is not like the Wizard of Oz. Remember in the Wizard of Oz when Dorothy walks into the throne

room, there is this big voice proclaiming, “I am the great Wizard!” and the lights flash? Then the dog Toto goes behind the screen and there is the wizard and he is just some ordinary guy pulling the switches. When we say ‘I’ sometimes we get that feeling like there is some guy in here behind everything who is making the decisions, pulling the switches and operating the whole thing. Or we think there is some little guy who is a Buddha sitting somewhere in there saying, “I’m going to manifest as that.” But what are you going to find that is some little person sitting in there running a show?

All we come to is that there are all these parts. In the case of the mind, there are all these parts of mind. There are the mental consciousness, visual consciousness, mental factors of mindfulness and concentration. There is intelligence, compassion, anger, joy, happiness and all the different mental factors and mental events. They interrelate and different ones come up at different times and things are changing all the time. That is how you get a manifestation. It is the same with the manifestation of the Buddha, except that a Buddha does not have the negative mental factors.

### **The causal energy of compassion**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Well, this is getting into a different subject. With the Buddha, because the compassion is so strong, the Buddha does not have to consciously think, “I am going to manifest as this or that.” The causal energy

of compassion is so strong that it is like the Buddha is governed by compassion.

## **Nihilism**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

This is a very, very common thing. There are many stories of this. This is exactly the same thing that past meditators have gone through; you look and you analyze and you cannot find anything and then you go, “Oh, I don’t exist at all. Nothing exists.” Then you get really scared, because there is nothing. That is going to the extreme of nihilism saying that there is absolutely nothing that exists. That is clearly not true.

## **Can a Buddha be reborn?**

*[Audience:] If everything is changing, is becoming a Buddha then a permanent, eternal state, or can a Buddha fall back and be reborn in samsara?*

Buddha’s mind is not permanent, but from the state of enlightenment, you never fall back. Once you have become enlightened, you never fall back because there are not the causes to fall back. At that point, you have eliminated the attachment, aversion and things like that, so there are not the causes to fall back. So this state of enlightenment is eternal, but the Buddha’s mind is not permanent or static, because the Buddha’s mind is changing every moment.

Somebody exists as a Buddha because of being merely labeled. Enlightenment exists by being merely

labeled. Enlightenment is not some kind of ultimately existent, findable thing. It too is made of qualities and characteristics, and on top of those characteristics, we give it the label ‘enlightenment’.

## **Relating the label of something to the base of the label**

It is real interesting to spend some time thinking about how we relate the label of something to the base of the label. And then how we feel like there is an ‘I’ that is there holding together the parts, or how we feel there is a Buddha there holding together the enlightened mind, as if the enlightened mind is going to fall apart.

For instance, we might say that there is a clock holding together the parts and making this thing a clock. We probably look at it like first there is the clock and then the parts of the clock. But how can you first have a clock without having the parts? You have the parts and on top of them, you give them a label. And if you then look within each part, it too exists by being labeled.

It is not like the causes are sitting inside as some solid thing holding the clock together. The causes for this thing we label ‘clock’ do not exist now. The causes for the clock cease for the clock to come into existence. When the causal energy finishes, the clock finishes.

This takes a while to work at. You have to really think about it, you especially have to start watching how you perceive things. When we first started doing this I asked you to sit in your backyard and look at a



tree and ask yourself “What is the tree?” Then I asked you to go through the parts and figure out the relationship between the tree, the branches, the trunk, the leaves and the roots and ask yourself, “At what point does it become a tree? At what point does it stop becoming a tree?” Or you can also look at the tree and think of all the causes that go into making that tree.

The basic thing is to try and get a feeling of what we call the object to be negated, or the object to be refuted, which is the inherent existence, the independent existence, the appearance of that real solid essence of something.

### **The cause and the result cannot exist simultaneously**

*[Audience:] Why do the causes of the clock, or the tree, cease when the clock or tree exists?*

The cause and result cannot exist at the same time. Because if the cause and the result existed at the same time, how could the cause produce the result? If they were to exist at the same time, the result would already be there.

### **Search and investigate**

This is something to play with. Sit in your backyard and really ask yourself, “Who is sitting here?” Or take a time when you are really angry—“I’m really angry. Somebody offended me. I’m angry and I’m sitting here!” And then ask, “Who’s the ‘I’ that is sitting

here? Who is the ‘I’ that is angry?” Really search and investigate. Do not just sit there and go, “Who is the ‘I’ that is sitting here? I can’t find it, so bye!”

We strongly feel, “I’m sitting here and I’m angry.” But who is it that is angry? What can we identify with? What can we draw a circle around and say, “That’s the ‘me’ which is angry.” Or when you get into one of these really big funks thinking, “I’m terrible, I can’t do anything right, everything is lousy.” Who is the ‘I’ that is so terrible? Try to find that person that is so terrible. Those times when you have very strong emotions, look at how the ‘I’ appears as the big ‘I’ and then search for it. Try and find it somewhere.

## **The Ones Thus Gone**

*[Audience:] When we talk about the “Ones Thus Gone”, where do they go to? [Laughter.]*

Do you mean the “Ones Thus Gone” in the practice of prostrations to the thirty-five Buddhas? The place they went to is a state of mind called the state of nirvana.

## **CHAPTER 13**

### **Ripening the Minds of Others**

#### **What Does ‘Ripening the Minds of Others’ Mean?**

‘Ripening the minds of others’ is like you have a green tomato and you need to ripen it, make it red so that it’s tasty and delicious.

How do we ripen other people’s minds? Sometimes they call it ‘How to assemble disciples’ or ‘How to gather disciples’, but it basically means how to ripen other people’s minds. What they are specifically referring to is forming Dharma relationships with people. We want to ripen all sentient beings’ minds, but not all our relationships come in the form of Dharma teacher and student, or even as Dharma friends. But when it says ‘disciples’, then it’s talking about a teacher-student relationship.

It is difficult to find an English word that fits what we are talking about. Using the words ‘master and disciple’ don’t quite fit, because we have all sorts of weird ideas about masters and disciples. When you say ‘student and teacher’, that doesn’t really fit either, because it implies a similar kind of relationship that you have with your first grade teacher. But a relationship with a Dharma teacher is totally different from that with a college professor or a high school teacher. So when we say student-teacher, we don’t really get what that relationship is. In a relationship with a spiritual mentor, many buttons get pushed,

because if we do have issues with authority, they will all come up. Even if we consider somebody as our spiritual friend, we'll still have issues of authority. Issues of authority come up even with our regular old friends. Even with a cat, I have issues of authority [laughter]. They just keep coming up.

## **Training in the Four Factors of Gathering Disciples**

If you look in the lamrim outline, we're on the section just after the six far-reaching attitudes: The four factors ripening the minds of others, or the four ways of gathering students, or the four ways of helping to ripen other sentient beings' minds. These four can actually be included within the six far-reaching attitudes, but they're set apart here to show us very clearly the four things we should do if we want to lead others on the path to enlightenment. Of course, this is when we're in a position to start to teach others. When we're not yet in that position, then we adapt it to the position that we are in. There is something within each of these four that we can practice at our present level.

### **1. BEING GENEROUS**

The first factor is generosity. Not only does generosity directly benefit others, but especially if you're seeking to help lead them on the path and you want to ripen their mind, then they have to want to receive the teachings. To want to come to teachings, they have to

think, “Well, the teacher is a nice person. Maybe there is something I can learn from them.” One way you convince people that you’re a nice person is by giving them things. This isn’t bribing students to come to your talks. [Laughter.] But rather, our minds are very, very gross. If people are kind to us and people show us some kind of warmth and give us presents, we are immediately attracted to them. Whereas if somebody doesn’t give us presents and they bite us instead, then we’re not so attracted to them. [Laughter.]

By being a generous person, they come to like you. It makes them ready to listen to Dharma teachings from you. Also, I think generosity directly communicates to others that you want to give. If you give material things, it shows a good example to prospective people whom you can benefit. You are showing a good example of a quality that they might admire, which would, again, tend to make them want to come for the teachings. But from the student’s point of view, we shouldn’t go around trying out all the teachers and see who gives us the most presents [laughter]. It’s our responsibility to support the teachers and not the other way around. But when we’re in that role [as a teacher], in order to benefit others, then it’s a nice thing to do.

You can see how it works. If we were to adapt it to work relationships, if you want to ripen people’s minds in the Dharma, one way to do it is just to be friendly. You give little sweets, little presents and things like that to people whom you work with. Then they come to like you, and they think you’re a nice person because you do those things, and they wonder,

“What are they doing that they are such a nice person?” Then you say, “It’s Buddhism.” [Laughter.] But it works because I’ve gotten feedback from people who have met some of you in different occasions, and they’ve said, “Wow, that person was so nice and so friendly that it made me think what they’re doing must be something nice. Something good.” So it made them interested in the Dharma. Being generous is one thing we can do that eases relationships and it makes people interested in what we’re doing.

## **2. SPEAKING PLEASANTLY**

The second factor is speaking pleasantly, but what it means is teaching the Dharma, because teaching the Dharma is speaking pleasantly. It means teaching people the means to gain upper rebirths and to gain what we call ‘definite goodness’. ‘Definite goodness’ is a technical term that I’m introducing now in case you hear it from other teachers later. It means liberation or enlightenment. It’s called ‘definite goodness’ because when you have liberation or enlightenment, it’s definite that you’re liberated. You’re no longer going to fall back into confusion.

Here, we are talking about teaching people the means to attain the two goals—upper rebirth and definite goodness. You teach them according to their interest and their disposition. This is why it’s so important to be skillful, teaching in ways that people can understand. For example, how do we adapt this to a work situation? As mentioned before, first you give your colleagues sweets and goodies and you are a nice

person. Again, it's not to butter them up, it's because you value the Dharma. Then you might talk with them about Dharma, but you don't have to use any Buddhist words to do it. You don't have to come in with a lot of Sanskrit terms and Pali terms and give them books in Chinese and Tibetan [laughter]. But you just speak about general Dharma things in very practical, normal language.

People may ask you what you did over the weekend. If you say, "Oh, I went to a retreat," and they ask you what this is about, then you tell them the content of the retreat. But again, you tell them the points that are easy for them to understand. This is what it means by guiding people according to their interest and disposition. This is being skillful. When you tell people about Buddhism, tell them about things that they're likely to understand and agree with. When people ask, "What is Buddhism all about?" don't start telling them about reincarnation. His Holiness is an excellent example. Look what he talks about at the public talks—kindness, gratitude, love and compassion, respecting others, world peace, universal responsibility. These are things that people relate to, especially people in our culture.

When you talk to your colleagues or your parents, tell them about these kinds of things and give them some of the books that they can read right away and understand, like His Holiness' book, 'Policy of Kindness'. And in that way, they'll say, "Oh wow, Buddhism, this is interesting," because it already agrees with what they believe and what they find valuable. And then after that, you can start introducing other ideas. Also, not only do they like to

hear about things like loving-kindness and respect, because these resonate with what they believe, but they also see how important it is to develop these in their own minds. It gives them something to work with right away. This is being skillful, teaching according to others' interests and dispositions.

To be able to teach according to others' interests and dispositions, we really need to become Buddhas. A Buddha will be able to understand exactly people's level of mind, their previous karma, what kind of teachings are suitable for them, what kind of language, what kind of terminology, whether to teach them Theravada teachings or Mahayana teachings, whether to teach them tantra, which tantric practices, whether to teach them in a traditional way, whether to adapt it to the culture, and so on. In other words, to be able to be sensitive to where others are at and explain Dharma in a way that communicates with them.

Also, it's important to speak according to the laws of the country and to speak using very pleasant speech and pleasant expression. When you're explaining the Dharma, don't swear and use rough language [laughter] and be very uncouth and things like that. This doesn't mean you have to be very formal and puritanical, but again, you teach according to what seems fitting and proper.

When we explain to people in our family or at work about the Dharma, we don't have to see ourselves as teachers. When we do that, we might create a distance with the other people and we might begin to feel quite awkward. Or we might get a little bit proud or mechanical. It is better to just see it as one human being sharing something we find valuable



with another human being. But of course never push it on anybody.

Did I tell you what happened to me yesterday, speaking of pushing things onto people? This is kind of off the subject, but it is good to include here as an example of what never to do. [Laughter.] I was teaching in Phoenix on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. The teachings were very well organized and well attended.

Yesterday afternoon, I had a few small groups and personal interviews. There was one Christian pastor who had come to some of the teachings on Saturday afternoon when I did a workshop on 'Anger'. He asked to see me in a small group.

He and another pastor, his colleague, came to see me. I had thought it very nice that there was going to be an inter-religious dialogue. They came in with their Bibles. They said they had come to learn and they asked me about my experience, how I became a Buddhist. I told them about it. And then one of the pastors said, "And you know, science is just theory. They have all these theories. They can prove some of them, but not the rest. Buddhism—I don't know about. But this book, this Bible, from the first page to the last page, is proven fact."

And then he continued, "When I was in Los Angeles I talked to one Caucasian monk. I asked him how come he believes in Buddhism? It's superstition. Whereas this book is fact, from beginning to end. Jesus appeared on the earth. He died and he was buried. But he was resurrected and it was proven fact. I asked the monk how come he doesn't believe in it? And this monk didn't answer me."

Oh, I knew why this monk didn't answer him. [Laughter.] It was pretty heavy-duty, not at all what I had expected. Fortunately, I had to go to the airport. This is how we should not be, when we're talking to people about Buddhism. [Laughter.]

I find especially with Westerners, it is good when we give new ideas and things, to pose them as questions instead of as proven facts. To just pose questions and give people space to think about things. I remember the first teaching I attended, which was by Lama Zopa Rinpoche. What Rinpoche did was a very good example of teaching according to people's disposition. One of the first things he said was, "You don't have to believe anything I say." I felt so relieved to hear that, at my first Buddhist teaching. Then I could listen. So when we are explaining Dharma to people, to give it like a gift, "See if this helps you. See if this works for you." And pose it as questions and let them choose what to work with.

### **3. GIVING ENCOURAGEMENT**

First we're generous, then we give them the teachings, which is another form of generosity. And then after we've given them teachings, we encourage them in the practice. We try and create opportunities for them to practice. Sometimes people may have the teachings, but they don't know how to get going, or they're lazy, or distracted, or insecure. So we provide conditions for them to practice. You can bring this about in a variety of ways. One way that I have noticed with Lama [Yeshe] and [Lama Zopa] Rinpoche is they would meditate with us. They are

truly tuned in to Westerners. Most Tibetan lamas won't meditate with their students. They come in, do some prayers, give the teaching, and then dedicate the merits and leave. They assume you know how to meditate. Very few of them will actually sit there and lead you through the meditation, or sit and do a meditation session with you. One way to give Westerners some kind of encouragement, is to do sessions with them. That's why we have Nyung Nays, and we do the Chenrezig practice as a group, because that is one way to encourage people.

I remember another way I had to use to encourage somebody to practice. There was one young man in Singapore who had cancer. In the Buddhist tradition, if you save lives, it becomes the cause of prolonging your own life. If you kill, it becomes the karmic cause for a short life. That's why you'll see, especially at the Buddhist temples in China, lots of ponds and people come with fish and turtles and they put them in the pond. People buy the animals at the butcher's shop that were going to be killed, and take them to the temple to liberate.

One time I was in Tushita center in Delhi, sitting there eating something, and a chicken walks in. [Laughter.] And I said to myself, "What's this chicken doing here?" It was on the way to the butcher and Rinpoche bought it to save its life, so there it was. So there is this practice of saving life.

To get back to the original story, this young man had cancer and I told him to liberate animals, but he didn't do it. There was always one thing or another he had to do that was more important—work overtime or do something for his family. One day I said to him, "I

want to liberate some animals. Will you help me to do it?" I didn't have a car and people there like to do things for the Sangha. So he came and we went together to get the animals and liberate them. We did this a few times. This was the only way I could get him to do what was good for him, which was to tell him I wanted to do it. [Laughter.]

This is one way of encouraging somebody to do something. We can think of different ways to give people encouragement. In the context of your work situation, if somebody is interested in going to teachings, offer to go with them. Pick them up. Bring them in. Introduce them to the other people in the group. Often when they first come, they're shy. They don't know anybody. It's a new situation. Tell them what happens in the group beforehand so they know what to expect. And when they come in, introduce them to people and give them prayer sheets and things like that. It is a way of encouraging somebody to practice, making people feel at ease.

#### **4. ACTING ACCORDING TO WHAT ONE TEACHES, SETTING A GOOD EXAMPLE**

The last factor to help ripen other people's minds, is that we should practice according to what we teach. This is extremely important. We should set a good example without pretense. In other words, it is not a thing of you telling other people to get up early in the morning, and when they're around, you get up at five, but when they're not around, you get up at nine. Not like that. Or telling the people, "Well, here are the five precepts. It is very good if you practice them."

But then you are off acting contrary to all five of the precepts. We should try as much as possible to practice what we teach. And be very honest about our own level and not put on airs about it.

Those are the four ways of ripening other people's minds. Are there any questions on that?

*[Audience:] It seems to me that to think "I have the intention to teach this person the Dharma, therefore I'm going to give them something" is a bit artificial, seems like a plotting mind to me.*

You don't want to get into that plotting stage. But rather, you're practicing the Dharma yourself and the first of the six far-reaching attitudes is generosity. By practicing generosity, and especially towards people like this, then it makes them feel welcome. It is not done with a conniving mind to try and trick them. It is done basically because you're practicing generosity.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

That's a very good point. Sometimes when we feel ill at east around somebody, one good way for us to conquer that feeling is to give them something. We make a connection. Good point.

That completes this section here.

## **CHAPTER 14**

### **The Eightfold Noble Path**

The Eightfold Noble Path is one of the essential teachings of the Buddha. How does this topic fit into the scheme of things?

The Buddha first gave the teachings on the Four Noble Truths, in other words, the four facts that are seen as true by the Noble Ones. The Noble Ones are beings who have direct perception of reality.

The First Noble Truth is that we have undesirable experiences in our life. The second is that these have causes, the causes being internal—our own ignorance, anger and attachment. The third Noble Truth is the cessation of both these undesirable experiences and their causes, in other words, there exists a state of liberation from these. And the fourth is that there is a path to follow to actualize that cessation. This path is the Eightfold Noble Path. The Eightfold Noble Path fits into the fourth of the Four Noble Truths.

Let me list these eight and talk a little bit about how they fit together into different things and then we'll start discussing each of them in more detail.

### **The Three Higher Trainings and the Eightfold Noble Path**

This is a great teaching for people who like lists, because the Eightfold Noble Path can also be listed under the Three Higher Trainings. Those of you who have been here before know about the Three Higher

Trainings—ethics, concentration and wisdom.

The higher training in ethics, which is the foundation of the path, has three of the Eightfold Noble Path: perfect speech (or right speech or correct speech—there are different translations), perfect action and perfect livelihood.

Under the higher training of concentration, we have perfect mindfulness, perfect effort and perfect concentration or single-pointedness.

Under the higher training of wisdom, we have perfect view or understanding and perfect thought or realization.

To summarize, we have the Four Noble Truths. The fourth Noble Truth has three subheadings—ethics, concentration and wisdom. Three of the Eightfold Noble Path go under ethics, three of them go under concentration, and two of them go under wisdom.

## **Higher Training in Ethics**

Now, let's start with the first one, the higher training in ethics. We're going to be talking under the broad category of ethics, which is basically how to put our life together. Ethics isn't a list of moral codes. It's not a list of "Do this" and "Don't do that" and rewards and punishments. Ethics is basically how to put our life together so that we can live in harmony with ourselves, so that we don't have a lot of guilt, regret, confusion and turmoil. It helps us to make wise decisions. Ethics is also how to live in harmony with other people so that we abandon things that disturb others, upset the balance and create disharmony.

Here, we're going to talk about how to use our speech in a proper way, how to use our physical actions in a proper way, and how to earn our livelihood in a proper way.

## **RIGHT SPEECH**

Let's start with speech, because speech is something that we do a lot. Even though we have two ears and one mouth, we use our mouth much more than our ears. [Laughter.] Speech doesn't mean just oral speech. It can be written speech too, and any kind of verbal communication.

The Buddha, when he referred to his own speech, said that his speech was truthful. It was useful. It was spoken at the right time, and spoken with a compassionate motivation. These four qualities of perfect speech or good speech, are very important. Let's look at them in a more systematic way. What does it mean to be truthful? What does it mean to speak in a useful way? What does it mean to speak at the right time? What does it mean to speak with a good motivation?

### **Truthful speech**

Truthfulness. Obviously, this means abandoning lying and deliberately saying things that we know are not true. This doesn't mean being a fanatic about telling the truth. And it also doesn't mean being a fanatic and using truth in a harmful way. Sometimes we can say things that are true, but we say them with a mind that wants to cause harm and we actually do inflict harm.



Even though the speech is truthful, it is not really falling under what we mean by 'truthful' here. Being 'truthful' is not just saying the facts as best as we understand them, but it means not using the truth to harm others.

