

LAMRIM TEACHINGS
Volume 1

Foundations of the Path

Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Chodron

Sravasti Abbey
692 Country Lane
Newport, WA 99156 USA

www.sravasti.org
www.thubtenchodron.org

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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 all sentient beings meet the Buddhadharma and quickly attain full enlightenment.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction to the Lamrim

Introduction and Class Structure

First, I think we are all very fortunate to be able to have this time to be together and to talk and learn about the Buddha's teachings. We are very fortunate just to have this opportunity to hear the Buddha's teachings in our world. It shows that somehow we have a lot of good karmic imprints in our mind stream. We've probably all done something virtuous together before. This karma's now ripening together in us having this opportunity to again create more good karma and make our lives meaningful. This is really something to rejoice over

The class will be on Monday and Wednesday evenings, at 7:30 promptly. I ask people to register for the class with the idea that people will feel committed to coming. The class is designed for people who truly want to learn the Lamrim and have a commitment to practicing the Buddha's teachings in their own lives. If you participate in this series of teachings, please come every time. It's for everybody's benefit and also so that we have a cohesive group energy.

At the Science Conference in Dharamsala last year, there was one guy who had a Ph.D. He was running a stress reduction clinic at the University of Massachusetts. People who were referred to him by

doctors for health problems had to sign up for an eight-week course. They came 2½ hours every week without fail. Six days a week, they had to meditate for forty-five minutes. Once during those eight weeks they had to come for a whole day and keep silence. He was teaching them Buddhist meditation without the label “Buddhist” to treat their health problems. These were people who weren’t even Dharma practitioners, but they signed up and they did it!

Feeling bolstered by what he did, and since people who are coming here already have some kind of commitment to the Dharma, I am asking you to please do some meditation in the morning every day for at least twenty minutes or half an hour. The purpose of this again, is to bring a consistent practice to your lives. Doing something daily is really important if you are going to get anywhere. Also because you are going to be receiving teachings, you’ll have to set aside time to think about them. If you just come here and then go home and don’t think about the teachings, you don’t derive the real richness and benefit.

So, I am asking you to please—at least once a day, more if you can—do a twenty-minute to half-an-hour session. You can do the prayers we just did, followed by a few minutes of breathing meditation to calm the mind down. Then, do analytic meditation—sit and think about the various points that we discussed in the most recent teachings.

One reason why you have an outline here is so you’ll know where we are going together and you can follow when I speak, and also so that you’ll have the essential points already written down, which will make your meditation much easier.

If you look at the outline, the first page says “Overview of the Lamrim Outline”. This contains the main themes of the entire path. When you look at page 2, it says the “Detailed Lamrim Outline”. This is an expanded version of the Lamrim Outline on page 1. This will be the outline that we’re basically following during the teachings and during your meditation sessions. You can think about each subject point by point, recalling what you heard, and check it logically to see if whatever was explained makes sense. Look at it in terms of your own life and your own experience.

This outline is based on the outline of the *Lamrim Chen Mo, The Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path*. There are several different Lamrim texts. This is a very general outline that corresponds roughly to all of them in terms of the essential points.

Approach

TEACHING ACCORDING TO THE TRADITIONAL OUTLINE

I want to give the teachings in the traditional way, in the sense of going through the Lamrim outline step by step. When I was here last time, many people commented to me that they’ve heard fragments of teachings here and there, and many different things, but they didn’t know how to put them together into a step-by-step sequential path—what to practice and how to do it. This teaching is designed to help you put together all the different teachings that you have

heard, so that you know what is at the beginning of the path, what is in the middle, what is at the end, and how to progress through it.

It's traditional in the sense that I am going to present it more or less in the form that is given to the Tibetans. I will be going through all the different points, and these include a lot of things that we may consider to be part of Tibetan or Indian culture, or things that our minds might feel quite resistant about. But I want to go through these points with the idea of giving you a Western approach to understanding them. You might take more extensive teachings from some of the Tibetan lamas later on, and if I am able to at least introduce you to some of those topics through the Westernized approach, then when you hear the standard Tibetan approach, it will go in more smoothly for you, like when they talk about the hell realms and things like that.

INTEGRATION INTO OUR LIVES

At the end of each session, I want our discussions to focus on how we've integrated those points in our own twentieth century American life, what other points we would add to it, or how we, as Westerners, should look at certain points. I want us not to feel like we have to become Tibetans, and not to feel like we have to swallow everything hook, line and sinker. Rather, we want to use our creative intelligence and examine the teachings logically, according to our experience, and try to integrate them. At the same time, we also want to be very clear about which points we as individuals have difficulty with, so that

we can help each other seek ways to understand those points.

I am saying this because I am thinking of one of my teachers. He went to teach in Italy where I heard he spent about two days talking about the suffering of the hell realms. The people there were going “Wait a minute! This is summer in Italy. I didn’t come on my vacation to hear about this.” [Laughter.] How are we as Westerners going to view these kinds of teachings, and what baggage from our Christian upbringing are we bringing in to these subjects? Similarly, when we talk about love and compassion, are we seeing it through our Judeo-Christian eyes, or can we really understand what the Buddha is getting at? What’s the difference between how we were brought up and the Buddha’s approach? What are the similar points? I want us to think about all these things in our mind as we start to look at all of our preconceptions, all of our habitual ways of interpreting things.

LONG-TERM VIEW TOWARDS ENLIGHTENMENT

This series of teachings is designed for people who are serious in the practice. It’s designed for people who want to attain enlightenment.