An example. People who are just getting into Buddhism often ask, "This precept about not lying. What happens if somebody comes up and says 'I want to shoot this guy.' Do you tell them where to go to shoot him? Should I tell him or shouldn't I?" [Laughter.] Clearly, in that kind of situation, you do what is beneficial. What truthfulness is calling on us to examine, is to see if we do speak the truth as we know it. How many times when we tell a story, do we exaggerate a point to make it more in our favor?

I got a letter from one of my students in another country. She has a lot of problem with anger. She has been working with this for a number of years. She was telling me about a fight she had with her husband. She got so mad at him and she was really telling him off. She said that the Buddha statue was right opposite to her in the room where they were having the fight. She was seeing the Buddha statue and at the same time, knowing that what she was saying to him wasn't completely the truth, that she was exaggerating it. You know how when you get into a fight ...[laughter] So she was seeing that happen at the same time she was saying it. And then at one point, something broke inside of her. She just broke down and really apologized to him, said the truth, and they were able to discuss it and let go.

That was quite a major breakthrough for her. I think that was quite a good understanding she had, to

see how we say we are telling the truth but it is not really the truth. How we pick out certain details and something to prove our point and omit the other details that would help us to understand the other person's viewpoint.

Sometimes also, we exaggerate when we talk. In particular, we don't tell the truth to ourselves. We say statements to ourselves like, "*Nobody* likes me!" "I make *all* the mistakes!" "*Everything* I do is wrong!" We make these kinds of statements to ourselves. They are clearly lies, aren't they? How can we say to ourselves that everything we do is wrong? It's not true. Not everything we do is wrong. Or saying to ourselves that nobody likes us. That also isn't true. But we say these kinds of statements to ourselves. Sometimes when we're complaining and feeling sorry about ourselves, we kind of prove our point to other people, "My boss always gets on my case." Always? Lots of times we don't even tell the truth to ourselves when we're looking at the situation. We exaggerate things.

We also do a lot of double-talking, explaining a situation this way to one person and that way to another person, saying it this way one time and that way another time. We get quite tangled up in our lies sometimes, in our exaggerations. We forget what we told who, so the next time, we don't know what to say because we don't know which version of the story this person has. When people find out that we have been lying to them, that destroys the trust. If we want to destroy our relationships, the best way is to lie. It really is. As soon as we start lying, the trust goes. Very easily. We spend a long time building up trust with our

colleagues, with our family, with our partner. But when we lie, even over small things, it knocks away a lot of the trust that has been built up.

The thing is how to tell the truth in an appropriate way, how to tell it in a kind way. Also, telling the truth doesn't mean giving all the ugly details that might be painful to somebody. Maybe just giving what they need to know at a certain time. People who work in the medical profession, if you have somebody who is terminal, you don't sit them down right after they have been through this barrage of tests and give them the whole truth for an hour. The person will be overwhelmed. Just give them a little bit of the truth about the diagnosis. Then slowly, as time goes on, fill it in. Lots of time, it is a thing of how to tell the truth in a graceful way.

## **Useful speech**

The second quality of speech is how to make it useful. Usefulness can be talked about in two ways—things that are useful in the long run, that is, useful for our ultimate goals like attaining liberation and enlightenment; and things that are useful temporally or in our day-to-day life.

### ***Making our speech useful for the long term goals***

How do we use our speech in a useful way for the ultimate purpose of liberation and enlightenment? By speaking the Dharma to others, by teaching the Dharma to others. That is why it says in the teachings, that the gift of the Dharma is the highest gift. By

explaining the teachings, you give people the tools with which they can free their own minds.

That doesn't mean that we all have to aspire to be Dharma teachers. It doesn't mean that you have to organize classes and sit on cushions. Explaining the Dharma can happen just in your day-to-day life. You might meet people and they ask, "Oh, what did you do on your summer holiday?" "I went to retreat." "What's that?" And you start talking to them about what retreat means. Or people ask you what do you do on Monday and Wednesday nights, and you tell them, "Well, I gave up playing poker [laughter] and now I'm going to a Dharma class." "What's that?" And you describe to them what it is.

Teaching the Dharma or sharing the Dharma doesn't mean using lots of fancy terms, complicated concepts and Buddhist jargon and being impressive. It basically means speaking from your heart about your own spiritual path as you see it, as you're practicing it. What is refuge to you? Why did you take refuge? What did you get out of the teachings? How do you benefit from meditation? How do you use the practices on patience in your daily life? These are things that very often we can share with our colleagues, friends and family.

Many people who are just getting into Buddhism ask me, "What do I tell my friends? What do I tell my parents? If I tell them I went on a week retreat instead of going to the beach, they're going to think I'm weird!" [Laughter.] Generally, when you explain Buddhism to people, tell the aspects of Buddhism that already agree with what that person believes in. Take the example of His Holiness. When he comes to town,

what does he talk about in the big public talks? He doesn't start talking about samsara, nirvana and Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and karma. He doesn't start throwing Sanskrit and Pali words out. He talks about loving-kindness, compassion, patience, harmony. Things like that.

This is the best way. Start people off talking about these things, and as they become interested, they will want to know about other things. Slowly, you can fill them in. Or you can bring them to teachings, bring them to the retreats, introduce them to teachers. That's also another way of sharing the Dharma, giving the Dharma, using our speech to spread the Dharma. Spreading the Dharma doesn't mean going out on street corners [laughter] or going door to door.

It can also be encouraging them in the spiritual path that they're already on. If somebody is a devout Christian and they find it beneficial to them, encourage them in that. Many of Jesus' teachings on loving-kindness, patience—these are very good for people to practice. We are not doing a hard sell on Buddhism. We're not trying to sell our product or root for our football team here. [Laughter.]

### ***Making our speech useful for the temporal goals***

*Helping to avoid conflicts.* Making our speech useful in an instrumental way, a day-to-day way, is especially to help avoid conflicts. In other words, giving people the information that they need. A lot of time, conflicts arise because people don't have the information they need, so they invent something in their head. They don't know what's really going on, so they say, "Well,

this happens. It must be due to x, y, z dah dah dah.” And then they have the whole story and there is a misunderstanding. So sometimes making our speech useful is giving people the kind of information that they need, like what time you’re going to be home, where you’re going, what they can expect from you and what they can’t expect from you. Instead of promising big lavish grand things, let people know what they can expect and then try and live up to it.

*Helping to soothe conflicts.* Also, try and use our speech to soothe conflicts, to take away tension when there is tension. It might mean doing some mediation between people who are in conflict, if you have those skills. It might mean just listening to a friend who needs to get something off the chest and talk something out. There are many ways of trying to soothe over things.

*Giving up slandering and back-biting.* Also, making our speech useful means giving up slandering other people and back-biting. It is not useful when we go around using speech that is intentionally divisive. We often do this when we are jealous. Somebody is getting an advantage over us. Somebody is friends with somebody else whom we want to be friends with. Out of jealousy, we use our speech in a divisive way to make people a little bit suspicious of each other, to create a little bit of friction between people, to somehow do something so that we can wedge in there and get what we want. When we do that, we are abusing our own capacity for speech.

*Giving up blaming.* Making a speech useful means giving up blaming people, including blaming ourselves. Get rid of this concept of blame to start with. Whenever there is something wrong, whenever there is a difficulty, it is not necessary to blame somebody and attribute all the causes for a situation to one person, be it somebody else or ourselves. Give up blaming with our speech. And with our mind, give up this attitude of trying to find one person to blame, whether it is dumping it on somebody else or dumping it on ourselves. Use our intelligence to look at a situation multilaterally to see all the different things that are going on in it, so that we give up using divisive speech. We give up blaming. We give up slandering.

*Giving up idle talk.* We also give up idle talk. Idle talk is also something that is not very useful. We can idle talk a lot. [Laughter.] Idle talk is just talk that is without any purpose, without any sense. Now, this doesn't necessarily have to do with the subject. Whether our speech is idle talk or not has a lot to do with the motivation and with the mind. For example, if you're talking about sports to a colleague at work just to make yourself look good, to show off how much you know about the different sports, or just to waste time, or just to blah blah blah and occupy the floor, that would be idle talk.

On the other hand, let's say you're going to visit some relatives whom you don't have a whole lot in common with. But you know they are interested in sports. You feel it's very valuable to maintain a relationship with them, and you really want to create

harmony and find something in common to talk with them about. For that reason, to keep the doors of communication open with those people, you talk about sports. In that context, it's quite useful.

What we're getting at here is, we're trying to do some introspection on what is useful speech. What are the times when our speech has been useful? What are the times when it is not productive?

Now of course, talking about Dharma is very useful, but it doesn't mean every time you talk about Dharma, it's useful. If you are on an ego trip talking about the Dharma to somebody who isn't interested and imposing on them, then that's idle talk. It is a call for us to look in and ask ourselves, when are we using our speech in a meaningful way?

Sometimes, silence can be the best way of using our speech. It can be the most useful way. We'll talk a little bit more about this later. Lots of times too, we idle talk because we feel we need to fill up the space.

If we don't say something, then what are we going to do? But sometimes, just being silent gives the other person the opportunity to say what they need to say. Sometimes it's better not to fill the space. To just be quiet. See what comes forth from the other person. Let the other person lead the discussion instead of us always leading it. Also, especially on phone calls, check out with people. See if it's a good time to talk with them or not. Very often when we call people, we assume they have all the time in the world, but they could be in a hurry. We know what it's like. We've all been in that situation—we're at the door, the phone rings, the caller wants to talk for half an hour and you can't get a word in it [laughter]. It is good to be



sensitive ourselves and not do that to other people. Ask people if it is a good time to talk, whether they have time to talk. Use our speech in a wise way.

## **Speaking at the right time**

### ***Giving negative feedback at the right time***

Certain things need to be spoken at the right time. If spoken at the right time, they fit in great. But if you speak them at another time, it might not be appropriate. The timing is wrong. It is the wrong thing to say at that time. Again, it is not just what you say that matters, but also when you say it and how you say it. This is very important.

For example, when do we give people feedback? If we have some negative feedback to give to somebody, do we give it in front of a whole group of other people? Do you remember when you were a kid, your parents chose to discipline you in front of your friends? That was so humiliating. Do you remember what that was like? Again, remember that when you are handling your own children.

Don't humiliate other people in front of their colleagues or in front of their peers. It is not the time to discipline them. It may not be the time, even in a work situation, to give negative feedback if it will make the person lose their self-confidence or lose their image. Take care to choose the right time if we have some negative feedback to give somebody.

When we give the feedback, do not blame the other person. Just state the situation as we see it, without interpolating meaning and purpose to it.

Also, do not give negative feedback when our tempers are on edge, when we're in a bad mood, when our button just got pushed. When we are flustered and stressed out, that is not the time to give somebody feedback. We need to do it when it is quiet, when we are in a more private situation, and when we're calm. Giving feedback isn't just telling the other person what our perception is, it is also having the capacity to be able to really listen to them. When we give criticism or negative feedback, we have to check our own mind first if we are in the mood to listen.

Often when we give negative feedback, we think it's just a thing of "Am I in the mood to say it?" We do not consider if the other person is in the mood to listen. [Laughter.] But when we raise something for discussion, we should automatically check as well, "Am I willing to listen at this moment to what the other person says? When I give them this feedback, am I willing to listen to what their viewpoint is and how they perceive it? If this isn't a time when I'm willing to listen, if I don't have the time, if I'm stressed out, then maybe this isn't the time to bring this subject up. I've to wait until another time."

### ***Not giving negative feedback continuously***

Also, not giving negative feedback continuously. [Laughter.] "You did this. You did that ...." We can watch sometimes how our mind gets into this incredible nit-picking thing. Can you see that? I can see it in myself. It's like once we get a negative image of somebody, then every single thing they do is wrong! They can't walk right. They can't close the

door right. They can't sneeze right. They can't do anything right because our mind has gotten so locked into this negative image that everything they do is wrong. We do this especially with the people we live with. The people we live with, the people whom we're closest to, the people we love the most—we often feel that they are part of us, so we can treat them in the same discourteous, rude, obnoxious way that we treat ourselves. [Laughter.]

### *Observing manners*

It is true. Look at the way we talk to ourselves. That is the same way we talk to the people whom we're closest to—completely without respect. It's also a call to look at the way we talk to ourselves. When we talk with ourselves, when we talk with our family, to not transgress the basic societal norms of being polite.

I remember when I was a teenager, I hated it when my parents told me to mind my manners. I thought manners was stupid! Politeness was awful! And then when I went to Taiwan and I took the Bhikshuni ordination, so much of the instruction they gave us was about manners and being polite. I remember after lunch, they would always give us instructions like remembering to push our chairs in when we get up from lunch. How to greet old friends. How to greet people. At first I thought, "Why are they telling us this?" And then I realize, "Well, they're telling me this because I still don't do it." [Laughter.]

I began to think a lot about these different small things to do with manners, and I began to see how much conflict in relationships occur just because of

being impolite. It's incredible! For example, being impolite with the tone of voice we use, impolite at the time we talk to somebody, calling them too late, calling them too early, not saying 'please', not saying 'thank you'. Just simple things like saying 'Thank you', to use our speech in that way. How many times have we gotten gifts but did not write back to the people to say 'thank you'? They're sitting there wondering whether it even arrived. It's not that they so much want "thank you's" and appreciation. They just want to know that it arrived safely. But we don't even take the time to write and say "Yes, it arrived. Thank you very much."

Observing manners is very important, especially with the people we live with and work with. It is good to start checking up on our own speech, how we use our speech, if we do this. We can see how small things can make very significant differences in relationships with other people.

### *Giving praise at the right time*

We not only give negative feedback at a proper time, but we also give praise at the proper time. And make sure that we give praise, because we often take things for granted. Again, this happens most with the people we live with. We don't thank our partner for taking out the garbage. We just assume that they will. We don't thank our kids for cleaning up. We don't appreciate the child when they do their homework. Or appreciate our partner when they wash the car.

Giving praise doesn't mean always saying, "You're marvelous. You're wonderful." That doesn't tell the

person very much. But if you tell them some things they did that you really appreciate, that lets them know what it is you appreciate about them. When we give praise, be specific. Don't just heap on the adjectives. "When you did xyz, I really appreciate it. It made me feel good. It helped me out in a difficult situation." Being specific gives the person information that they can use about what they did that is helpful.

Also, make sure that we give the praise near the time when the person did the behavior. Don't wait six months before you send the thank-you letter. Don't wait six months before you tell your kid that you were really glad about something they did. Give the praise in a timely way.

Often, when people are successful, or when they've had some joy in their lives, they want us to share in it and give them some positive feedback. But we just kind of shine it off. We don't praise it. We don't comment. We don't share in it. And they feel let down. They feel kind of flat.

If we look in our own life, we see lots of times when these situations have happened to us. The thing is, instead of looking at the times when they have happened to us, look at the times when they have happened to other people. We can then use our speech to remedy them. That's the thing to look out for.

### ***Knowing when to be silent***

Speaking at the right time also means knowing when to speak and when to be silent. Sometimes, silence is a much better way of expressing ourselves and a much

better way of sharing something with somebody. We all know this. Sometimes being with somebody in silence is a much greater way of feeling close than having to fill the space all the time. Treasure the silent times with other people. Learn to be silent. Learn to be with other people in a peaceful way, in a silent way.

When people first come to retreat and they hear they have to observe silence, they've told me afterwards, "Oh my God, I'm here in a group of twenty, thirty people and we're silent. In my family, silence meant somebody was going to explode. How am I going to live a week in retreat not speaking? It reminds me too much of the silent dinners in the family!" [Laughter.] Here, we are learning to be silent with a good energy flow. We are not identifying silence with rejection, or silence with lack of connection.

Especially in Dharma situations, silence can be a wonderful way of sharing something very deep with other people.

For example, we as a group meet and do the Chenrezig practice together. I have noticed at times that after the dedication, nobody gets up. Everybody sits in silence for another fifteen, thirty minutes. Just because the silence is very nice to share, being able to go into yourself and yet have a community that you share that with.

### **Speech motivated by compassion**

The fourth quality of speech is speech motivated by compassion. This is one of the most important

qualities about speech—why we speak. To really look at our motivation. Things don't come out of the mouth unless the mind moves first. So look at the mind. What's the mind's motivation? Sometimes we may speak truthfully, but the intention is to harm somebody with the truth. Sometimes we may praise people, but the intention is to harm them with the praise. If we praise but our motivation isn't good, our praise becomes flattery. Or our praise becomes coercion.

Also, out of compassion, trying to console others with compassionate speech. Doesn't mean that compassionate speech is always consoling and nurturing. Sometimes compassionate speech can also be quite direct and quite straightforward. Compassionate speech can be speaking out against injustice. Speaking out against prejudice. But these are done with compassion, not with anger.

Compassionate speech can be used to urge others to reconsider their decisions, to urge others to look at more sides of a situation. There are many ways to use our speech in a compassionate way. But the key thing is to always check the mind beforehand.

Compassionate speech isn't, "I know how you should solve your problem. I'm compassionate, so I'm going to tell you how to solve it." Lots of times, that is what is going on in our mind, though we don't say it like that. We know what we want the outcome to be, and we want to manipulate the other person to come around and follow our advice, because our advice is very good. We know how they should live their life, how they should put their life together. We are so compassionate. We help them. We tell them because

they're too blind to see it themselves. [Laughter.] If we have that kind of motivation for speaking, even if what we speak is true and right, it's not going to come across well. Or if the person puts up some resistance, we're going to get defensive, angry and upset. "I'm only trying to help you. Why are you getting so mad at me?! I was speaking to you out of compassion!" [Laughter.] We need to really check the motivation and try to make it compassionate. Sometimes it might mean not speaking until we can change our motivation.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

We can still say what in our judgment we perceive to be the best. That's fine. The extra added element in what I was talking about that is undesirable, is "Therefore you should do it." So the thing is to be able to give advice without imposing any obligation on the other person. Allow them to make their own decision. When you're speaking to adults especially, it's much better that you get them to make their own decision. If we just enforce our view onto the other person, then they're likely to come back to us afterwards and be quite resentful. Or if something goes wrong, they'll blame us for what went wrong. If people ask for advice, it is much better to say, "Well, it seems like dah, dah, dah to me, but this is just my opinion. You know more about the situation. You have to make the decision." And then just leave it completely to them. With a child, it's obviously different.



*[Audience: inaudible]*

You want this person to get more functional because it reflects on your integrity, your feeling of confidence and your reputation in the office.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

You mean if you don't give advice, are you really caring? And if you do give advice, are you really caring?

Yes it is very hard. I find that too, because people often come to me for advice and I feel it's incredibly important for people to make their own decisions. Try and ask them lots of questions to get more information and maybe pose a few different things for them to think about or do. But really, insist that they make their own decisions. Otherwise it is easy for people to just say, "Oh, I did what you told me to do and it didn't work out 100% hunky dory. It's all *your* fault! I'm not taking any responsibility for my actions, because it's your fault. You told me to do this." [Laughter.]

But you're right. It is difficult to help and yet make sure that we're caring without being vested in the outcome. Sometimes that may mean giving people the space to make mistakes.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

The basic thing is, that in any situation, we act with as much compassion and integrity as we can bring to that situation. We cannot see what the result is, because

results come about through a mix of so many different conditions that we can't determine. So the basic thing about caring is what our motivation is at that moment. Do not think that caring means we get a particular result from the other person. Do not think that helping somebody means we get a particular result. Helping them is the attitude of helping. Otherwise, we will drive ourselves nuts ...

*[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]*

## **RIGHT ACTION**

### **Abandoning killing and protecting life**

[Front part not recorded.] Included in the abandoning of harming others physically or abandoning killing, is to protect life. To protect lives in all ways that we possibly can. To create a safe environment. To eliminate threats to health. That means disposing of our toxic things properly, not putting our paint in the garbage can. Just small day-to-day things. What do we do with the paint with lead in it? What do we do with toxic things around the house? How do we dispose of them? Using our physical action in a proper way means to dispose of them in a safe way that doesn't endanger the environment. To try and create healthy environments. To give shelter to others. Create a place that's safe for other people to live in. It could get as fine-tuned as not driving when we don't need to. It can get as fine-tuned as carpooling when we possibly can in an attempt to create a safe environment for other people. Not putting out pellets

to kill the slugs in the garden. Offer your vegetable to them. [Laughter.]

### ***The practice of releasing animals***

Promoting life. Here, we get into the Buddhist practice of releasing animals. This is done a lot in the Chinese culture. It's a very lovely practice. I did it a lot when I lived in Singapore. We can organize it some time here too, if people would like. In Singapore, it was very easy to get the animals. At the marketplace, they would have animals that were ready to be slaughtered. There are all sorts of sea creatures, turtles, eels, grasshoppers (that you feed to your birds), birds in captivity. There is a special practice for you to liberate living beings that are going to be slaughtered or imprisoned.

Last year when I was in Mexico, we did this too. We did it with the children. The families all went out in the morning and got different animals. Somebody even got a hawk! They had some interesting animals, like an owl. Then we gathered in the park and we said prayers to imprint the Dharma seeds on the animals' minds, and then we set them free. [Audience speaks.] You buy them and then you liberate them. Don't steal. [Laughter.]

### ***Taking care of the sick and distressed***

Creating a safe environment. Liberating those who are in physical distress. Also, taking care of the sick. The complement of avoiding harming others physically is also to help them when they are in physical distress. If

you see an accident on the streets, stop and help. If Aunt Ethel is sick, go over and help her. If somebody is in the hospital, visit them, call them or send them a card. This again, is something that we tend to neglect, often because of our own fear. We don't like to see people who are dying. We don't like to see people who are sick. We're too busy. We have so many important things to do in our life. "Can't you have your surgery another week when I'm not so busy?" "Can't you die some other time?" [Laughter.]

Taking care of others especially when they are sick, because we know how we feel when we're sick. Some people are hermits when they're sick. Let them be hermits. Don't impose ourselves on them. But there are other people who, when they're sick, want somebody to bring them a glass of orange juice, or vegetarian chicken soup. Whatever it is. We like to be taken care of when we're sick. It is the same with other people. Take that opportunity when it's there, either with neighbors or relatives. And do it with a happy mind, not with a mind that is really rushed, "I have so many other things to do. Okay, here it is. You got it. Now I'll go do my things because it's really inconvenient for me to take care of you when you are sick." Rather, to take care of the sick with a lot of love, a lot of care.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

It's hard. We definitely live in an imperfect world. A lot of these things, it's not like there's going to be one simple solution that's good for everybody. We do the best we can. But I think especially causing direct

harm, as much as we can abandon that, it's better.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

It's true. In many situations, we do the best we can. We do it with as much good heart as we can. That's why they say that keeping just one precept now is much weightier karmically than keeping many precepts at the time of the Buddha, because it's much more difficult to keep precepts now. If you have taken the five precepts, feel proud of yourself. Not that kind of 'proud', but a sense of rejoice and satisfaction.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

What you brought out is a very important point. Part of the purpose of this is for the effect it has on others, but the big purpose is the effect it has on ourselves. How we are when we try and become more aware of what we do with the slugs and the ants, where and when we walk, and how much we drive. It's not just the effect on the society but how it makes us slow down, look at what we're doing and our motivation, and recognize our interdependence with others.

Also, when we help other people physically, when we help the sick, do not do it out of guilt or obligation. As much as we can, do it with a kind attitude that wants to give, not so that others will owe us a favor. Especially when we take care of the sick, it really means developing our own equanimity. When people are sick, sometimes they're very irritable, sometimes they tune us out, sometimes they talk too much. They aren't always in control of their body, speech and

mind when they're sick. We have to have some equanimity. Also, when people are sick, we have to be able to deal with saliva, excrement and things like that.

To really help people when they need it. Help them talk about the things they need talking about, especially if you're with somebody who's terminal. They may want to talk about different spiritual issues, or emotional issues, or whatever it is. Give them the space to do that. Helping them in that way as much as we can.

It's developing some tact. How to nurse. How to help somebody. How to give medicine. Lots of times, we leave that up to professionals. I saw the difference between Asia and here when I lived in Singapore. One student of mind was dying there. He was at home and his family was doing a lot of the care for him. I was thinking that here, we would probably just keep somebody in a hospital or in a hospice and have a stranger do that. But there, the sister helped carry him into the bathroom. She helped him with all these personal things that we often don't do with people in our family. We feel embarrassed and let strangers do that. Sometimes our family member may feel better if a stranger does that. That's fine. But sometimes, they may feel better if somebody in the family helps them. Not just giving more and more tasks over to the professionals to do, but to be involved in the care ourselves too.

### **Abandoning stealing and practicing giving**

Another aspect of bringing to fruition our capacity for

action is to abandon stealing or taking things that haven't been given to us. Using things that weren't for our personal use, that aren't ours. Borrowing things and not returning them. Borrowing money and not paying it back. These kinds of things. Instead of always taking, taking, taking, we try and practice giving. To give material things when we possibly can. But do not think that giving material things is enough. I think we have a bare tendency now to think that if we just write out a check, then our obligation is over. If we just give a check to a charity, if we just give a check to a friend, if we just give a gift, then our obligation is fulfilled. Don't use giving as a way to buy ourselves out of our feeling of guilt.

Another kind of giving is to offer service. Sometimes we're better equipped to offer money. If we offer service, we might make a mess. But we shouldn't think offering money is the way for us to get out of offering service. When we can, help people physically in the things that they need help with. If they're moving, or if they're building something, or if they're planting, or whatever it is, offer service to them.

In terms of practicing giving to the Dharma group, don't just think, "Okay. I gave something in the dana basket. I paid my dues." First of all, dana isn't paying. Dana means gift. It means generosity. It's not paying for the teachings. It's not getting rid of the feeling of obligation. It's a freely offered gift in the same way that the teachings are freely offered. In the same way, we want to offer service to the group. We want to offer service to the Triple Gem and to help the Dharma spread. Try and use our energy in that way

instead of expecting everybody else to do all the work in the group. Otherwise it is always the same group of people doing the work again and again. They need some help and some rest. So try and offer service.

Also, to try and protect people when they're in danger. This is a type of generosity. It is also a way of protecting life. But really, it is to evoke the spirit of giving within ourselves. Not always keeping tabs of whose turn it is to pay when we go out to eat. Or looking at how much I spent on their gift last Christmas and how much they spent on mine in order to decide what to do for them this year. Try and cultivate the spirit of generosity that really wants to give.

When we give, give in a kind way, not in a disrespectful way. If you give to somebody, for example, a beggar in India or a homeless person, give in a respectful way. Look at the person in the eye. Give the nice things that we have instead of keeping them for ourselves and giving the bad ones to others.

I read about somebody who said that every two weeks she tried to make it a practice to give away something in the house that she liked. Making that a practice, developing that spirit of generosity, giving away something we like because we want the other person to be happy. We give without fear. We do not fear losing the thing. We're giving because there's some kind of pleasure.

It is no good to give just because people flatter us. Or when people flatter us, then we give a lot. When people are nice and kind, when they say nice sweet things, we give them lots and lots. When they are mean to us, we don't give them anything at all.



Sometimes we can be very proud and arrogant, going around thinking, “Who is so good that they can be the recipient of *my* gift?” We give because we want recognition. We want other people to know how generous and how philanthropic we are. So we need to check the mind. Check the motivation. Develop a good heart.

There is actually another aspect to this, but I think I’m going to hold on and do it later. Any closing questions?

*[Audience:] Somebody comes to me asking for information. I know the information is going to hurt them. Should I give them the information?*

I think it’s going to depend a lot on the situation, who the person is, what the information is, and what your relationship with them is. The information might be painful at first but it could eventually lead to a good result. If you feel that is the case, and it would be better to tell them now than withhold the information, then you may want to do that. If you have a close relationship with them, then even though it’s going to be painful for them, you will be there to help them through that. You have to look at the many aspects in the situation.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Yes, it is very easy to lie. Sometimes it’s very uncaring to do that. “I don’t want to get involved in somebody else’s problems and heartaches. I’ll just feign ignorance.”

*[Audience: inaudible]*

It might be painful at first to say this to the person, but you feel it might be able to help them in the end. For example, somebody is having difficulty at work and they do not know why. You know the reasons. They come to you saying, “I got a very bad grade on the rating and I don’t understand why. Do you know why?” You know it is because of the work they did on a particular project. You know that it’s not going to be pleasant saying that to them, but maybe if you could give them the feedback and spell it out, then they could come to see how they can improve what they’re doing. So you’re telling them not because you want to hurt them, cause them harm, or make them lose self-confidence, but because you want to give them information so that they can improve and do things in a different way later on.

Okay. Let’s spend a few minutes contemplating.

We talked about right speech and the first two types of right action.

Right speech means to say what is truthful and useful. It’s speech spoken at the right moment and spoken with compassion. It also means avoiding lying, slanderous or divisive speech, harsh words, and idle talk.

## **Right action**

Right or perfect action is:

1. To abandon physically harming others,

- especially killing them, and to practice protecting life. We talked about releasing animals and saving lives.
2. To abandon stealing or taking what hasn't been given to us, and to practice material generosity, generosity of our service, protecting others from harm and generosity of the Dharma.
  3. To abandon unwise sexual behavior.

### **Third type of right action: abandoning unwise sexual behavior**

This includes any kind of sexual behavior that is damaging to self and others. The primary thing here is adultery, meaning that whether you're married or not, if you're in a committed relationship, going outside of that. Or if you're single, you go with somebody who is in a committed relationship. At a conference that the Western Buddhist teachers had with His Holiness, it was mentioned that Thich Nhat Hanh had said that he felt any kind of sexual contact where there was the possibility of a committed relationship was fine. But when it was just frivolous sex, then Thich Nhat Hanh considered it an unwise sexual behavior. His Holiness' response to this was, "Well, that's not the way it is traditionally defined in the scriptures". But the next day His Holiness came back and he said, "Well I was thinking about that and actually I think that's good. I think that's right". I thought it was quite interesting that he came around to that.

### ***Taking care of our body in a healthy way***

The corresponding action to avoiding unwise sexual behavior is to try and take care of our body and use it in a proper way. Not only to use it in a proper way sexually but also to take care of our body in a general way, to keep it healthy. This does not mean being attached to our body and fussing over our body. It means recognizing that our body is the vehicle through which we can practice the Dharma. And because we value Dharma practice, we value our health.

I mentioned previously one Western psychologist who was at a science conference with His Holiness described to His Holiness how Westerners often feel out of touch with their bodies and alienated from their bodies. His Holiness replied, “But you care so much about your health and your appearance and you exercise”. He had a hard time putting those two things together. But actually I think in our society they go very much together, that somehow because people do not feel comfortable with their bodies, they go to the extreme of trying to make their body into the perfect body. Making it look the way they think it should look (just like the models in the magazines), becoming obsessed with appearance and with exercise not in a healthy, respectful way, but in an obsessed, compulsive way.

Here, we’re talking about taking care of the body in a healthy way, not out of attachment, not because, “Oh, I love my body”. We don’t have to go into this big thing about how the body is beautiful. We also don’t have to go into this big thing of how the body is evil and sinful. In others words we completely drop that whole dichotomy. I think what often happens in a

Western Christian culture is that you get this idea of “the body is evil”, “the body is sinful”, “sex is evil”, “vanity is evil”. We grow up with all that and in an effort to counteract that, we get into the extreme of fanatic exercise, obsession with beauty, all these trips relating to the body. And yet, we don’t feel comfortable with the body. When you’re really obsessed with one extreme, going to the opposite extreme doesn’t necessarily balance it out. It could mean that you’re equally obsessed.

What we’re trying to do here is to completely drop all that false discrimination regarding the body. We do not say the body is especially beautiful and fantastic, because if you look at the inside of our body, it isn’t beautiful and fantastic. We do not say the body is evil and useless either, because the body can be productive and it is the vehicle that supports our Dharma practice and enables us to be of service to others. I think this takes a good deal of contemplation and meditation. We need to look into it and really do some research, “What is my view about my body?” “What is my view about sexuality?” I’m not equating these two because there’s much more to the body than sexuality. We want to recognize the preconceptions that we have in our mind and then look at some way to balance them out and drop them. We do not just go to the other extreme. Sometimes when you’re really stuck, you try and deny it and go to the opposite extreme. What you want to do is drop both of the extremes.

### ***Cultivating acceptance of our body***

So I suggest it's really valuable to work on that in your meditation because it brings about much more acceptance of our body. I think the more we can accept our body, the happier we're going to be in our life. Especially because our body is going to age. All of us are aging. We're getting more wrinkles. We're getting closer to death. We're getting closer to having cancer and lung disease and kidney failure and everything else. If we don't die of one thing, we are going to die of another thing.

As Lee said when we did the 'Death and Dying' workshop together, "We all have a terminal diagnosis. We just don't know what it is yet". [Laughter.] It's true! And the more we can recognize, "Yes, that is true. I don't need to freak out about it, and I don't need to ignore it and deny it either. I can accept that as a fact of my life, and use that to energize my practice," the more we can come to have a healthy view towards our body and its functions and what will happen to it. Then we become able to accept sickness and aging and death instead of freaking out about those.

I think a lot of our difficulty as we grow older, is making these transitions between having a young and healthy body to having a body that is getting sick a lot more because it's aging and a body that isn't so attractive. If we live that long that's what's going to happen to us. If we can make some peace about it, then when it happens, we're not going to freak out.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

If I realize, for example, that my body may be healthy

now but it has the potential to become unhealthy, then I tend to treasure my health more and say, “Let’s use my body now as the basis for my Dharma practice. Let’s do some real serious practice now while I’m healthy because when I get unhealthy it’s going to be real difficult to practice. Let’s really use the time and the advantage that my health provides right now.”

The same thing with youth. While we have some youth, let’s really engage in the practice because it’s much easier to do it now than when you’re really, really old and your eyes are failing and your ears are failing and you’re often sleepy and it’s harder to walk and things like that. If we recognize where we are now in relationship to the whole life cycle, then it energizes us to use the opportunity we have now for Dharma practice instead of using it just for having a good time and fulfilling our sense-pleasure desires.

### *Futility of fulfilling sense-pleasure desires*

We could go around and fulfill all our sense-pleasure desires, but all that pleasure doesn’t last, and as soon as it’s over you cannot retrieve it. You have nothing to show for it.

Like the weather today was great and beautiful. Maybe you went to the beach. Maybe you took a walk around Green Lake. Maybe you stayed out in the sun. It was great and you enjoyed it. But now it’s all over. What do we have to show for it? Is there any lasting benefit from that pleasure that we experienced all day? In terms of karma, nothing. Complete zilch in terms of preparing for future lives, in terms of bringing us closer to liberation and enlightenment, in

terms of cultivating positive states of mind and developing wisdom and loving-kindness. All that sense pleasure didn't do any of that for us. It just consumed a lot of time, gave us some temporal happiness. But none of that happiness is here right now.

They often compare sense pleasure to the happiness you experienced in your dream last night. Like your dream. Maybe you had this fantastic, super, incredible dream, you were with this incredible person. It was super deluxe but when you wake up, where's the dream? Gone, finished.

Living our life solely for the purpose of having sense pleasure leaves us with that same kind of emptiness as soon as it's over. I think that causes people to have a lot of regret at the time of death. At the time they die, they look over their whole life and say, "OK, I've spent my whole life. What did I do my whole life?" People go through this whole list of things they did but then the question is, "Well, what comes with me now that I'm dying? I did all that. I made it to the top of the corporate ladder. I got this incredible house. I was so famous. I won the trophy in roller-blading and I did this and that. I was the best artist and the best musician. I had all this pleasure and everybody loved me. I was so popular but now I'm dying. What of that comes with me?" That's when people develop a lot of regret and a lot of fear. Because it's really, really clear at the time of death that none of that stuff goes with us.

The only thing that goes with us when we die is our mental consciousness and the karmic imprints that we have accumulated from the actions that we've done



our whole life. If all the actions we've done our whole life had just been done out of a selfish motivation for our own pleasure, then we have nothing to show. All the imprints that go with us are just the imprints of selfish pleasure. Whereas if we spent our life trying to generate constructive mental states and an attitude of kindness and concern for others, an attitude of selfless giving or generosity or ethics or whatever, and we do actions motivated by that, then when we die all these imprints and habitual tendencies go with us. There'll be a real sense of richness and fullness and accomplishment and a lack of fear.

## **Questions and answers**

### **Dharma practice as we get older**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

It's going to be of course unique to the individual. Some person may be just wild and all over the place in their youth. It was only when they got older that they started waking up and thinking about the meaning of life. So for that person it's a different situation. But in general, in terms of our physical capacity, when the body starts becoming more uncomfortable and starts losing its power, that in itself is one more thing that we have to deal with.

It was really interesting for me when I lead a course with one sociology professor for students of Chapman University in the winter. We've done it two winters now. She's in her sixties—a wonderful, very incredible woman. But I really notice (and she's also

told me) that in the last two years, she has a hard time hearing. She comes to the morning meditations but she cannot hear us when we lead the meditations. Or she cannot hear the Dharma talk we're giving. How distressing that was to her! I recently received a letter from her telling me she got a hearing aid and how much better it was. I think it was a big psychological jump for her to actually get a hearing aid.

So we're talking about just those kinds of routine physical deterioration that can interfere with our Dharma practice. Of course with the mind, many people mature as they age and the Dharma becomes much more vital and vibrant to them.

## **Examples of unwise sexual behavior**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

For example, you know that you are HIV positive. You continued having sexual relationships without telling your partner and without practicing any kind of protection. Or you manipulate somebody else emotionally to get them to have sex or you use physical force. These acts are very damaging to others.

## **Responsibility and commitment in relationships**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Both His Holiness and Thich Nhat Hanh emphasize very much this feeling of responsibility and commitment to other people. Not only in terms of

intimate or sexual relationships but also in terms of relationships with people in general. To really look at people as treasures to uncover, not as tools to be used.

*[Audience:] Is prostitution considered unwise sexual conduct?*

Prostitution was not included under unwise sexual conduct. It's unwise sexual conduct only when somebody else had paid for the prostitute, but you took her instead. When Gen Lamrimpa said that, I nearly hit the ceiling! But obviously the social ethic at that time was completely different. The whole notion towards women was very different then than it is now. Also it may not have been that prostitutes were sold into it in slavery or forced into it by economic conditions.

*[Audience:] What's the reason behind celibacy and how does this help direct one's energy towards the Dharma?*

This happens on many, many levels. On one level, one's health improves. His Holiness also commented about this in the teachers' conference. He was saying that many people, after they become monastics and become celibate, that because the physical energy is retained, then also their health improves. So that could be one thing. For some people it may not work this way. It depends a lot on your mind.

Also, I just know that for myself, from my own personal experience, if I let my mind generate a lot of attachment—either emotional attachment to

somebody or sexual attachment—then when I sit down to meditate, my mind much prefers to think about things I'm attached to—things that are wonderful, that bring a sense of security and pleasure. That's much nicer to think about than death and refuge and karma. [Laughter.] My mind just goes off and it becomes very difficult to meditate. So on the level of distraction in your meditation, if you have more restraint in your break time and don't get involved in relationships, it becomes much easier to meditate. When people come on retreats, I ask them to be celibate, simply because it cuts out a lot of distraction in their minds.

It also cuts out a lot of the trips we do when we're relating to other people. You can see how your behavior changes when the mind is actively looking for interested and sexual relationships. Watch what your mind does when you meet somebody who is physically or emotionally attractive to you. You get into incredible amounts of all sorts of trips. After I took ordination, it became much, much clearer to me the kinds of trips we get on to when there's attraction involved with somebody else. Celibacy cuts out that stuff.

Another way in which it helps you direct your energy towards the Dharma is that, for example, if I had a husband and kids, it'd be really difficult to be giving Dharma teachings the way I am. You wouldn't have just Achala (the kitten) walking in and out of the room. You'd have my kids, you'd have my husband, you'd have my in-laws calling on the phone [laughter], and everything else. It will be much more difficult to find the time to do retreat, to go to

teachings, etc because of the family commitment. Your family needs you. They want you. You want them. It becomes more difficult. So that's another reason for being celibate.

Sometimes people ask me, "If everybody ordains, doesn't that mean there won't be future generations to propagate the Dharma?" I don't see that danger happening yet. I've never seen everybody rushing to the monasteries to ordain so that we weren't going to have any future generations of Buddhists.

*[Audience:] How does one practice within a couple relationship?*

First of all, I would recommend, if you aren't already in a relationship (if you are already in one, then work with the person you're with), then I would advise looking for somebody who also has similar spiritual interest, who also wants to follow the Buddha's path more particularly. Somebody whom you can talk with about Buddhism and who encourages you in your practice. Somebody whom you can meditate with, who has some good discipline, who gets up in the morning so if you want to sleep in, that person kind of nudges you and says, "Come on, let's meditate." Don't get mad at them and start a fight! [Laughter.]. Can you imagine that? You'll have to have Buddhist marriage counselors—"My husband woke me up and nags me to go meditate with him in the morning!" [Laughter.]

So you want to find somebody who really has an active interest in practice, an active interest in the kind of Buddhist values that you have. Somebody

whom you can talk with about Buddhism, who encourages you in your practice, who understands that spiritual side of you.

This applies also to our friendships in general; I'm not just giving advice for how to find a spouse. Our Buddhist friends are so precious and so valuable because they understand that spiritual side of us and the accompanying values that we have—that the most important thing in our life isn't money and success and fame. The people who share those same kind of values are very precious to us. If you have a partner, I would recommend you go on retreats together. Or one of you go on retreat and one of you stay home so as to give the other person space. Really support each other in wanting to have quiet time alone or quiet time to go to class or to meditate.

## **RIGHT LIVELIHOOD**

The third one is livelihood. Perfect or right or brought to fruition livelihood. This has to do with how we earn our living, how we sustain our life and how we use our wealth. This is a very important thing because a good deal of our life revolves around how we earn a living and how we use our wealth. The job and career we choose is going to influence the circumstances we're in which in turn influences our own conditioning. That's why it's quite important to talk about livelihood and think deeply about it.

The basic thing is to try to not break precepts in one's way of making a livelihood. Not to break the five precepts of avoiding killing, stealing, unwise sexual behavior, lying and intoxicants. Also not to do

anything which encourages other people to act in destructive ways. These are the basic criteria. To have a job where you don't have to act unethically and where you don't have to encourage anybody else to.

Right livelihood includes not overcharging people. It includes not under-paying your employees. Paying employees correct wages is part of right livelihood. Falsifying work records, falsifying your timesheet, claiming that you worked more hours than you actually worked would be unethical. Stealing from your company. Making long distance calls on the company telephone bill when the company doesn't let you do that. These kinds of things would not be proper livelihood.

There are some specific occupations where it's strongly recommended that we not get engaged in. For example:

- Being a butcher.
- Being a fisherperson, catching fish.
- Selling weapons.
- Being involved in the so-called defence industry which is the offence industry
- Selling, distributing or serving alcohol or intoxicants. In the plane, they serve so much alcohol. I kept thinking of all the flight attendants and the karma that they're creating, and they don't realize what's going on. Some of them don't even know not to offer me alcohol. Some of them recognized and don't offer.  
[Laughter.]
- Dealing in animal skins and furs because some beings were killed because of that.

- Sooth-saying.
- Selling poisons, any kind of poisons that would destroy life. I remember one time I gave a talk on this subject and the person who drove me home decided to change after they recognized what they did was no good—either that they had a job in an insecticide company or they had just bought a whole bunch of insecticides, I can't quite remember.
- Raising livestock for slaughter.
- Dealing in slaves.
- Being a hunter or soldier, anything that involves other beings dying or killing other beings.
- Usury, but of course now working in a bank is quite an accepted social thing. Probably at the time of the Buddha, people really cheated each other through usury.
- Operating a gambling casino.
- Prostitution or any kind of involvement in the pornography business—in today's society we would include this in. I think pornography is something that is pretty exploitative.

So those kinds of livelihoods. “Wrong livelihood” also means doing your job with the wrong intention, even if you aren't involved in any of the above wrong livelihoods. Like let's say you're a doctor and you really want more people to be sick so that you'll get more patients and more money. That becomes wrong livelihood. Or if you're a trader and you want there to be a war or an embargo or sanctions so that you can do more trading in the black market. Trading in itself and doing business is quite an okay livelihood but



when you're praying for other people to have misfortunes so that you can benefit from it, then it becomes a wrong livelihood.

## **Questions and answers**

### **Short-selling**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

What's short-selling? [Audience speaks.] Stock market is beyond my realm of understanding. [Laughter.] I'll leave you guys to determine that, but anything that involves deceit or cheating is a wrong livelihood. Even if you do have a proper livelihood, using deceit or cheating in it makes it a wrong livelihood.

### **Lying in business**

A question that I commonly get asked is what happens if our boss expects us to lie? When we do business, we're expected to cheat the customer. I have one friend who used to work in Hong Kong for Levi Strauss as one of the chief executives. She's a Buddhist, so I asked her this question. I said "How about this? How do you keep good ethics when you're doing top-notch business like that?" She said actually keeping good ethics is the way to have a good business because if you cheat the customers, if you short-change them in some way, if you deceive them, they're not going to come back to you. Whereas if you're straightforward and you don't overcharge,

they're going to come back. So she was actually saying that this whole question really is quite irrelevant. There's no real need to cheat, deceive and lie in business.

## **Killing to provide meat as food-aid**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

From a Buddhist viewpoint, that would still be unethical. The best thing is to try and get them something else to eat that doesn't require killing a being. Also it's been shown that to produce meat requires much more resources than to produce the equivalent amount of grain. So better to send grain instead. Also, the meat will spoil in the relief airplanes.

## **Abortion**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

This is a real difficult issue. When asked about it, His Holiness usually says it depends on the situation. But in general, abortion is included within taking life.

## **Divination/ fortune-telling**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Traditionally, fortune-telling, sooth-saying, and things like this are often seen as ways of cheating people or encouraging superstitious practice. "But the Tibetan

lamas do divinations,” you would say. In the Chinese temples, you pray to Kuan Yin and you throw these sticks and it tells your fortune.

The standard answer for that is that this is done in order to benefit people. If you pray to Chenrezig and you throw the sticks, if your mind has enough faith, maybe the slip of paper that turns out from the sticks will help you to get some clarity in your mind. When the Tibetan lamas do the divinations, they invoke Palden Lhamo or Tara or one of the Buddhas who then speaks through the dice. It’s done for the benefit of sentient beings.

My own opinion is that there may be some practitioners who are really doing it for the benefit of others, and they really have some ability to give that kind of advice. There may be other practitioners where that’s not the case. So I think one needs to be very, very careful.

They say that if you go to a fortune-teller and the fortune-teller says, “Oh something really awful is going to happen in your life” or “You’re going to have a really bad rebirth. You’d better do a lot of purification because there’s some incredible negativity”, then you get really scared and you go right out and learn the purification practice and start doing it.

But if you come to Dharma class and you hear that the Buddha says in the scriptures, “Look at the karma you’ve created in your life. There’s a lot of negativity and that brings suffering,” then we say, “Oh Buddha’s just talking. That isn’t really the case.”

It’s really true, isn’t it? People often take what a channeller or fortune-teller or the I-Ching tells them

much more seriously. They take that much more personally and seriously than what the Buddha's teachings tell them. I think this happens because of our limited mental capacity. So I think sometimes this kind of fortune telling is done as a way to communicate with people who have that tendency and will only listen through that way.

## **Buddhist astrology**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

There's a form of Buddhist astrology and there are certain Buddhists who practice it. Although His Holiness says that it's good to keep that tradition alive, he himself doesn't rely a whole lot on it. I think it depends a lot on one's motivation, on one's skill, on how one emphasizes things. Something is not right when one has a really important decision to make and one thinks, "Oh the Dharma teachings aren't so important. Let's look at the chart instead."

"What are the criteria we use to make a decision?" To make a wise decision, first of all we should think about what is most ethical. Look at the ethical pros and cons. Look at the benefit for sentient beings. Look at the benefit for our Dharma practice. Use these kinds of criteria for making decisions. But instead of encouraging that, if an astrologer encourages you to use your chart and forget about ethics, forget about altruism, forget about your Dharma practice, then I think we're getting really off balance. Or just using the dice or just using I-Ching.

I'm not negating any of those things because

sometimes those things can be helpful. But it's when you trust those things more than you trust the Buddha's teachings, then something is not right.

## **More discussion on divination**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

It would depend on who you went to ask too, like if you're a Buddhist practitioner but you seek from a non-Buddhist astrologer your long-term goals in life. Buddha gave you a goal to become enlightened—that's pretty long-term! [Laughter.]

I've had a great deal of difficulty because one of my teachers does a lot of divination. He throws dice to determine what to eat for lunch, who to ask to lunch, what airplane to take. Most of my teachers aren't like that. Most of them use divination when, for example, somebody is sick and they want to know which doctor to go to or things like that. So I've had a great deal of difficulty with the teacher who uses the dice a lot.

Once I said to another teacher of mine, "When I go and ask for advice from my teacher, I trust his advice. I want his advice. I don't want the dice's advice. We're trained to respect our teachers, and especially when we practice Vajrayana we're trained to see our teacher as the Buddha. When we're training our mind like that, then what do we need the dice for, because our teacher's opinion should be something we really seek?"

This teacher said, "Yes that's very, very true but most people will listen more if the teacher says it by

throwing the dice first. If people think, ‘Oh, this came from the Buddha’, or ‘This came from Palden Lhamo,’ then they’ll listen to it more than if it came from their teacher.”

But for me personally, it’s the exact opposite. I trust my teachers’ personal advice more than the divinations because I really admire my teachers. But that’s my personality, my character. You’re getting this through my own personal filter.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I wouldn’t take out the dice or the sticks and use them to tell others what to do. There are a few reasons why I don’t do that. First of all I don’t know how to, with any degree of accuracy. Second of all, I think with Westerners, people need to learn to take responsibility for their lives. For me to give them an answer that they then follow, would not necessarily help them even if it was good advice, because the important thing is for them to come to that decision themselves and take responsibility themselves. Because the danger (and here is also where I have some differences with the tradition) is that I feel that if you throw some dice and tell somebody, “Marry this person or do that,” and if it doesn’t work out, they may blame you and they may blame the Dharma. There’s a likelihood that that could happen.

*[Audience:] What are the factors to consider when people have decisions to make?*

When I have decisions to make, first of all, I look at

the *ethics involved in it*. I really look closely, “If I do this, will I be able to keep my precepts? If I do that, will I be able to keep my precepts? Will I be able to act ethically? Are there any ethical dangers in either of these choices?” So that’s one of the first things I look at.

The second thing I look at is, “Which situation is going to be more *conducive for my practice*? Is there one situation where it feels like it will really encourage my practice, energize me and give me the time and the conditions to be able to practice well, or is that situation likely to inhibit or interfere with my practice?”

I also look at what are the *benefits to others*. This links up with the previous one. In other words, if I practice well, it will benefit others. So in the long-term if a situation is good for my practice, it will be beneficial for others.

Another factor: in an immediate sense, what is the short-term benefit for others? If I do this versus doing that, is there something that brings more direct benefit?

So I look at these different things and try and balance them out.

I think when we make decisions, sometimes what impedes us from making a wise decision is when we get really, really tight and think we have to make a very concrete decision right away for how we’re going to live the rest of our life. But actually very often, with many of the situations where we are confused about what decision to make, we’ll find that we don’t have to make a real solid decision right away. It doesn’t have to be a decision that we live out

the rest of our lives. Sometimes we can make a decision to do something, but if we realize it isn't right, we can change lanes and do something else. We do not need to feel boxed in by our decision.

I think what is very important in making decisions is not just doing something because it's the easy way out; you're afraid of what somebody else is going to say if you don't do that. In other words letting our craving for approval and praise and support be the dominating criteria in making a decision. Then I think we will get into trouble. If we make a decision and do something just to please somebody, not because we really care about them with compassion, but simply because we want their approval and we don't want them to dislike us, then often we will feel very restless and dissatisfied afterwards.

*[Audience:] Is running a pawnshop a right livelihood?*

There're probably honest and dishonest ways of running a pawnshop. There're probably ways of running it where you really take advantage and milk people. And there're probably ways where you're just basically helping people.

*[Audience:] What do we do when our livelihood contravenes our precepts?*

I think there you have to think deeply. Many people may choose to keep the precepts and give up their job. Others may think, "Well, in the long term, keeping the job will benefit sentient beings. So I'll



break the precept and do some purification.” But there you have to be really careful and make sure that that’s really the case. That it’s going to happen. That it’s not rationalization.

*[Audience:] What does Buddhism say about having money? Is having money evil?*

We often have this thinking that money is evil. Having money is bad. In Buddhism this is not the case at all. Buddhism doesn’t say sex is evil and bad, in the same way it doesn’t say money is evil and bad. It’s our attitude towards all these things that’s the key thing. The Buddha did say that there are certain advantages to ownership and to having things. One is that you can support yourself and your family. That’s very practical. In order to practice Dharma you have to be able to support yourself. If you can’t support yourself, then you become a burden to society. Also if you have a livelihood and you make money, it gives you the opportunity to use the money to serve others. To use it to give to charity, to give to people in need, to help Dharma projects and activities.

Having money also enables you not to have debts. Nowadays almost everybody has debts. It’s the way people live, because for most people it’s economically more viable to buy a house and take out a mortgage, and there you have a debt. But if you don’t do that you wind up losing money. But we do not want to have unreasonably high debts. The Buddha also emphasized that it is important when you’re spending, to really look at how much money you have and not spend beyond your means. So the point is not to get

into unnecessary debts or live higher than one is capable of living.

Also the Buddha suggested that one uses one's income for four different purposes:

1. Savings and investment.
2. Recreation and taxation. It's interesting that it says in the scriptures to give to guests and relatives and the King. Giving to the King is taxation. We don't have a King now. The IRS became the King. [Laughter.]
3. Supporting yourself and your family
4. Charity—donation to the needy and to religious organizations. This doesn't mean that you give only to Buddhist organizations. Don't discriminate, "Oh this is a Christian organization so I'm not going to give to it." If, for example, the organization is running a shelter or doing some relief effort and is not trying to proselytize (and drive people nuts), that's fine. So don't get this black and white mind that you shouldn't give to an organization that's not Buddhist.

*[Audience:] What is the right livelihood for monastics?*

Now the question may come up, "What about monastics? What is their livelihood? How do monastics earn a livelihood?" Well, right livelihood for monastics is doing their practice and keeping their precepts.

Monastics live by donation. At least theoretically

they should. Nowadays it's a totally different ball game. I personally really advocate that for monastics, living by donations is a much better way. But the situation for many monastics in the West is, people won't support them so they have to go out and get a job. You also have the situation of people going around raising money for their monasteries. There's also something in there to be sensitive and careful about.

In general the monastic's job is to keep their precepts and do their practice. In that way, if people make donations to the monastics, they create a lot of positive potential. The monastics in turn are able to sustain their life and do their practice and create positive potential that way.

If monastics are not keeping their precepts and not doing their practice well but are instead collecting money to build big monasteries and to have nice living accommodations, then that's not very ethical. It's actually a sign of the degeneration of the Dharma when monastics start having extremely luxurious living quarters and are not practicing at all.

## **Break away from the Protestant work ethic and the conditioning of our society**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

So I think as Buddhists in the West, our real challenge in having a right livelihood is to break away from the Protestant work ethic and the conditioning of our society that sees our human value only in terms of our profession and career and financial income. I think

that's one of the real big challenges for Buddhist practitioners because there's so much conditioning. If you have a high-status job, it means you're worthwhile as a human being. If you get a big paycheck, it means you're worthwhile as a human being.

You are working at a job; there's a layoff and you lose your job. All your self-esteem is gone, "I don't have a job anymore. Who am I? I have to take unemployment benefits. That's living off the government. That's a disgrace". We get so psychologically tangled up, so upside down. I think we have to break ourselves from that kind of conditioning.

Or if you take a new job that enables you to have a right livelihood but you don't make as much money. Then very often we feel this incredible drop of self-confidence because we feel that in order to be successful, each new job should enable us to make more and more money.

We might have a lot of money that we invested in the stock market. The stock market goes down and we lose our investment. Then our sense of value as a human being, our sense of success as a human being plummets as well. I think these are the things that we really have to work with so much in our society because that comes from Martin Luther's values of work being in service of God. During that time, it was a very convenient way to combine capitalism and religion so that you could do both at the same time, because that's what the people needed to do at that time. But now I think we need to break out of that conditioning.

It's so difficult for us to break out of the conditioning. When those kinds of issues start coming up, we should remind ourselves that at the time of death our business card does not go with us. Whatever title we have, whatever career we have, whatever label we have does not go with us at the time of death. It is not the thing that is going to determine our next rebirth or whether we get enlightened or liberated. Similarly, our bank account doesn't go with us when we die. It stays here. All our relatives fight over it. We should remember that having a big bank account isn't the purpose of our life.

That's why we come to the Dharma, isn't it? Because we can see that there's some kind of empty feeling with the way we're living our life in society. That having possessions, having the American dream is not what brings happiness. That's why we come to Buddhism, because we have some kind of instinctive awareness about this. But then on another level, we have all this conditioning that says, "But ... career, status, money, property—this is all value, this is meaning, this is success."

So we have two different sides of ourselves saying two different things, and we have to really look inside and resolve that. Really ask ourselves some very, very serious questions, like, "What is the meaning of my life? What is the value of my life? What is more meaningful in my life—developing a kind heart or developing a bank account? What is more meaningful in my life—developing wisdom or getting a lot of titles and professional recognition?"

I think we come to Buddhism because we know in

our heart of hearts, that what is valuable is the kind of human being we are. And we can see that so clearly. When there're difficulties, what do we rely on? What solves our difficulties? It's not always the money and the status. It's who we are as a human being. When we want to help somebody, it's our presence as a human being that is the biggest gift, the biggest help. So to really break free of all that conditioning about: "I have to have all these things to be valuable". It's a major challenge for us. Very important challenge. The more we can lessen this conditioning on ourselves, then the more we're going to be peaceful and relaxed and happy. Definitely.

*[Audience:] What kind of lifestyle do we need in order to be happy?*

That's a thing to look at too. How often do we need to go to Hawaii? How nice a flat do we need to have in order to be satisfied? How many times a week do we need to go out to eat? So there's a lot of adjustments that can be made. We often get very habituated to a certain kind of lifestyle and we think we're going to be miserable if we have anything less than that. This is the real advantage of going to India. You see that you can be happy without all that.

So we've been in the middle of talking about the Eightfold Noble Path and we discussed how they fall under three categories—the higher training in ethics, higher training in concentration, higher training in wisdom. We did the three that fall under the higher training in ethics: Right Speech, Right Livelihood and

Right Action. Being mindful of these and how they function in our lives, help us put our life in order, help us live some kind of life in which we can be happy this lifetime, avoid conflict with people and create good karma for future lifetimes, and also enrich the mind with positive potential that we can dedicate to Buddhahood. It's a very good thing if we do those three. We'll find a real change in our mind and a change in our life and our relationships with other people.

So before we engage in any high practices, it's very good to put our basic daily life in shape by practicing the right or brought-to-fruit speech and action and livelihood.

## **Higher Training in Concentration**

Today we're going to talk about the ones that are under the higher training in concentration: mindfulness and concentration. (Right Effort can go either under the higher training in concentration or the higher training in wisdom.)

## **RIGHT MINDFULNESS**

Now, mindfulness is a real interesting thing because how it's described is quite different in different situations. We are going to talk about mindfulness and the four close placements of mindfulness; and they're discussed differently in different traditions. I'm going to predominantly approach it from the Theravada approach. And I might sprinkle in a little of the

Mahayana approach as well.

Mindfulness is like a bare attention to or a bare observation of what is going on, and we develop the four close placements of mindfulness. They're called "close placements" because we think about them a long time, we familiarize ourselves with them a long time. Our mind is closely placed on them. We become extremely mindful of these four. And so these four close placements of mindfulness are: mindfulness of the *body*, of the *feelings*, of the *mind* and then of *phenomena or mental events*.

### **Mindfulness of the body**

Mindfulness of the body is being aware of what the body is doing. What's happening in the body, the sensations in the body. So if you're meditating on this, you might start just with the breathing meditation. You're placing the mind on the body, on the breath, the process of the breath and what the body is doing. Some teachers teach a kind of scanning meditation. You scan various parts of the body and you're aware of all the different sensations. Maybe going from the head down, back up again, being aware of the different sensations in the different parts of the body. And this is practiced not only when you're seated in formal meditation but also as you're walking around. So that when you're walking, you know you're walking. When you're running, you know you're running. When you're standing, you know you're standing. So the mindfulness is just being completely conscious, completely aware of what your body is doing in that present moment.



We're often quite spaced out regarding our body. And especially sometimes with our body language. Sometimes we aren't aware at all of how we're sitting until other people say, "Boy, as I was talking to you, you seemed really kind of closed down". We didn't say anything. We didn't do anything. But if we were aware, we might have realized we were sitting like this, our arms protecting ourselves. Or we're sitting there a little nervous. But we're not aware of it. How many times have you picked something up and played with it while you're talking, or you're shaking your foot as you're talking. So often we're totally spaced out just in the simple matter of what's going on with our body. What our body language is conveying to other people. How we're standing. How we lie down. What's going on in our body as we're lying down. What are the sensations? What's the position?

This is really bringing us back to the present moment in terms of what our body is doing, so that we know what it's doing.

And so similarly in your meditation sometimes you pay attention to body sensations. Your knee hurts. Instead of instantaneously moving it, you watch it a little bit. And you separate the sensation from the idea of: "This hurts and I don't like it" and "Why are they making me sit here?" So just be aware of the sensation. Something itches—be aware of the sensation. Your sunburn is burning—be aware of the sensation.

It's just a bare awareness of the sensation, of the body position, of the body language. This is something we can do in meditation. It's also something that is quite effective and quite important when we're not in

meditation. And I think as we become aware of this, we also get a lot of information about ourselves and the messages we give to other people through the way we hold our body and the way we use hand gestures and the way we move our head. All these different things. We communicate a lot but sometimes we're spaced out.

## **Mindfulness of the feelings**

Feeling is another example of an English word that doesn't match the Tibetan meaning or the Buddhist meaning. Because when we hear "feeling", we think of things like "I feel anger" or "I feel joy" or something like that. Here we're not talking about "feelings" in the sense of emotions. That's falling into the next category. Here we're talking about "feeling" in the sense of pleasant feeling, unpleasant feeling and neutral feeling. And all of our feelings, both physical feelings and mental feelings, fall under these three categories.

You might have a pleasant physical feeling when you're lying in the sun, or an unpleasant physical feeling when you've lain there too long, or a neutral feeling when you've fallen asleep or if you're not paying attention to it. You might have pleasant mental feelings when you think about somebody you really like, or unpleasant ones when you think about somebody you don't like, or neutral ones where you're just kind of staring at the highway.

### ***Pleasant feelings***

Mindfulness of feelings is being aware of what the feeling is. So when you feel something pleasant, you're aware of it. When you feel something unpleasant, you're aware of it. Again so often we're totally spaced out just about this very raw data of what our feelings are. And when we aren't aware, it gets us into a lot of jams. Because sometimes we have a pleasant feeling and we're not aware that we have a pleasant feeling. So what happens is our attachment jumps in and sticks on to the pleasant feeling. It says "This feels good. I want more". And then we all know what happens as soon as attachment gets in. As soon as "I want more" comes, we're going to get more! And it doesn't really matter what we have to do to get it (as long as we don't look too impolite).

So attachment arises in response to pleasant feelings when we're not aware of the pleasant feelings. Because it's so easy when you just have a pleasant feeling, to immediately cling to it. We want more, we want it to continue. Or if we don't have it, we want it to come back. Whereas if we're really aware of the pleasant feeling when it's happening, then we're just aware that it's there. We're able to be with it and leave it at that instead of the mind immediately jumping to the future and grasping on. So you might try that the next time you have a bowl of ice cream or frozen yogurt—non-fat kind for the dieters [laughter]. When you eat it, just taste it. See if it's pleasant. See if it's unpleasant. See if it's neutral.

And see if you can just let the pleasant sensation be, without the mind immediately saying: "I want more. Where is the next spoonful?" Just experience the pleasant sensation and let it be.

## *Unpleasant feelings*

Similarly when we have unpleasant sensations. When we aren't mindful of those, then what happens? Anger: "I don't like it! I have aversion to it. I want to make it go away." So again when we aren't aware of the unpleasant sensation, the anger comes up very, very quickly after that. And you can see that sometimes when you're talking to somebody. Or maybe when you hear a sound, maybe some music. That might be a better example. You hear a sound or music or something and it sounds unpleasant, but instead of just acknowledging: "Yes, that is an unpleasant feeling"—if we don't do that, then what happens is—the mind jumps in and says: "That's unpleasant and I don't like it. How come they're playing that kind of music so loud anyway? Why don't they be quiet?!"

So the key here is if there is an unpleasant sensation, like you're hearing something unpleasant, just to be there with the unpleasant sensation, just to feel what it feels like without going on to the next step of getting angry.

## *Indifferent feelings*

Similarly with indifferent feelings. Indifferent mental feelings, indifferent physical feelings. When we aren't aware then what do we generate? Spaced out apathy. We don't care. Indifference, ignorance, bewilderment. Just kind of out of touch. So we're driving on the highway, nobody is cutting you off, nobody is letting you in, just driving, spaced out [laughter]. So it's kind

of encouraging the neutral feeling. If we're not aware of it, then apathy just sinks in at that moment.

Remember when we studied the twelve links? There was the link of feeling? That link is a very important one. Because if we can just be aware of what the feeling is, then we don't go on to the next link which was craving. Either craving for more of it or craving for less of it. So it becomes a very good way to stop the creation of karma. If you're just aware of the feelings and don't react so much with the different afflictions then it stops us from creating a lot of negative karma.

### ***Conclusion***

So when you're meditating on this, you can just sit there and be aware of the different feelings. You can be aware of physical feelings: pleasant sensations, unpleasant sensations, neutral sensations in your body. You can also be aware of pleasant, unpleasant, neutral mental sensations too. As different thoughts come into your mind, or different moods, just be aware of what they are.

### **Mindfulness of the mind**

Here we're aware of the quality of the mind. What you're feeling; and here I'm using "feeling" in terms of emotion. So the emotional tone of the mind. What's going on in the mind. If you have many thoughts you're aware you have many thoughts. If your mind is agitated, you're aware it's agitated. If your mind is dull, you're aware it's dull. If you're angry, you're

aware that you're angry. If you're jealous, you're aware that you're jealous. If you're blissed out, you're aware that you're blissed out. If you have a lot of faith, then you're aware that you have a lot of faith.

Whatever emotion it is or whatever attitude that you're experiencing, whatever mental factors that have arisen here, you're aware of that. So similarly when your mind is tight, you're aware your mind is tight. When your mind is relaxed, you're aware of that.

And again just having this kind of knowledge of what our own emotional experience is would be quite something, isn't it? Because then instead of our emotions getting acted out in our speech and our action (after which we go: "Why in the world did I say that? What will they think of me?") we're able to catch them when they're small. So it's like you're sitting in the dentist's chair and you feel fear. You're aware that there's fear and you just sit there and you experience the fear without the mind going on to: "Oh the dentist is here and I'm sure he's going to miss and the drill's going to come out the other side of my jaw". So you're just aware of: "What does it feel like to feel afraid?" When you're afraid, what does it feel like? It's quite interesting just to sit there and watch, "What does my body feel like when I'm afraid? What is the emotional tone? What is the mind feeling when I'm afraid?"

Similarly we're often not aware when we're anxious. We're quite nervous. We're bouncing off the walls. The people we live with are wondering what's going on? And yet we're saying: "I'm not nervous.

I'm not anxious. Shut up!" But if we were aware that we were anxious; what do you feel like when you're anxious? Do you get any special physical sensations when you're anxious? What is the feeling in your mind when there's anxiety? What is the feeling tone in your mind? The mind feels quite unpleasant.

How about when you have a real feeling of compassion for somebody else? Your heart's completely open, not afraid of getting involved, really compassionate to somebody. What does that feel like in your body, in your mind?

So being able to discriminate these different mental factors, these different attitudes, these different emotions, being able to recognize what are our own experiences.

On the higher states, when you get into high meditation, you're able to know what level of practice you're on; when your mind is a worldly mind and when it's a transcendental mind; when you're concentrating and when you're not; when you have this experience and when you're in the other experience. And these all follow from the initial practice of becoming quite aware of just what our emotions are. So when you're meditating, you might just sit there and just be aware of whatever emotions that come into your mind. And what's so amazing when you do that is to watch how quickly they change. They change so fast.

Lee is a hospice nurse. She sees so many people with incredibly strong emotions of grief or anger or whatever. And she says that she's completely convinced that nobody can hold a super strong hysterical emotion more than forty-five minutes. Even

if they tried. Even if you're so overwhelmed by grief because everything in your life totally fell apart. She says that after forty-five minutes the mind changes. And even within that forty-five minutes, each moment of grief is different from the previous moment. And if you're mindful, you're aware of the different moments of grief and how they're different. Or if you're feeling sad and you're mindful, you'll be aware that there are different moments of sadness. It isn't like sadness is one thing. When you're in a sad mood, it's changing. There are all sorts of different things going on.

And here also you can start being aware of what are the *causes* for these different emotions, both the positive ones and the negative ones. What is it that makes them arise? And how is it that they fade away? And really watch the emotions. It's just incredible. Especially sometimes you're sitting there and you're trying to meditate and, I don't know about you but it's happened to me, that all of a sudden incredible anger would come.

I'd remember something that happened years ago that I hadn't thought about in ages. And I'm just sitting there in a totally peaceful room, totally calm environment, kind people all around me and I feel like there's this raging fire. Everybody thinks I'm in the middle of samadhi but inside me [laughter]—very easy to fake it—there's an incredible anger and you feel like you just can't sit there anymore. But you just sit there and you just watch this anger. And it's fascinating to watch the anger. You don't jump in and get involved in it. You just watch as it rages and how it feels in your body and how it feels in your mind.



And you watch it and watch how it changes. And it just keeps changing and then after a while you're not angry anymore. And you're going, "Wait a minute. I was really furious a minute ago. What's going on?"

And then it's so weird because you realize that the anger arose totally because of the way you were thinking. And the anger passed because everything is impermanent. It gives you a whole different insight on what's going on when you're angry. Because usually when we're angry we're completely convinced that the anger is coming from the other person into us. "You're making me angry. It's coming from you into me. So I'm going to give it back!"

So just be aware. What does it feel like when you're feeling really open towards somebody? Or when you're feeling really loving. When you open the door on a sunny day and you look out and your heart just feels like: "Wow, it's nice to share this world with other people". Then how does that feel? What's the emotional tone of that? What causes that to arise? How does that change? How does that fade away? What's going on? Just being aware.

## **Mindfulness of phenomena or mental events**

Here we're aware more of the contents of the thoughts. With the previous type of mindfulness, we might notice there are many thoughts or few thoughts. With this mindfulness of phenomena, we're looking more at the contents of the thoughts.

But we're not looking at them in the sense of getting involved in them. Again it's not this whole reactive mechanism to "Oh goodness I'm thinking

about that again. Wouldn't she know it? Can't keep my mind off that. I'm so stupid". So you're not getting into that. Or if you're getting into that, then you're able to say: "Oh look at the thoughts that are accompanying my judgmental mind". It's very interesting when you get into a real self-critical thing: "I'm so bad! I'm so terrible!" Watch the thoughts. Look at the contents of the thoughts. What are we telling ourselves? What lies are we involved in? "I can't do anything right! Nobody loves me!" Very logical? Totally truthful, huh?

So just look at the contents of the thought: how the mind takes one thought and then links it to another and links it to another one. How you travel the whole universe without going anywhere just because the mind is on free association. Sometimes you can watch this when you're in a conversation with a friend. They say one thing and your mind gets stuck on that sentence. They keep on talking but you've gotten stuck at that one sentence and you really want to react to that. It's like you're not listening to what they're saying afterwards, you're not really tuning into that. You're just waiting for them to be quiet so that you can come back to that sentence that you got stuck on. It's quite interesting to watch that.

So be aware of the content of the thought. How at that certain time when we get stuck, we start thinking about that one sentence that they said and what we want to say in response. And then we tune them out. Again this is mindfulness; noticing when you get stuck, being mindful of when you get stuck. And then maybe instead of just letting that thought process continue around the thing you're stuck on, try and

keep an open mind and really listen to everything else that person has to say. Because you might get a totally different view on that one sentence if you do.

But it's really a feat to make the mind listen sometimes. Make the mind be open. It's like sometimes I have to sit there and say: "OK, just listen. Keep your mouth closed. They're still talking. They might just answer your question if you gave them a chance". You don't have to jump in right away and ask a question.

## **Questions and answers**

*[Audience:] How does mindfulness help stop attachment and aversion?*

Basically if you're mindful, then you're just with that present moment and what it's feeling like. Whereas the attachment and the aversion are very much reacting to the present moment. It's kind of half experiencing it but already leaping towards the future, already leaping towards: "I want more", "I want less". So by just being there with it, and being content to be there with it, then you stop that mind that's jumping to the future.

*[Audience:] What do we do with the thoughts that come up, e.g. when we start to itch?*

The best laboratory is in our own mind. Watch what your mind does when something starts to itch. Initially there's the physical sensation. Then there's the thing of "It's unpleasant". And then the mind starts to

wander: “Oh I wonder if a mosquito bit me”, “I wonder how long I have to sit here before I can rationalize scratching it”, “I wonder if I have a fungus”, I wonder this, I wonder that. [Laughter.] And sometimes you sit there and you wonder so much that you’re totally convinced that you have a huge rash all up and down your leg. So you have the physical sensation and together with that, the feeling, and then the thoughts just flood in. And so this is the thing to be aware of.

Do research in your own laboratory. Otherwise we’re just intellectualizing about it. Just watch your own experience and watch (if your mind operates anything like mine), how your mind immediately jumps in and starts making up some story about it, about what’s going on. Just watch that. Step back and watch it like you’re watching a movie. I’m not talking about dissociating. I’m not talking about becoming a psychological space case, but instead of reacting immediately to everything that goes on, to be able to say: “Oh yes, that’s happening”.

*[Audience:] If we concentrate so much on listening to the other party instead of working out our response while listening, we may not be able to respond promptly to them.*

There is no need to worry because sometimes you can just sit there and listen to somebody and just try and take it in without thinking of what we’re going to say in reaction. Even if after they stop speaking, let there be a pause and silence for a couple of moments. That’s sometimes nice. I noticed at Cloud Mountain

when we have the discussion groups, very often people speak and after a person speaks there's like a couple of moments of silence before another person speaks. And it's really nice because it lets what that person said sink in. So I don't think we always need to be afraid of having nothing to say. We can maybe slow down the tempo of the conversation.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Yes, you're probably aware of a lot of things. Because there's probably an unpleasant sensation, either physical or mental. And then there's the emotion of the anger. And then there's the thoughts going on with it. So you can focus on one or the other. But it's interesting to watch also how they are inter-related.

*[Audience:] Why do we want to hang on to our anger?*

Because we're stupid. Really. And this is the interesting thing, that as you meditate, you watch your mind doing these things that make no sense at all. Then that's the thing that gives you the space to say: "Well maybe I don't need to keep on doing this if this isn't making any sense".

*[Audience:] Once you recognized what's going on and that it doesn't make any sense, what kind of tools or advice can you give to make it go away?*

There are different things that you can do at different times. What we need to be mindful of, is to not try to

avert the aversion, i.e. you're trying to push that feeling of aversion away. So what we need is some kind of clarity of: "This isn't making any sense" without "This isn't making any sense and here I go again!" It's just: "This doesn't make any sense to do. I'm making myself miserable by the way I'm thinking." Then sometimes at that point, what you can do is apply one of the antidotes, e.g. with anger, you meditate on patience; with attachment, you meditate on impermanence around the ugly aspect of the thing. You apply a different way of thinking.

I've had it happened to me just last weekend, for about three days, where I had the opportunity to watch my mind. I knew it was coming because I was going to be with Rinpoche (my teacher), and when I'm with my teacher my buttons get pushed, even if he doesn't do anything. So I had reminded myself to look at what goes on in the mind. I knew it was going to be an entertainment session.

So there I was in California, and what was very interesting was I started seeing people that I hadn't seen in years that I had known at various times of my Dharma life—there were people that attended the first course I went to nineteen years ago in July. There were people I knew in France, in Singapore. And it was like I kept meeting these people that were like ghosts from my past except they weren't ghosts. They were living people. And then watching all these thoughts come up of: "Oh god, they've seen how I acted in the past and what do they think about me because I was such an idiot! They know all those stuff about me." All the shame! And so sometimes you can sit there and you can watch it and say this is stupid

and this is nonsensical. And you've already worked it out, and you're completely convinced .... It's like I didn't really need to apply the antidotes very much, because I knew it was all stupid. But it wouldn't go away.

So I just sat there and I watched it. And I watched these really weird thoughts kind of float in and float out. All this attachment to reputation and what people think about me from all these places that I lived and the things that I did. And I just watched it. Whereas what I could have gone into is either a totally paranoid thing or a total thing of: "OK, now I've got to make a really good impression on these people. Let them know how much I've changed." Instead of recognizing: "OK, this is a lot of attachment to reputation arising which is really dumb because it really doesn't matter. I really should trust these people enough after all these years of knowing them to know that they're going to give me some space. And if they don't, what to do." So it's like I understood it. So I just sat there and let it dance and then it went away. And by the second day I was totally okay.

*[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]*

... so you stop and watch: "This is attachment to reputation." It's actually quite interesting. "Look how attached I am to my reputation. All these people whom I haven't seen in years, all of a sudden when I see them, I care about what they are thinking even though I hadn't thought about them in years. As if what they think about me is so important. If it's really so important I should have thought about them all

these years. What they think about me is not important. It comes and it goes.”

And then I was thinking too that all of us had been in the Dharma for so long that if we'd been in the Dharma this long and if we don't have the ability to give each other space and be a little bit tolerant, then we haven't made any progress. I realized I've been able to work on my mind and give them a little bit of space and be a little more tolerant, so they're probably doing the same thing for me. They probably are and I'm sure they have made some progress in their practice. So let's trust that and let's relax. And if they haven't and they still think I'm an idiot, what to do?

## **Checking the validity of our thoughts**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

What's quite useful is to write down what those thoughts are. Just to bring them into conscious awareness, be mindful of what those thoughts are. Write them down. Write them all down even though they all sound so completely horrible and you don't want anybody to see them. You don't have to let anybody see them but you're going to put them out in front of you.

And then go back to the beginning and really read each one and stand back as a separate person and look at that thought and say: “Is that true?” Or to what extent is that true and to what extent it's exaggerated? “If people only knew what I was really like, nobody would like me.” We've got to give



people some credit. They can put up with something.

And also let's recognize that: "OK, I might have those awful qualities but I also have a whole lot of good ones too". And how is it that I never think: "If only people knew what a kind heart I have inside, then they'd love me". We always think: "Oh the people know what an awful heart I have inside of me and they hate me". How come we always think one way and not the other way? Because there have been times in our lives when we have completely open, kind hearts. How come we forget about that? So, to be able to look at those different things that we're saying to ourselves and really assess their validity. We really lie a lot to ourselves.

*[Audience:] Is there any difference in the interpretation of "mindfulness" by the different Buddhist traditions?*

Now in the Theravada tradition mindfulness often refers to just that bare awareness of what is happening, in this moment.

Gen Lamrimpa made a very clear distinction in his book. He was saying in the context of developing concentration, contemplation isn't just being aware of what's going on. You're also aware of what the antidote is. So the mindfulness isn't just being aware that I'm angry and watching it, but it's also trying to be mindful of what the antidote (to anger) is as well. You might start contemplating the antidote and you start being mindful of the antidote.

So different traditions handle things in different ways. And different people will handle things in

different ways too. Some people, when anger arises, they find it completely okay just to sit there and say: “Anger” and watch anger. For me I cannot do that unless I have gone through the whole process of recognizing why my anger is a complete hallucination and I’m thinking in a totally wrong way. And so I have to sit and really think of all the meditations on patience and look at the situation this way and look at the situation that way. And apply the antidotes and then the anger starts to subside.

And then if the anger comes again on the same topic, the way my mind works is, if I’ve really understood it deeply, then at that time I can just sit and watch the anger. But if my mind again gets involved in it because I wasn’t mindful of the anger early enough, then I might have to start playing with the antidotes again and thinking in a different way.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

You mean thinking that that’s what you should be or actually getting yourself into that state? You mean taking all your thoughts and saying: “Shut up” and then just sitting there like that? I think maybe instead of judging the thoughts and judging the feelings, just look at the laboratory, do the research, look at what’s going on. Instead of saying: “I shouldn’t be doing this. This is all wrong. I’ve got to make a change.” Look at what’s going on and as you look you can start to recognize how the anger is, what its disadvantages are and how it’s unrealistic. So you don’t have to sit there and do a big “Shut up!” in your mind.

## Mindfulness of feelings and mindfulness of body

*[Audience: inaudible]*

“Feeling” refers to pleasant, unpleasant and neutral feeling. They can be physical or they can be mental. Examples of feelings classified as physical: when you stub your toe, the unpleasant feeling of what it feels like when you stub your toe. Or the unpleasant feeling of when you are falling asleep. The placement of the body refers to watching the sensation. These things are not like they’re in nice, neat categories. Our mind is just starting to become aware of all these things that very often seem to be happening at the same time. So, for example, when you bump into something, focus on how it feels, kind of a tingling sensation. And then switch it to: “Well, does this feel pleasant or unpleasant?” And pay more attention to the pleasant or unpleasant feeling. And those things are very, very close, aren’t they? But slightly different emphasis.

*[Audience:] Could you elaborate? I’m confused between physical sensations and feelings.*

When you’re angry you get physical sensations, don’t you? Maybe you can feel your temples like this. And you can feel the skin getting hot. You can feel the energy. So there’s a physical sensation. And there might be either a pleasant or unpleasant physical sensation. This is something to do research on. When the adrenaline starts pumping, is there a pleasant physical sensation? I don’t know. This is something which we should watch. Just be mindful. And just

what happens when the adrenaline starts going. Physically, is it pleasant or unpleasant? And then as you're getting angry is there a pleasant or unpleasant feeling? What does the anger feel like? What is the feeling of the anger? What does it feel like to be angry?

## **Watching anger**

You can watch how anger is in your body and then watch what anger is in your mind. The thing is, we are so unused to watching and they all happen at the same time. And we're usually in the mode of reacting to them that just to get ourselves to slow down for a minute: "What's going on in my body when I'm angry? What does my mind feel like?" And here I don't mean "feel". "What's the tone of my mind? How do I recognize anger? Is there something else mixed in with it? What kind of anger is it?" Because there's some anger that's more on the resentment side, another anger that's on the hatred side, another anger that's on the frustration side, another anger that's on the irritation side, another anger that's on the judgment side, another anger that's on the critical side. There're many different kinds of anger. How do you identify them? What's going on?

## **Having faith and trust**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Well to go back to that situation that happened to me a few days ago with all this stuff coming up of what

other people think about me, the faith and devotion came in there. These people have been practicing for a while and they won't keep coming back if the practice wasn't working for them. And if it's working for them, then I can relax more around them because this is just completely my own mental creation. So there was some faith and trust in these people. And also some recognition that I wasn't that important that they were going to spend so much time thinking bad thoughts about me. They had better things to think about.

*[Audience:] Can anger be justified?*

What I do is sometimes I recognize the anger and then I recognize that there might be some element of factual truth, something that is understandable in a factual way. But that is something different from my anger about the situation. Like maybe somebody stole my wallet. Most people would get angry about that. That isn't a kosher thing to do. It's a negative action. So it's fair enough to think that that was an unethical action and it's better if people don't do that. But that's something different from getting all flipped out because of it.

*[Audience:] What part does intuition play in this? Should we follow our intuition?*

People often ask: "Well, what about intuition? How about when you really know something? You know something's right?" There are different levels. And sometimes I'm extremely skeptical of my intuition

because I know in the past it's been totally off sometimes. And if I believe in my intuition sometimes, then what I do is I just lock myself into some small category. So sometimes I recognize: "Well, okay, there's this feeling, there's this intuition but let's just be aware that it's there but I'm not really going to believe in it until I get some more evidence."

*[Audience:] What is the purpose of practicing mindfulness?*

Well first of all your ethical conduct is going to improve. Second of all you're going to be able to concentrate more. You're going to be able to see impermanence, you're going to begin to see non-self. So there are different levels of understanding that mindfulness is going to bring.

We've been doing the Eightfold Noble Path. It's called "noble" because this is the path perfected by the noble ones or the aryas. The aryas are those who have direct, non-conceptual perception of reality or emptiness. So this is the path they follow to become aryas and this is the path they perfect as aryas. When we say the "Four Noble Truths," it's actually four facts seen as true by the noble ones, seen as true by these aryas who have direct perception of emptiness.

We've talked about how the eight can be classified into three which are ethics, concentration and wisdom.

#### A. Ethics:

##### 1. Right Speech

2. Right Livelihood
3. Right Action

B. Concentration

4. Right Mindfulness
5. Right Concentration
6. Right Effort (can kind of go between concentration and wisdom)

C. Wisdom

7. Right View
8. Right Realization

So tonight I'm hoping to talk about Right Concentration & Right Effort.

## **RIGHT CONCENTRATION**

This is also called samadhi, or “ting nge dzin” in Tibetan which means “single-pointedness of mind”. Buddhaghosa defined it as “the centering of the consciousness and its concomitants, evenly and completely on a single point.” The mental consciousness and the mental factors that arise together with that particular mental consciousness—those are the concomitants—are evenly and completely focused on a single point, and that gives you incredible flexibility of mind. The mind is no longer like a monkey jumping from one thing to another but it has some control.

The practice of samadhi, or concentration, isn't specifically a Buddhist practice. It's also done by people of other religions. I know the Hindus do it,

maybe the Christians do. I'm sure others do as well. And it was interesting because His Holiness brought this up at the Western Buddhist Teachers' Conference: that not every practice a Buddhist does is necessarily a practice only done by Buddhists. For example, this one on samadhi is something that could be done by other religions.

But what makes this a particularly Buddhist practice is the motivation and the other states of mind under which this practice is done. The difference between a Buddhist practicing samadhi and a non-Buddhist practicing samadhi is that the Buddhist is, first of all, doing it with refuge—entrusting their spiritual guidance to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha—and therefore having the goal of liberation or enlightenment.

When the mind has that kind of motivation, is determined to be free of cyclic existence, and is aimed at liberation and enlightenment, then the practice of samadhi becomes a liberating factor. But without the refuge, without the determination to be free, without the motivation for liberation or enlightenment, then it's just regular, old samadhi and it doesn't necessarily even free you from cyclic existence. They say that we've all reached these very high states of samadhi before, and we've even been born in the form and formless realms and remained in blissful concentration for aeons. But because we didn't have the determination to be free and we never bothered to check out the nature of reality, we never realized emptiness and thus we never purified our ignorance, anger and attachment. And so when the karma to be born in these higher states ended, then



again we fell down into lower realms of existence.

That's why it's so important to do this practice of concentration with refuge and with the proper motivation: with the determination to be free, or the altruistic intention to become a Buddha. The practice of concentration makes the mind a very fine and receptive instrument which can then be used to understand all the other elements of the Path. We can see that when we try and meditate on love, it's very difficult to stay on love because the mind starts doing your shopping list, starts planning your vacation and all sorts of other things. Or we try and meditate on emptiness and we just think of the emptiness of the refrigerator because the mind cannot stay on the right kind of emptiness. This is why concentration is important. It gives us some control over our mind so that when we use that same mind to investigate the nature of reality or to meditate on the kindness of others or the suffering of others, we can actually get somewhere in those meditations.

In the section "calm-abiding", we talked about the five hindrances. Here, under the Eightfold Noble Path, it talks about another set of five obstructions. There's some overlap but there's some difference, so don't get confused if it doesn't match the other set of five exactly. It is quite interesting to go through these because I think if we look, we'll find that we know them quite well.

## **Five hindrances to developing concentration**

### **1. Sense desire**

The first of these five hindrances or obscurations is sense desire. The mind is looking for happiness and sense pleasure. The mind, when you're sitting there, thinks about your partner, thinks about your holiday, thinks about frozen yogurt, thinks about how you'd much rather have ice cream and how would it go with peach pie, and what you're going to spend your pay check on etc. Also, when you're trying to meditate, the mind starts humming and singing. Have you had that happen? You're meditating and then your favorite music starts going through your mind? That's sense desire at work.

The mind's going outwards, looking for happiness from an external object, which is an entirely fruitless pursuit. We've been doing it since beginningless time, looking for happiness from external things. And look where we are now. We're in the same place we still were a few hundred million lifetimes ago. We haven't really gotten anywhere. We've enjoyed a lot of sense pleasure but it hasn't gotten us anywhere because they say that all that pleasure is like last night's dream, there and then finished.

So the sense pleasure is a big obscuration to our meditation, and an obscuration even to Dharma practice to start with. It's one of the big things that keeps you from getting to teachings, especially in the summer when it's so nice to take a walk or go swimming. So you can see the sense pleasure just pulls us completely away from Dharma practice.

### *Antidote to sense desire*

The way to combat that is meditating on

impermanence, meditating on death—sobering the mind up by looking at the fact that none of these things can bring us lasting happiness. In our meditation we think of all these wonderful things we got in the past and then just ask ourselves, “What does it do for me now?” I’m sure we all had an incredible amount of pleasure in the past. So we go through and remember those things and say, “What does it really do for me? It doesn’t have the ability to bring lasting happiness.”

So when we check using our own wisdom, then very naturally the attachment decreases. Now some of you looked a little bit pained ... it’s like, “I don’t really want to give those things up. Come on, it made me happy. What else is going to give me happiness if I don’t get it from that?” And that’s the whole thing, to really look at our life and ask ourselves if it does give us happiness.

There’s nothing wrong with being happy. That’s the whole purpose of the Path. We should be happy. But let’s see if following the sense pleasures gives us happiness or if it just makes us completely berserk and dissatisfied: always wanting more, always wanting better. Let’s check out where real happiness comes from.

## **2. Ill-will**

Then the second of the hindrances is ill-will. If we’re not sitting there desiring this and that and the other thing, then we’re often sitting there saying, “I don’t like this and get me away from that. That guy harmed me and I want to retaliate.” We spend a lot of time in

our meditation planning very efficiently how to get our revenge, how to tell somebody off, how to let them know that we're the boss around here, how to hurt their feelings because they hurt our feelings—whatever it is. And so just look at that mental factor of ill-will, that mind that's so tight, that's so tied in knots, that's angry.

Sometimes we're angry at specific people. Maybe we don't like our colleague or we don't like the cat or we don't like something else. Sometimes the ill-will is much more amorphous. It's this kind of ill-will against society, ill-will about the military industrial complex, ill-will toward the consumer mentality, ill-will towards how we're being brainwashed by the advertisements. And so we can have an incredible amount of amorphous, generalized hatred or anger, and resentment towards different elements of society in general. That often also keeps us incredibly bound and makes the mind very tight, very unhappy.

Then we can spend a tremendous amount of time in our meditation complaining. That's one of my favorite things. It's awful but I'm kind of addicted. This is wrong, that's wrong! So we can complain about people, about society, about the government, about the people in the factories, about Mars. We complain about anything there is to complain about and it doesn't get us anywhere.

### *Antidote to ill-will*

I'm not saying you should stuff that hatred down or stuff that feeling of despair down, but rather pull it up and look at it and recognize that it's useless. Also, try

doing some meditation, seeing the kindness of others and the value that we've received from others, the benefit that others have given to us, how our whole life is dependent on them, how everything we have in our life all come about due to the efforts of others. So although society certainly has a lot of room for improvement, if we only look at that, then we totally miss out on the other side of society where we've experienced so much good fortune and kindness.

Like His Holiness was saying when he taught in Seattle, "You know if one person is murdered in Seattle, because that gets to the front-page news, but all the people in the city who were helped that day, that doesn't get put in the newspaper." If we look around at the activities in the city, the predominant thing we'll see is people helping people. So if we focus on that, then this ill-will really decreases.

### **3. Sloth and laziness**

The mind that just wants to lie down, go to sleep and enjoy. This lazy mind that says, "My back hurts, my knees hurt, I'd better go lie down. I shouldn't meditate or it'll do me some big structural damage. I should go lie down." The mind that says, "Oh I went to teachings all weekend. I need a break tonight. I'm really exhausted from sitting in that chair and listening to teachings all weekend. I really need to sleep tonight".

#### ***Antidotes to sloth and laziness***

The Buddha gave different remedies for this, in a

progressive order.

The first thing to do when you have laziness come up is just try and ignore those thoughts. They pop into the mind but just don't feed them energy. Ignore them. Let them go.

If that doesn't work, then do some recitation, chant some mantra, recite the scriptures, recite the Heart Sutra. This often helps us, it gets us "unlazy" because we're chanting and the chanting gives us a certain amount of energy. Especially if you chant out loud and you chant with a melody, it can energize you and help you overcome that laziness.

If that doesn't work, then pull your ears and rub your limbs with the palms of your hands. Give yourself a massage. Kind of hit yourself, slap your cheeks and pull your ears. Get the circulation in the body going.

If that doesn't work, then get up, splash water on your face, look around in all the directions and look up at the sky. Stretch the mind out, look at far distances, get the cold water on your face. Sometimes if you're doing a retreat you might have some cold water next to you, then you can be really lazy and you don't even have to get up to get the cold water. You can just sit there and splash it.

If that doesn't work, then you can develop an inner perception of light. You can visualize a very bright light and imagine that it fills your body and mind.

Or you can do the breathing meditation, exhaling the dark, heavy mind in the form of smoke and inhaling a bright, alert mind in the form of light and feeling that light fill your body and mind.

If that isn't doing the trick, then walk around—not

with your senses and looking at every beautiful thing around, but try and control your senses—really get up and walk and move the body. Maybe do some walking meditation.

Or you can lie down and go to sleep. But when you wake up, make a very strong determination to use your life wisely and not just continually give way to the sleepy, lazy mind. So it's not just lying down and sleeping and saying, "Oh good, now I've got my way!" but really knowing, "Okay, now it's time to rest," but when you get up, say, "Now I'm going to be bright and alert and I'm not going to just keep giving in to the mind that is quite lazy." So those are some ways to handle the laziness.

#### **4. Restlessness and worry**

The fourth obscuration or hindrance here is restlessness and worry. The body cannot sit still. There's incredible restless energy. The mind is full of apprehension or anxiety, "What about this, what about that? What happens if ...?" Or making travel plans—"If I take the plane on this day, then how am I going to get the train there ... I've got to fax this person ... my visa doesn't last this long." And so the mind just gets completely wrapped up, very restless, very worried.

Or the mind might get worried: "Oh what happens if I lose my job?" and "How much money am I going to make?" and "How much do I have saved away?" or "Oh no my relationship isn't so good. Maybe I should break up. No I don't feel like ..., no maybe I should ..., what am I going to do, I'm going to be so

lonely but other friends will tell me that I'm happy, they thought I should break up with him ...” So the mind that is just full of restlessness, full of worry, cannot stay on anything.

This can also be a mind with lots and lots of expectations. Thinking about what you want to have, what you're hoping for, what you're wishing for. It can also be a mind that's pushing you, a mind that has these incredible, unrealistic expectations. “I've got to sit here and meditate and attain enlightenment.” I think I told you the story about this one monk from Holland. He had gone into retreat and he said, “I have incredible faith in my teacher. I'm going to go into retreat and I am going to meditate and attain enlightenment.” A few months later Lama told him to stop retreat and open a business.

As soon as you sit down with your practice, you have very fanciful expectations of everything you're going to attain. You're putting yourself in for a real setback. Because the mind is just basically geared up towards squeezing yourself into an image of who you aren't again. So instead of being the chief CEO image, we're going to be the chief sit-on-the-meditation-cushion image ... all that pushing, all that expectation just makes the mind very restless, very worried, very anxious.

It can also be a mind that is overly concerned with ethics. In other words, it's not a mind that's balanced regarding our ethical conduct, but rather, the mind is saying, “Oh I walked across this lawn and maybe I've stepped on some ants and what can I do? I have to go from here to there and the lawn was in the middle. I might have stepped on these ants though I didn't see



them, and I'm going to go to hell because I created this negative karma!" So this mind is kind of overly concerned with ethics in an unrealistic way. That can also make the mind very tight. That usually isn't our problem. Our problem is usually not enough concern. But it can be that sometimes we just get this very anxious mind.

So all this anxiety, apprehension, worry, and restlessness—all these are a big hindrance.

### *Antidotes to restlessness and worry*

You can do a few different things to counter restlessness and worry.

One of them is when you sit down to meditate, say to yourself: "Do I have this time free?" "I've decided I'm going to meditate, for (however long it is—15 minutes, 2 hours) ." "Do I really have this time free?" You look. "Yes I do. The world's not going to collapse. Everything else can wait. Yes, I have this time free so I don't need to worry about everything I'm going to do afterwards. Because I've already thought about it and decided it can wait. So now I can just free my mind from that and concentrate."

If that doesn't work and the restlessness keeps coming up, then you can try focusing on the breath and here maybe focus particularly on the out-breath. You're also focusing on the in-breath, you have to breathe in, but when you're breathing out really feel, "Okay I'm letting go of that energy." It's like you're really letting it go as you exhale, and that should help calm down the anxiety.

It can also be helpful sometimes to write down the

different thoughts that are going on when we're anxious and then look back over them and ask ourselves how realistic they are if we're just worried and anxious about things that are on the moon somewhere, things that we don't really need to be worried and anxious about.

And sometimes there's restless energy in the body. This happens very often at the beginning of practice. I know for me, when I first began practicing, it was impossible to sit still, totally impossible. And it took, I think, well over a year, maybe even a year and a half, 2 years of just very steady practice before, kind of very gradually, I noticed that I could sit longer. And I think there's an actual change that happens physically in terms of your energy that enables you to sit longer. So if you have that kind of thing, it might be very helpful to do some yoga or stretching exercises before you sit.

His Holiness always says, "If you can do something about a situation, then there's no need to worry because you can do something about it. If you cannot do anything, then there's no need to worry also". So that also can be very helpful to think about.

## **5. Doubt**

Sometimes we have lots of doubts come up about the Buddha's teachings. Or sometimes we have doubts about our own capability: "Can I follow the Path? Can I really do this? Something's wrong with me. I'm sure everybody else has the Buddha potential, but not me." So our doubts can come in many shapes and forms.

## *Antidotes to doubt*

It was quite interesting that last night Geshela said we should recognize that we cannot expect to understand the Buddha's teachings all at once. It is a gradual path, so to recognize that it's only natural when doubts come. It's very natural that we may not find immediate clear answers to our questions, but if we can give our mind some space and have some faith and trust in the Buddha that because he said some things that really rang true to us, therefore maybe we'll understand these other things someday. And that kind of faith can give us the ability to continue even when the mind is plagued with doubts.

Also, when you have doubts ask questions. This is really what Dharma friends are for. This is why I encourage all of you to hang out together and talk about Dharma. When you have doubts, you can go to your friends and they can help you with it. Or go to your teachers or read books. Try and get some answers. But then also recognize, as I said before, that there may be some things that we're not going to be able to resolve right away. And we might have to sit there with the doubt for some time and just keep coming back to it over a period of time.

One of the big doubts that Westerners often have at the beginning of practice is about rebirth: "Does it exist? I cannot see it." You can read something about it, think about it, talk about it, but you might realize at a certain point that you're just kind of stuck. So then just put it on the back burner. His Holiness at the Teachers' Conference this year said he thinks a person can take refuge even without believing in rebirth. If

there are other things in the Buddha's teachings that make sense to you, that are useful to your life, then emphasize those and practice those and slowly, over a period of time, the whole rebirth issue might become clearer and clearer.

I've really seen with my own practice that there are some things that at the beginning seem impossible to understand. I had so much doubt about them. I would keep coming back to them every so often, basically because one of my teachers would raise them again in teachings. And then I'd start thinking about them and sometimes I'd get a little bit on it. It isn't that all the doubt would go away but some little something would sink in. So be willing to work with your doubts this way over a period of time. Have some flexibility.

And I think here also is where a long-term motivation like bodhicitta is so important, because if you really want to become enlightened, if you have this very strong feeling to work for the benefit of others, then that motivation will carry you over the periods when you have a lot of doubt. I think it is important that you know this, because you will go through times in your practice when you have lots of doubts. I remember once I was sitting there and thinking, "How do I know the Buddha exists?" And you go through this sometimes. But if you really have this kind of long-term determination and some kind of spaciousness in your mind, then that carries you through.

And as you do the practice, as you get some taste from the practice, then that resolves your doubts because you're getting some experience—not

hallelujah-I-see-lights experience, but you become a little bit less angry, a little bit more calm, you begin to see that the teachings work.

I was thinking too, that sometimes it's a matter of karma from previous lives, because some people enter the Dharma practice, they practice a little bit and then at a certain point they just go bust. "I'm not going to come back to this! I'm going to Hare Krishna." Or "I'm going to do something else." Sometimes they're super-enthusiastic and then they just drop everything cold and go do something else. That can happen sometimes partly because of the way the mind is working—not having that long-term motivation, and not having that spaciousness—but also because of a lack of positive potential and merit from previous lives. This is another reason why we should exert some effort to create that kind of positive potential in our mindstreams because that does serve to carry us through when doubts arise in this life or future lives.

I think one very important thing we can do when doubts arise is just to give ourselves some time, because often the doubts are all: "Oh I've been meditating for a whole month now and I don't have samadhi!" and "I have been practicing Dharma for seven years and I still cannot concentrate!" Remember Geshela mentioned that generating bodhicitta may take not just a few years but a few lifetimes? If we have this kind of long-term perspective, then we'll be able to carry ourselves through.

Sometimes the doubt just makes us act really crazy; it makes us just give up everything completely or it makes us just flit from one thing to another. "I've

been doing this meditation and I haven't gotten anywhere. I do that one and I don't get anywhere." And so we flit around from meditation to meditation, from teacher to teacher, from group to group, from tradition to tradition. No wonder there's doubt in the mind, because we never stick with anything. In that way, doubt can be a really big obstacle, but it's very natural to have it. If you don't have doubts then something's probably wrong.

And then sometimes we not only have doubts in the Buddha's teachings but we begin to doubt our own capability. "Can I do it? I can't!" "I can't concentrate! I'm too old!" "I'm too young!" "I'm too fat!" "I'm too thin!"—just all sorts of doubts about our own capability. When this comes up, it's very helpful to contemplate the precious human life and all the conditions that we have going for us. It's also helpful to remember that we do have the Buddha nature and that even if we wanted that to be taken away, it can't be. We're stuck with our Buddha nature. We have the potential to become a Buddha whether we want to or not. Just remember that. If you look in *Open Heart, Clear Mind* there's a chapter that describes Buddha nature, so that might help answer some of your questions too.

### **Five antidotes to hindrances**

Under concentration, there are five different antidotes that the Buddha gave to deal with some of these unwanted thoughts of ignorance, anger, attachment, anxiety, restlessness and all the various thoughts that we have.

## 1. Displacement

In other words, switch your mind from concentrating on that to concentrating on something else. If your mind is going around and around in circles about everything you have to do, maybe just chant some mantra instead. If your mind is going around and around about how this person said that and they did this and it all happened ten years ago and you're never going to forgive them, then maybe switch your mind and do some visualization or do some meditation on love. So it's very consciously recognizing that you're having afflicted thoughts and you are going to *move the focus of your attention to something else* . The analogy is taking a bigger peg and using it to displace or hammer out a smaller peg that's in the hole.

So this first one is displacing it, consciously shifting your mind to another topic that's going to be more beneficial to think about. And that may actually act as an antidote to the one that's getting in the way.

## 2. Thinking of the disadvantages of that particular thought pattern that you're having.

If you're having a lot of attachment come up, think of the disadvantages of attachment. What are the disadvantages of attachment?

*[Audience:] It distracts us from our practice. It creates negative karma. It causes distress. It causes more craving. It causes more obsession.*

So really think about these disadvantages. is getting upset and holding on to a grudge.

Or think about the disadvantages of anger when your mind What are the disadvantages of anger?

*[Audience:] It doesn't feel good. It harms others. It harms ourselves. It's very bad for the health.*

So if you have some kind of thought pattern that you're stuck on, then think about the disadvantages of it in this way. That helps you to drop it and to not give it energy.

The Buddha described our having attachment as being a well-dressed person carrying a carcass around his neck. It's a "nice" image, isn't it? Now that's the disadvantage of attachment. This image of a well-dressed person with a carcass around his neck is disgusting. "Why do I need to carry this around?!" You toss it away. So similarly, if you're a nice person but your mind gets plagued by the attachment, the resentment, the self-preoccupation, those are like carcasses around the neck. When you look at the disadvantages, it's like looking at how disgusting the carcass is, and then it's easy to just say, "Hoo! Who needs this?!" and just let go of it.

### **3. Paying no attention**

This is like shutting your eyes so you don't see something. When you go to the movies and they're going to play a violent scene, some people open their eyes then, but those of us who don't like that close our eyes. So when there's something quite unpleasant



or ugly, you close your eyes. It's the same thing here in ignoring those thoughts. You recognize that this just isn't getting you anywhere and so you do not feed it. You recognize that until you have the proper tools to be able to think this through clearly, it's better not to think about it—better just to leave it on hold because all you'll do is make it worse and get yourself all tangled up.

Sometimes when we have a hard time we think, “Well wait, I have this problem, shouldn't I think about it? Are you telling me to ignore my problems? We deny the whole nature of cyclic existence. denial; don't worry about going into it.

Then I'll go into denial again.” We're already in denial. We deny the reality of emptiness. We're already in

I remember one time one of my friends was having a lot of problems with her practice. There were a lot of doubts about things with her teachers and her mind was all tangled up. So she went to another teacher, told him the whole problem, and he said, “Don't think about it”. [Friend:] “Don't think about it? This is my problem. I've got to think about it otherwise I'm going into denial! I can't do this!” [Ven. Chodron:] But then if you really think about it, you'll see that the way we think about problems is very often totally unproductive. If we have a choice between thinking about our problems in an unproductive way that creates more distress, and just not thinking about it because we don't have the tools to handle it, then actually it's better not to think about it.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I think it's not so much telling ourselves, "Don't think about it. Don't think about it" as just not feeding the energy—not paying it attention. Just like pushing the "Pause" button, I'm going to take a break. Do something else, think about something else.

#### **4. Allowing the thoughts to settle**

The analogy here is like a person who is running, and then they realize that they don't need to run, they can walk. And then they realize, well, they don't really need to walk, they can sit down. And then they realize, well, they don't really need to exert that much effort to sit down, they can lie down. So somehow just like the body, there is a gradual settling down of the thoughts. Give your mind some space. Just let it settle and know that your thoughts will settle down, that it's impossible for them to keep going and going.

I find it very interesting that when I'm doing a retreat, I'm more likely to have certain kinds of afflictions during certain sessions. Sometimes people find that in the day they have more attachment, or during the daytime they have more anger and in the evening time they have more attachment, something like that. I find that in the morning sessions, I tend to have more anger coming up. It's very interesting. I will notice the anger coming up, and I know from past experience that as soon as I get off my cushion the anger will be totally gone. So then I think, "Well let's just short-circuit it a little bit and pretend I got up early and left it there, and then continue with my practice". [Laughter.] So this is letting the thoughts settle, letting them go down.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

In all of these you have to play around and see which ones work better for you. What I find very helpful is to come to the breath, not so much on the in-breath or the out-breath, but on this peaceful feeling that we sometimes find in the breath. Just concentrate on the peaceful flow of the air. Even if we're doing a visualization, we can keep with the visualization but try and tune our mind more to the peaceful feeling of the breath. And then that allows the thoughts to settle. So you can kind of play around with it. See what works for you.

Or sometimes what I'll do is I'll just sit there and say, "OK I'm just going to feel this." Instead of going through all the thoughts, I just try and remain with that awareness of "How does the anxiety feel in my body? How does it feel in my mind?" And I'll just sit there and watch the different feelings and then gradually the energy just kind of fades away and it settles down. What doesn't let it settle is if I'm anxious and I keep thinking about the thing about which I'm anxious. But if I just pay attention to what it feels like to be anxious, then slowly that kind of energy settles.

## **5. "Repressing" them**

I don't think it's necessarily the same as psychological repressing, but the analogy is like a stronger person that holds a weaker person down. So in this case if your mind's just going totally, totally bonkers, it might just take a little bit of self-discipline to say to yourself,

“Look, this is totally useless! I’m just going to drop this completely because I’m not getting anywhere.” You generate a very strong thought of, “OK I’m going to drop it!” Often that can work.

So that’s all about concentration, in brief form.

## **RIGHT EFFORT**

Actually we need effort in all of them. Sometimes they put effort with concentration; sometimes they put it with wisdom. Actually we need it also for the ethics. Effort is a mind that takes delight in doing what is virtuous. Effort does not mean pushing. This is a really big thing—really important. It means taking delight. That sounds nice, doesn’t it? Training the mind to take delight in virtue.

So if we hear the word ‘effort’ or ‘enthusiasm’ and we’re thinking of delight instead of pushing, then we understand what it’s all about. It’s interesting talking with Sally, who does all the cooking for Geshela. Talk about stress! She’s turning out all these marvelous meals all the time, but she was saying this morning how it was such a discovery for her this particular time, that she could work really hard and be very joyful for it. Usually she works hard and if she has to do this kind of thing, she gets very stressed out and nervous and anxious ... but it was so nice cooking for Geshela because she realized she could work hard and just be very happy and be very joyful. So part of effort is also knowing your limits, knowing when to take a time out, when to take a rest.

### **Four kinds of effort**

**1. To take delight or make effort to prevent negative states of mind from arising and to purify the negative karma that has been created in the past.**

This is the preventative measure one and also the purification one. We've talked about purification a lot; I won't go into it a whole lot now. The effort involves really cleaning up things from the past, purifying and making determinations and in that way, preventing new negative thoughts and actions from arising. So that's a real chief function of purification: that by purifying the energy in the past, it helps you to break the habit so that it doesn't arise again in the future.

**2. To abandon negative states if they arise and not create more in the future.**

The first kind of effort talks about preventing negative states of mind from arising. Here, it's saying that if negative states of mind have already arisen, then we apply the antidotes to them. To do that, we need to study and learn the antidotes, e.g. the five hindrances and the five different ways of handling them. Knowing the antidotes, practicing and remembering them, and using them to abandon negative states if they arise. In that way you avoid creating more in the future.

So "From now on, whenever a negative state of mind arises, I'll try to remedy it, and make some kind of determination to try and avoid it in the future." If you have a particularly strong defilement, work very

consistently with that, familiarize your mind with the antidotes and apply them.

I hope one thing you got from this weekend with Geshela (because he kept mentioning it), is that this all takes time. Sally made a very interesting comment to me this morning as she sat listening to some of the questions (Sally has been practicing Dharma a long time). She remembered, “Oh yes, I remember when that was my burning question and that’s what I was stuck on”. And hearing other people ask those questions now helped her realize that it actually does take time to get an understanding of things. But having that space and her having put in the effort all that time, she’s able to recognize the progress that has been made: “Yes, it takes time.” “Yes, that used to be my burning question and now it’s okay, I have that resolved. I have another burning question now but that one will get resolved at some point too.”

### **3. To generate virtuous states not already generated.**

We try and generate the positive attitudes that we haven’t already generated—generosity, patience, ethics, gratitude, kindness and so on.

And rejoice also in your past virtue. So just as in the first one of these, we would look over the past and purify the negative karma, in this one, we look over the past and take delight in the positive things that we’ve done. This is a very, very important part of the Path—rejoicing in our own and others’ virtues and good qualities—but we often skip over it. We like to focus on the negative, but it’s really quite important to

do this—look over what we’ve done in the past and feel a sense of rejoicing over it. Even the fact that we have this perfect human rebirth and that we’re here—let’s rejoice about it!

#### **4. To maintain virtuous states once they’ve arisen**

So when some spirit of generosity crops up, hold on to it! [Laughter.] Or when some feeling of kindness comes into your heart, don’t let it flit away, put forth effort to maintain it, develop it more and more, and create more and more of these kinds of thoughts and attitudes in the future.

So the effort goes in all of these different directions. If you sit and think about these four, it’s quite interesting because the first two are more concerned with the negative things and letting those go and the last two are more concerned with the positive ones and increasing those. The first and the third one are dealing more with the past: what’s happened in the past, and either rejoicing or purifying and seeing what we can get from the past to occur in the present. And the second and the fourth are dealing more with the future and where we can go from here: how to hold on to virtuous states or how to free ourselves of present negative ones and how to keep doing this in the future.

You’ll find that as we go through these, it might seem like it’s just a lot of the same material set in different ways. It is, but there’s a purpose for that because each time we hear it in a different way, we get a new way of thinking about it. And if we take it home and really mull over it, then new

comprehensions occur.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

This is very, very true. Even in the guidelines for refuge, the Buddha really stressed the importance of choosing wise friends and not hanging out with people who bring out your negative qualities or whose negative behavior you tend to follow. It's very important. That's why spiritual friendship is so important and the people that you share the teachings with are very precious people because they understand that part of you; they value that part of you. They aren't going to sit there and say, "You're using your holiday to do what? You're going on a retreat? Come on!" These are people who are really going to value you and encourage you in your process of self-discovery and so those people are very precious.

### **Concluding meditation**

So let's sit quietly. Maybe during this meditation think of one of the hindrances—sense-desire, ill-will, sloth and laziness, restlessness and worry, doubt—and maybe ask yourself, "Which is the one that comes up most for me and what are the antidotes I can use to handle it?" And maybe think of how to use the five antidotes to concentration to handle that—displacing it to another thing, thinking of the disadvantages, ignoring the thoughts, letting the thoughts settle and telling yourself to let go of it.



## **Review—four kinds of effort**

We were saying that there are four kinds of effort:

1. To prevent negative states that have not arisen from arising and to purify those that have been generated in the past.
2. To abandon negative states that have already arisen and to prevent them from arising again in the future.
3. From the positive side, we generate positive states that have not already been generated and rejoice in those that we have created in the past.
4. To maintain the positive states that we have generated and to try and create more in the future.

Doing all of this requires effort. Remember effort isn't pushing nor is effort grinding our teeth and going "Urghhh!" Effort means taking delight. It's a mind that takes delight in doing these things.

## **Factors that help us generate Right Effort**

### *Contemplating constructive and destructive factors*

In order to have this kind of effort, and especially those four kinds that we described, there are a few things that are helpful. One is to spend some time contemplating what is constructive and what is destructive. If we are able to know the difference between positive and negative actions, constructive and destructive mental states, then we can apply these

four efforts. We are able to discriminate, “Well, what did I do in the past that needs purifying? What did I do in the past that I can rejoice about? What am I going to generate in the future? What do I want to generate? What am I generating now? What can I generate in the future?” It is to have some kind of discrimination about what are constructive and what are destructive actions and constructive and destructive mental states. This is one thing that will help us to generate that kind of effort, so spend some time thinking about that.

### *Awareness of our behavior*

The second factor is to become aware of our behavior. It's not just having some intellectual idea about constructive and destructive actions, but also actually becoming more aware of our behavior. We talked about this a bit in the section on mindfulness of our body language. We mentioned it when we talked about Right Speech, Livelihood and Action. All these things have to do with our awareness and becoming mindful of what we're doing, becoming aware of our behavior and not just being on automatic all of the time.

### *Having a positive aspiration*

Another thing to help us generate effort is to have a positive aspiration and an ideal that we want to go towards. This requires that we have the goal of our life, the purpose, the meaning of our life, very clear. If our goal is clear and we have that aspiration for

liberation and enlightenment, then delight in practicing the path becomes very easy. It's like when you have the aspiration to earn money, going to work isn't so bad. When you think of the benefits of earning money, then you're kind of anxious to go to work. If you have an ideal in your life and you think of the benefits of enlightenment, then you take delight in doing the practice. It's important when we're practicing to have this mind of delight, and to really try and deliberately cultivate it.

We Westerners sometimes have a hard time with that because we tend to get effort confused with pushing. We go from the extreme of pushing to the other extreme of just being lackadaisical, lazy and apathetic. We don't seem to get this middle way of taking delight. Both the laziness and the pushing, neither of them has much delight in them. When we're lazy, we're not taking delight in the Dharma; we're just going "Urghhh!" When we're pushing, we're into our Protestant work ethic culture—we've got to achieve, attain and "Let's go for it!". That doesn't bring about this relaxed mental state that we need for practice. It's working with our mind and having this positive aspiration so that the practice really becomes a delight. It's very important.

### ***Knowing what to do when we're stuck in our practice***

Our practice isn't always going to be a delight. We go up and down quite a lot. Sometimes it seems like it's going well and sometimes we feel quite lost. We feel very bewildered like "I'm sitting doing this

meditation, I don't know what I'm doing and my mind hasn't changed." All sorts of stuff comes up.

Expect that. If you know that this is going to happen, then when it happens you're not going to fly into chaos thinking, "I'm doing something wrong, I'm abnormal. Everybody else is blissful and I'm abnormal." But you'll know that this is actually part of the practice and part of what you go through and you'll have some tools prepared.

Very often, what happens is when our practice hits a low point, what do we do? We stop practicing. Don't we? The very time when we have some personal difficulty, when we're a little depressed, when something is wrong in our life—that's the time when we really need the Dharma the most, when the Dharma can help us. But what do we do often? We just drop it. We get overwhelmed by our problem.

Sometimes we have some difficulty with our practice, we feel stuck, like we're not going anywhere. That's the very time when we need to go talk to our teacher, but what do we do? Instead of talking to our teacher we say "Oh, if my teacher knows what a lousy student I am and how bad my practice is, they'll never talk to me anyway." We don't talk to our teacher and we withdraw. It's interesting that the times when we have these resources available to us to help with our practice—the community of Dharma friends to talk with and who understand the same problems, our teachers, time available to meditate—we don't use them. So often when we run into a glitch, we just drop the whole cat and caboodle.

At one retreat at Cloud Mountain, during the

evaluation session, for those of you who know Phil, he was saying, “Sometimes in the middle of a retreat, I just felt so awful, my practice just wasn’t going anywhere and I was going to go back and be a Presbyterian again”. [Laughter.] He said, “At least there’s John, Luke, Mark and those are names that I can pronounce.” This is just part of what happens. But you see he had paid for the whole retreat so he stuck it out. [Laughter.] This is the disadvantage of doing Dharma on dana basis! When you pay, then you stick it out because you want to get your money’s worth. When it’s on dana, you say, “Well I didn’t pay anything anyway. Let’s just drop it.” It’s very strange how our mind works in the West.

Just remember when your energy’s low, that’s the time really to seek out the resources that are available. I just got a letter from somebody who was saying that she felt that her practice was kind of stuck and her Dharma energy is low. She went to Geshela’s teachings over the weekend. It was like “Oh, wow, he put it all in perspective, what we’ve been doing in the Lamrim class and it all kind of came together”. This is the advantage sometimes of just renewing your involvement with the group, the teacher and the Dharma and everything going around. You often get the thing that you really need at that moment.

Now I very often had the experience when I was living in India, especially studying with Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey, that I’d be talking with Dharma friends about something. We would be stuck and wondering about something and how does this work and how does that work. The next day we’ll go into class and Geshela answers the question. It’s just

remarkable. If you keep making that effort and don't take all your mental states so seriously, then when you get stuck, you can really keep going. Being stuck is impermanent, too. This will help you renew that sense of purpose and the delight in practicing the Dharma. Lama Zopa used to say that the Dharma isn't difficult. It's just our mind that makes it that way. It's our mind that can make it easy also. It's our mind that takes delight and feels inspired.

### *Reading biographies of the past practitioners*

Other times when you lack effort, it might be good to read some of the biographies of the past practitioners. Read Milarepa's biography during the times when we feel, "Oh, I can't possibly get anywhere. My practice, my mind's just so awful, my life is so awful." Milarepa killed thirty-something people before he came to the Dharma. At least we didn't do that. He became a Buddha in that lifetime.

When you get depressed: "Oh my relationship with my teacher isn't working well and I can't stand this group and blah, blah, blah," then you look at Milarepa. He went to Marpa and Marpa made him build buildings with these huge enormous rocks. He built a nine-story building with rocks and then Marpa would come along and say "I don't like that one at the bottom. Take it out". Milarepa had to do it. Then he would go and he would request teachings from Marpa and Marpa would kick him out. Or Marpa would be teaching other disciples and Milarepa would go sit in the back and Marpa would say "What are you doing here? Get out of here."

But you see, he had that noble aspiration. He had that long-term purpose. He knew his teacher well. He knew the path. He knew where he wanted to go. Milarepa just saw all of those kinds of things as purification and he just went through the difficulties. It is helpful to think Milarepa built and tore down these nine-story buildings so many times with a lot of effort, faith and devotion. If we run into a glitch in our practice, let's realize that maybe our glitch isn't nearly as bad as his was and find our inner resources and our delight so that we can continue.

### *Balance in practice*

An important thing in not getting yourself to the point where your practice is stuck is this whole thing of taking care to be very, very balanced and not push yourself. Don't get into one of these Dharma frenzies of "I'm going to become a Buddha before next month" and "I'm going to do all of the hundred-thousand prostrations in one month and here I go" and set yourself up with these grandiose expectations. If you set grandiose, very high expectations in a short period of time, then you're not going to have the patience to continue. Change happens slowly and you're not going to be able to fulfill your expectations and then you're going to go "Well, it didn't work" and give it up, when it wasn't designed to work in one month. It's something that takes time. In a similar way, avoid high expectations and really avoid burn-out. Avoid this mind that just pushes and pushes and pushes. Just take it easy so that we can be consistent.

Taking it easy doesn't mean being lazy. It just

means being relaxed, having a relaxed mind, doing something in an even, consistent pace instead of with this Protestant work ethic mentality. It's very important, very important.

### ***Remembering that we are healthy***

When we do feel our energy going or even when we don't feel our energy going, it's helpful to reflect on some other things to keep it up. One is to reflect on the fact that we're healthy. Often we take our health for granted and we think "Well I don't feel like doing Dharma now. I'll do it later." But if we really think "Wow, I'm healthy and Dharma practice is so much easier when I'm healthy. I'll use that time when I'm healthy now. Later on I'll lose my health and get sick, but I'll have this Dharma practice behind me, I won't regret having wasted my time. I'll have all the enrichment that comes from practicing, that will sustain me when I'm sick." Remember this when we're healthy.

### ***Remembering that we are young***

Remember that we're young. This is a relative thing. The definition of young changes every year. Forty used to be old, but now forty is young. Remember that we are young and Dharma practice again is much easier when we're young, when we're healthy, when our body moves well. Take advantage of this time, instead of saying, "Well I'll just live my life in pleasure and then when I'm sixty or seventy and I can't move and there's nothing else to do, then I'll do



Dharma.” Instead of that attitude, practice now with really this sense of appreciation for our youth. Then when we get old, there will be no regret and there will also be this whole store of positive energy that sustains us in our old age.

You look at Geshe Sopa. He’s seventy-something, but he doesn’t seem that old, does he? Physically he doesn’t look his age and mentally, he’s definitely not in his seventies. This is accomplished through the force of his practice. Or for those of you who know Grace McCloud, she lives not too far from here. She’s an old Buddhist in the area. She’s eighty-four, eighty-five now? She’s a really wonderful person. She’s been practicing many years. You go over and talk to her and her mind is really alert, happy and cheerful and it comes as a benefit of her Dharma practice.

Remember this, the practice that we do now will really sustain us when we’re older. It helps us take delight in doing the practice.

### ***Remembering that we have enough physical resources***

Another factor to remember is that we have enough money to practice right now. Again this is a situation that can change. Who knows what will happen to the world economy? There could be a time later on in our life when we don’t have the physical resources to be able to practice. But right now we actually have the resources that make it possible to practice and so again take advantage of this opportunity instead of taking it for granted or instead of being blasé. But really looking, “Yes, I have the health, with all the

money, the resources to be able to practice. I'm not living out on the streets. The American economy isn't in shambles. I can go on retreat. I can do this and that." This is taking advantage of our resources.

### ***Remembering that we have religious freedom***

It's also important to remember that we have religious freedom. Especially when you think of those young men in China (I told you the story) . We don't know how long we're going to have this opportunity. When I sat down and thought about their dilemma, I just saw how much I take our freedom here for granted. I'm just so blasé about having the freedom to practice Dharma, to be able to travel, to be able to invite teachers, to be able to meet in a group like this. We don't know how long we're going to have this opportunity.

I think I told you before about my friend Alex, who went to Czechoslovakia before the revolution, before the Communist regime fell. When he went to teach Dharma in someone's home, everybody had to come at a different time. In the outer room they arranged cards and beer like everybody was playing cards and then they went in the inner room to do the Dharma teaching. They had the whole show of the card game in case the police came. Just remember that we don't have to do that. We have that freedom to practice. Really appreciate your freedom and take advantage of it.

When we think about these things, then it gives us much more energy and delight in doing our practice. We see that comparatively we have very few

obstacles. It's really quite easy for us to practice.

### ***Remembering we have been fortunate to encounter the Dharma***

Remember, too, that we've been able to encounter the Dharma. It's quite possible to have been born in a country where there are no Buddhist teachings, where you cannot encounter the Dharma. You might have the same spiritual thirst that you have now but no way to satisfy it because you're born in a country where there's no access to spiritual teachings. Really appreciate what we have going for us, the easy access we have to Dharma and the opportunities to practice. That gives us the energy to do the practice.

### **The Higher Training of Wisdom**

Let's go on to the higher training of wisdom. There are two parts of the Eightfold Noble Path that are listed under the higher training of wisdom. One is called view or understanding. These are two different translations. The second one is called thought or realization. Again these are two different translations for the same word.

In terms of the higher training of wisdom in general, there are actually four different kinds of wisdom. Three we cultivate and one is carried with us from previous lives. Dependent upon what we did in previous lives, what imprints we set in our mindstream from previous lives, then in this lifetime we're born with a certain degree of Dharma understanding.

Wisdom in the Buddhist sense is completely different from worldly intelligence or worldly knowledge, worldly wisdom. You've heard stories of some of the great sages of the past who were illiterate but they had great Dharma wisdom. You meet many people who have incredible worldly wisdom but when it comes to Dharma, they are totally dumb. Really, it's like they cannot understand anything. Again, according to the imprints from our practice in previous lifetimes, we have some understanding, some wisdom right now.

## **Three kinds of wisdom that can be cultivated**

### **1. Wisdom from hearing the teachings**

There are three kinds of wisdom that we can deliberately cultivate in this life. One is the wisdom from hearing the teachings. This is the first wisdom to cultivate in this life. We need to hear teachings and we need to study the teachings. This is very, very important because often we think that we can just make up our own path, we don't need to listen to anybody else. But we've been making up our own path from beginningless time and we're still stuck. This lifetime we might actually try listening to the Buddha's teachings. It might be helpful to us. Listening and studying, we might get the Dharma.

Listening isn't just about getting information. The whole time when you're listening to teachings, or when you're reading, you're actually actively thinking about the teachings at the same time. A certain amount of wisdom arises during the time that you're

listening to the teachings. This is the first wisdom that we cultivate.

## **2. Wisdom from contemplating the teachings**

From there we go on to contemplating the teachings. First, we listen and then we think about what we've heard. We contemplate. We reflect on the teachings. Sometimes when we're at home, we might sit in meditation position or we might just lean back in our chair and just think about the teachings. Just really think about what we have heard. Think about what we have read. Apply it to our lives and check it to see if it is logical. See if it fits what we've seen in our lives. Work with it a little bit in terms of our own life to make sure we have the correct understanding.

Also included in contemplating the teaching are discussions with other people. This is a very, very important item. My teachers used to say that you learn 25% from your teacher and 75% from your classmates and your fellow Dharma students, from talking and discussing with them. In the Tibetan tradition, they would all go out in the debate courtyard and yell and scream, which is very good if you're an adolescent male. [Laughter.] It's a skillful use of that energy, isn't it? We don't need to all go do that—to yell and scream and clap our hands—but just discussing with our Dharma friends. I found I often thought I understood a teaching but when I discussed it with my friends, I realized I didn't. Or the teacher was talking about something and I got some of the points, but I missed the others and then my friends helped me fill in my notes. Or they see relationships

that I never saw? It's very, very helpful talking with Dharma friends.

It's very helpful in the process of applying the teachings to our own life, to discuss with our Dharma friends how we're applying them and how we fit them into situations that we encounter. We'll probably find that our friends have had the same situations and that they're struggling with the same things. It lessens the sense of isolation, to actually open up and talk about those things. Sometimes that's difficult to do because we have this image of "I have to be this great Dharma practitioner and if I tell my friends about how I try to practice in life and how it didn't work when I tried, they're going to see what a lousy practitioner I am"? That's the wrong way to think. We often think that way but that's completely the wrong way. But instead, recognizing that our Dharma friends are dealing with the same things as we are and we can learn a lot from them, how they apply it in their life and share how we're applying it or trying to apply it in our life. Contemplating and discussing is the second wisdom that we can develop in this life.

### **3. Wisdom from meditating on the teachings**

The third wisdom is of actual meditation where we are trying to integrate and unify our mind with the Dharma. We go through that process of hearing and then contemplating before we can actually meditate and integrate and make our mind one with the Dharma. That's what the word 'yoga' means. 'Yoga' means union. We're trying to unite our mind with the Dharma. That comes through meditation, repetition,

applying it again and again and again, until the teachings become very familiar. It's like making a new habit in your mind.

So these are the three kinds of wisdom in general that we want to try and develop. I think it's helpful to know about this. There's this kind of progression. Before you can actually meditate, you have to think about the teachings and make sure you understand them because you cannot meditate on something that you do not understand. Before you can think about them, you have to learn them by hearing and reading.

*[Audience:] After meditating on patience, I find that I am still not very patient.*

What are you doing when you meditate?

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Kind of like you're just sitting there and saying "patience, patience" and no patience is coming?

Geshela said very often, "Don't just say patience, patience". And His Holiness is consistently saying, "We need to sit down and think about these deeply". It's finally begun to sink in that that's what we're doing when we're meditating. We're taking the material that we had in class and sitting down and thinking about it deeply. Not making this distinction between "Well my meditation is to visualize or to breathe and then class information is just information that I hear". But to actually take the stuff that we hear in class, sit down and really think about it deeply so that you're not saying "patience, patience." You have,

like in the back of *What Color Is Your Mind?* that whole section about anger and how to develop patience. Well, there's this whole thing. We'll think like this, and think like that. You sit down and you try actually thinking like that. You take one of the points on how to develop patience and you actually think about that.

## **Integrating teachings with meditation**

Here we just had this whole talk about effort. You go home and you sit down and think, "Well, I am healthy. What significance is it to me to be healthy? What does it do for me? How am I going to feel later when I am not healthy? Will I be able to practice Dharma then?" You think about just the whole advantage of being healthy. Then when you're done with that, you think about being young. "What does it feel like to be young? What's it going to feel like to be old? What advantage do I have now? How can I use it?" There's also the fact that we have religious freedom. And you think about that.

You actually have points and you're thinking about them deeply. In this way, as you think, sometimes you can have an incredibly strong experience. You might have this experience at some point, of just even one of the points of, "Oh my goodness, I'm healthy! This is incredible! Absolutely incredible!" "Here's this woman I visited who's dying of cancer, and cannot speak without blocking the trachea. I don't have that and this is absolutely incredible." You get this very strong feeling. Just hold your mind on that feeling, let your mind really experience it.



This is why it is very helpful if you have the Lamrim outline, or if you take notes in class, to write down the points so that you can remember them. When you get home, you really think deeply, and while you're thinking, then the experience comes. Also the more deeply you think about the material we cover in class, then when you do other meditations like the breath or the visualization, you'll be able to integrate the understanding you have from these kinds of meditation into the visualization.

For example, in the Lamrim class, we did the six far-reaching attitudes, the three kinds of generosity, the three kinds of ethics, the three kinds of patience and all these different things. When you go home, think very deeply about each one of those and get a grasp and understanding, "Well what does generosity mean? What does it mean to give material possessions? What are the circumstances that are good to give in and what aren't? What blocks me from giving? What does it mean to give protection and how can I do that? And what does it mean to give Dharma?"

### **Integrating teachings with visualization practice**

You think about that deeply and then in another meditation session, maybe you're doing a visualization, and you're imagining Chenrezig radiating out light. Well, as that light is getting sent out, you can think of the generosity of Chenrezig. For those of you who have the Chenrezig empowerment, when you visualize yourself as Chenrezig and you send out the light, then you can practice those three

kinds of generosity with yourself as Chenrezig sending out those different things in the form of light to others. Or you can practice the three kinds of ethics, sending those out as Chenrezig to other people. The more you understand the teachings we go through in class, the richer these meditations are going to become as well.

*[Audience:] How do you differentiate meditation from contemplation?*

You're still reflecting about it. Only it's deeper, more integrated. It's repeated again and again. Sometimes when we actually sit in meditation position, we might still be at the second one, just only at the contemplating level, because we're still trying to get a handle on what it was that was said and how it fits together, and that's fine. Sometimes as you do that kind of contemplation, more questions come up and that's good. When you have questions, that's good. Write them down, talk about them.

## **The American consumer mentality**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Very often we approach the Dharma with a consumer mind. [Laughter.] Seriously we do. We approach Dharma groups and Dharma teachers as consumers. "What's high quality?" "What teacher's entertaining? Doesn't matter if what they say is true or not, as long as they're entertaining, then I'll go. I'm bored with this teacher." It's like "Well, I'll go to another movie, go to another teacher." Or "I'm bored with this

practice. Well I'll go do another practice."

This is the American consumer mentality. Wanting to check out, window-shop. Make sure we're getting the best bargain, the best deal? Most for our money? Most Dharma for our money? We approach our meditation like consumers. "OK, look I've paid my time, I've meditated for half an hour, I want to attain this and such. I went to school for four years, I deserve my diploma. I meditated for four months, I deserve a certain realization." We very much have this consumer mind.

This attitude makes a huge problem for us. A huge problem. If you watch consumerism, what is it about? It's about dissatisfaction, isn't it? The whole thing, we're taught to be dissatisfied, to want more, to want better. We come to the Dharma practice with that same dissatisfaction. "I don't like this meditation cushion, I want that one." "I don't like this retreat center, I want that one." "I don't like this schedule, I want that one." "I don't like this teaching, I want that one." The dissatisfactions are very much the same.

*[Audience:] How can we tell whether we are approaching the Dharma with a consumer mind?*

One way is just to see the energy in your own mind. If your energy is this dissatisfied, complaining energy, then it's a different energy than if it's, "Well gee, I need more information" or "Gee, I need to understand this better" or "Gee, if I heard this teaching it would really complement my practice" or "Gee, this teacher might be able to give me a different slant on it". It's a very different kind of energy in your mind between

when you're dissatisfied and when you're just gathering more resources. It's the same kind of difference in energy between, "Huh gee, I don't like this apple-pie. I better go out and buy something else" and "Oh, I'm hungry and I need to eat something". There's a difference in your own internal energy there.

## **RIGHT VIEW**

The right or perfect or brought-to-fruitition view or understanding, which is the seventh of the eight, involves understanding the Four Noble Truths. This is having a deep understanding of the Four Noble Truths. The more I learn the Four Noble Truths, the more I find them incredible. His Holiness has said many times that for Westerners, in the Lamrim teachings, instead of starting with the topics as laid out by Lama Tsongkhapa, it's better to start with the Four Noble Truths. They give us a whole overview of the Buddha's teachings. They really speak to our heart in a very direct way. The first two Truths talk about our present condition and they're the things to be abandoned. The last two Truths talk about our potential and they're the things to be actualized.

The first two Truths talk about cyclic existence and how it is brought about. How we create cyclic existence. The last two talk about Nirvana, liberation and how we create that. When we think about undesirable experiences and their causes, then we get a real good understanding of our life and what causes our life, what causes our problems, and why we are here. How is our mind working? We get a real familiar

awareness, a good understanding of our present situation and how cyclic existence evolves. Then when we study the Path and the result of the Path, the cessation of undesirable circumstances and their causes, then we can really tap into our potential and get a very clear direction about how to use our potential and what direction we want to go in our life and what we can do to actualize that.

The understanding of the Four Noble Truths is very, very important here. If you go over it again and again, you'll find that it just completely describes everything in the world. It's just amazing, the more I go into it; it just describes everything. It's right there, in the Four Noble Truths. You really start to see how the Buddha really knew what he was talking about.

## **The three characteristics**

Right view or understanding also involves understanding the Three Characteristics.

### ***1. Impermanence***

The first characteristic is reflecting on impermanence. This particularly falls under the first Truth, the Truth of undesirable experiences. To recognize impermanence, to really do some reflection on impermanence and see how our mental states are impermanent. Our moods are impermanent, our body is impermanent, everything we like is impermanent, everything we don't like is also impermanent—thank heavens! We get some feeling for impermanence and what factors impermanence has, and what meaning

this has for how I live my life. The fact that things are impermanent, then is it worthwhile getting attached to things? What is really meaningful if things are impermanent?

## ***2. Unsatisfactoriness***

The second characteristic is reflecting on unsatisfactoriness. The fact that our mind is perpetually unsatisfied, always wanting more, always wanting better. No matter what we have, it's not good enough. You see this. It's rampant.

I remember when I was first getting introduced to the Dharma, when Lama Zopa talked about this, when he talked just about this discontent and this feeling of constant dissatisfaction, I looked at my mind and I saw, "Wow, that's really what's going on here".

Recognize that none of the things we grab on to externally has the ability to solve that feeling of dissatisfaction. Why? Because all of those things are changeable. And why? Because our own moods, our own dissatisfaction is changeable. How many times have we been dissatisfied? We get what we want and then we get dissatisfied about something else. This is really our life, isn't it? I want this. I want that. I bellyache. I complain. As soon as we get it, "Oh, I want this other thing, I want this other thing".

Just recognize, "Yes, this is how samsara works, this is the state of samsaric existence". As we understand this, this is what gives us the determination to be free, the impetus to really practice the Path. We see how getting stuck in our constant dissatisfaction doesn't get us anywhere. But there

actually is a way out. The way out is developing that sense of inner contentment through recognizing impermanence, through recognizing unsatisfactoriness.

### **3. *Selflessness***

And then the third characteristic is to recognize selflessness ...

*[Teachings lost due to change of tape during recording]*

... One woman brought up a question about selflessness. She said she had been reading the part in “Open Heart, Clear Mind” about selflessness which is about how you look at a flower and how it has petals and stamens and pistils. How there’s just this collection of things that has the name “flower” but there’s no real flower there. She said, “And then I looked at my children and I thought there’s no real Rosie and there’s no real Jenny. That felt really weird.” She was a little bit shaky about that. Kind of like “I really love my kids. I’m freaking out. Are you going to tell me there are no real Rosie and no real Jenny? What am I going to do?”

We talked about that for a while. Is there some kind of permanent essence about your child that is everlasting? What in our own mind is some kind of permanent essence that isn’t changing? We’re different now from the time we walked into the room. It’s all changing like that.

Our problems don’t have any essence either.

Sometimes when we think about selflessness in terms of the things we like, we say “Oh, there’s no essence”. But then when we think about our problems not having any essence, it’s a real relief. This thing that I’m labeling as this huge enormous problem—what is it? Where is it? Can I lay my fingers on it? No. It’s just a bunch of different circumstances and I give it the label “problem”. Besides that it’s not a problem.

That’s why Lama Zopa in “Transforming Problems” says, “The first thing you have to do is to be happy about your problems and say they’re good”. Give them another label. Why do we give them another label? Because they’re empty. If they had an essence we couldn’t give them this other label, we could never see them as good. Read that chapter in the book. He really hammers it in. You cannot see your problems as bad. You’ve got to see them as good. What sense is there in seeing your problems as bad? They’re good. Bodhisattvas want more problems.

It is this kind of understanding of the Four Noble Truths, the 3 characteristics, that is creating that perfect or fruitional view or understanding which gives us an incredible perspective on life and grounding on life, a way to understand our life. When you understand the Four Noble Truths, your mind doesn’t go into existential crisis anymore.

Remember existential crisis? [Laughter.] Remember the one you had when you were a teenager, you thought you’ve finished with it when you were a teenager, but then you got to middle age and you realized it hadn’t changed at all. It’s like falling in love when you are a teenager and you think,



“Oh, that’s just infatuation”. You do it when you’re twenty and thirty and forty and sixty and seventy. You realize that you’re still a teenager and infatuated. Nothing much has changed. I don’t want to discourage you. [Laughter.] We never really grow out of teenageship, do we? We just kind of ignore it for a while but it’s still the same questions our whole life. Our whole life, the same questions.

Anyway, as you understand the Four Noble Truths, then what happens is that we don’t go into the same kind of crisis as before because we have a framework to understand why we’re at where we are, what causes brought it about, what we can do about it, what our potential is, why things happen in the world the way they do. It really helps to avoid this incredible cynicism and despair about the state of the world because we begin to understand the state of the world as the first two Noble Truths. Buddha talked about it twenty-five hundred years ago. There it is. This has been going on for a long time. This is the state of samsara.

But there’s also a whole lot of other potential. There’s the last two Truths that can help to pull us out of it. When we understand this is samsara then we don’t fall into the same despair that we did before when we were thinking, “Why is the world like this? It should be perfect”. We realize “Well, this arises because of ignorance, anger and attachment. And yes, I have all three of them. And so does everybody else”. It’s no surprise that things are the way they are. It points a direction how to change as well. The Four Noble Truths really ground us, really ground us very much.

## RIGHT THOUGHT

The last one is perfect thought or realization. This can include the understanding of emptiness. This also falls under the Four Noble Truths and it also falls in here. You begin to understand that by practicing the Eightfold Path you can eliminate the grasping at inherent existence. Therefore, eliminate all these afflictions that create the karma that bring about the undesirable experiences. You begin to be able to see a way out of it.

We also see in the Eightfold Noble Path and the Four Noble Truths, that these things also exist by being merely labeled. There isn't any kind of absolutely existing, inherent, independent things. They're also empty of inherent existence.

Somebody asked Geshela, "You gave these teachings on emptiness and now I'm wondering if I should drastically re-align my whole practice and just meditate on emptiness." Geshela said, "No, what you do is you bring emptiness into your whole practice, so that whatever you're practicing, whatever you're doing—perfect action, perfect livelihood, perfect speech, perfect mindfulness—that you recognize that all those are also empty of inherent existence. They exist by depending on labels and by depending on the parts. They are collections of different qualities and characteristics and items and they exist by being merely labeled. They don't exist as some outside ultimate but rather as things that we create by practicing in our own mind.

This Eightfold Noble Path are like mindstreams. They are conscious realizations. They are not an

external thing to grab on to and possess. They are not an external ultimate that we squeeze ourselves into. What is perfect action? It is my action if I act in an ethical way. We realize that these aren't external things. They're internal things. They exist by depending on causes and conditions, by depending on parts, by depending on labels.

### **Three thoughts that are important to have**

Also under right thought are three other kinds of thoughts or realizations that are important to have.

#### ***1. Giving up***

One of these is dispassion or renunciation (there are various translations). I don't like either of those words very much. I think it's better to translate this kind of thought as giving up.

What this is, is giving up conditions that block our spiritual practice. Giving up the things that make us dissatisfied. Giving up the dissatisfied mind that creates our problems. It's kind of nice to think about a lot of the practice as just giving up things. It's not so much things you need to do and squeeze yourself into as just things you need to relax about and let go of. We just give up our obsessive thinking. We give up our attachment to reputation. We give up seeking approval from other people. We just relax about all those things. There's a real nice quality when you think about that. Let's just let that one go, let that one go, let that one go. All those things that are counter-productive to our own spiritual practice, you're able

to just leave them.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

It is just that natural process of, “Hey I don’t need to do this anymore”. It is also what you said about giving up the fear because I think sometimes there’s the fear of, “If I don’t take care of myself, what’s going to happen? If I’m compassionate, maybe I’m going to get overwhelmed”. We have this kind of fear and doubt. When you just let that go, then it becomes very easy to change. One way I find helpful to deal with that fear is I say to my mind, “Let’s try doing it this way as an experiment”. Instead of saying to my mind “I’ve got to change. I’ve got to do it this way”, let’s just try this as an experiment. Try it this one time and see how it works.” I really advice that if you have a mind that’s like my mind, which I wouldn’t wish on anybody else.

## ***2. Benevolence***

The second part here is one of benevolence. Cultivating an attitude of benevolence, of kindness, of love, some kind of warmth and affection, some kind of softness or roundness, or just a benevolent attitude towards ourselves and towards life in general, and towards other beings, and towards our practice. It is a kind of benevolence that has patience, affection, warmth and tolerance in it. Really take some time to cultivate benevolence and to remember it. Try and let ourselves be benevolent instead of forcing ourselves, “I’ve got to create benevolence, I’ve got to make

myself benevolent.” Again it’s this thing of letting go of some of the rough edges and letting ourselves be benevolent. It’s letting ourselves feel warmth towards other people, giving up the fear of that warmth, giving up the fear of being involved.

### ***3. Ahimsa***

The third one here is ahimsa and His Holiness talks about this one a lot. This is Gandhi’s one. Non-violence. Non-harmfulness. Giving up the wish to injure others. Ahimsa is the thing that really propelled Gandhi. It’s just so inspiring to think about his life. His Holiness admires Gandhi so much. It’s that total giving up of any kind of wish to injure anybody else, that complete attitude of non-harming, that gives us then the space to actually be helpful in a very gentle way. Giving up that wish for revenge. Giving up the need to prove ourselves, to retaliate, to strike back, to let our anger out. Non-harming is really about giving up anger, isn’t it? It is being very patient with the process of change.

These three—the giving up, the benevolence and the non-harmfulness or non-violence—are included in right thought or right realization. Again these are things we can go home and think about. You can go home and do a whole checking meditation, thinking about them. “What is giving up? What would I like to be able to give up? How can I give these things up? How have other people been able to give these things up?” I find Helen Keller’s story quite inspiring. Giving up a lot of attachment to reputation and things like

that, giving up discouragement. But how have other people been able to give up these blocks to progressing on the path?

Or benevolence—what is benevolence? What does benevolence feel like in me? Who can I be benevolent towards?

And the same with non-harming. Think about Gandhi's life. Think about how he handled problems and generate that same admiration. Then think of how we can use that thing of ahimsa, non-harming, in our own life and stop harming. Be helpful.

You do a checking meditation. You think about these things and then later on, if you do a visualization, either with the Buddha, Chenrezig or whatever, they or you as the deity could be radiating out energies of benevolence, non-harming and giving up. The more you understand these things, the more you're also going to understand what it's like to be a Buddha, what Chenrezig's qualities are, what Buddha's qualities are. The checking meditation and the daily practice, they really help each other. They go hand in hand.

How about if we just do some meditation now? There are many different things we talked about this evening. Reflect on them.