It’s not designed for people who just want to learn some way to deal with your anger. You can go through these teachings and you’ll get some techniques on how to deal with your anger, and how to deal with your attachment. These definitely will come out in the teachings, but that’s not the only point.

We are going to go more in depth. We really have

to have a long-term view. Everything is being explained to us in the context of us actually becoming a Buddha and us actually stepping onto that path and practicing that path to become a fully enlightened Buddha.

There is only one point where I am going to stop and give a lot of background information. The Tibetans say that this text, *The Gradual Path* (which is what Lamrim means), is for beginners, and it takes you step by step from the beginning to the end. However, the teachings also pre-suppose a whole world-view behind it. If you're brought up Tibetan, Chinese, or Indian, you would have this world-view. If you're brought up an American, you don't. E.g., the world—view of multiple births—that we are not just the person we are in this body; the idea of karma—cause and effect, the idea of different life forms existing not only on our planet earth but also other universes. I will, in the early lectures, set aside a whole lecture to talk about those issues, to fill us in on all the things that are supposed to take place before starting Lamrim.

STRUCTURE OF TEACHING SESSIONS

We will continue the sessions as we did today. Some prayers at the beginning, then silent meditation for ten, fifteen minutes and then I will talk for maybe forty-five minutes or an hour, and then we'll have questions and answers and discussion. When you go home, you can contemplate and review the different subjects we've talked about. At the next session, during the question-and-answer and discussion time,

you can bring up some of the reflections that you've had and your understandings through meditation.

VAJRAYANA FLAVOR IN THE LAMRIM

Although it is said Lamrim is designed for beginners, in actual fact, I think that the Lamrim is set out for somebody who already has the idea that they want to practice Vajrayana. You will find a certain Vajrayana flavor throughout the whole text, starting from the very beginning. And even though the different topics are presented serially—first you do this, then you do that, then you do this—in actual fact, you will find that the more you understand the later topics, the easier it is to understand the beginning ones. Of course, the more you understand the beginning, the easier it is to understand the later sessions. Even though they're presented step-by-step they interweave a lot. For example, the meditation on our precious human life comes earlier in the path. However, the more we understand the altruistic intention, which comes in the later part of the path, the more we'll appreciate our precious human life and the opportunity we have to develop that altruistic intention. As with all these meditations, the more you understand one, the more it will help you to understand the others.

Because it has this tantric influence right from the beginning, your mind is already beginning to get some imprint of the tantra. Something's starting to sink in about that whole way of viewing things. This is actually quite good. For example, right from the beginning, when I get into the part describing the

prayers, we will be learning about visualization and purification. You do a lot of visualization and purification after you've taken initiations and do the tantric practice. However, just in our basic Dharma practice here, we are already doing those same things. It's making some familiarity with that in our mind, which is very beneficial for us.

Overall outline of Lamrim

The Lamrim outline has four major sections:

1. The preeminent qualities of the compilers, in other words, the people who established this system of teachings. You look at their qualities and gain respect for them and what they have done.
2. The preeminent qualities of the teachings themselves. You get some kind of excitement about everything you can learn by practicing these teachings.
3. How these teachings are to be studied and taught. We get an idea of how we should be working together.
4. How to actually lead somebody on the path. Most of the text is involved in this fourth point: how to actually lead.

Preeminent Qualities of the Compilers

LINEAGE OF THE TEACHINGS

Let's go back to the first major section: the preeminent qualities of the compilers. This is basically just giving you a little bit of the historical perspective, knowing that the teachings came from Shakyamuni Buddha. I am not going to tell you too much about Buddha's life because I think you can read a lot about that.

But what is interesting about the Buddha's life is that even though he lived 2,500 years ago in India, his life is very much like middle class American life, in the sense that he grew up in the palace with all the pleasures of the world. The ghettos, the neighborhoods where they have the shootings, were far away. His father wouldn't let him go there. He was locked inside a palace and he only had nice things. All the aged people, the decrepit people, the poor people, the sick people—they were all in another part of town. The idea is we don't see them. The insane people, the retarded people, all the unpleasant things—we kind of push away. We go through our fantastic middle class life going to the movies, going to the shopping malls, going on the sail boats, going on vacations, and live very pleasurable lives. This is exactly how the Buddha lived, too.

One day, he went out of the palace. He sneaked out on four different occasions. One time, he saw an old person. The Buddha was quite shaken up, and he asked his charioteer "What's going on here?" The charioteer said, "Well, this happens to everybody." This is kind of like us. When our parents start to get old, we watch our parents age and how it's disturbing to us.

The second time the Buddha went out, he saw a

sick person. Again, he was shocked when he learned this happens to everybody. It's like us when we get very sick or when one of our friends dies. They are not supposed to die. Not when they are young anyway. And yet it happens. It jars us. That's similar to what the Buddha experienced.

The third time he went out, he saw a corpse. Again he learned that death happens to all of us. This is like when somebody we're close to dies, and we go to the funeral. Of course the Buddha saw a corpse as it is, whereas we go and we see it looking so beautiful—nice rosy cheeks and peaceful smile—all made up. But still, in spite of how they tried to cover up death, it's a shocking experience for us. It makes us look back at our own life and question “What is the purpose of my life? What am I going to have to take with me when I die?”

The last time the Buddha went out, he saw a religious person, a wandering mendicant, one who had given up the whole middle class life or palace splendors to devote oneself to the practice of making life meaningful for others. This is kind of where we are at right now. All of us are coming to the teachings, having had some experience of sickness, old age and death. We feel a lot of dissatisfaction, frustration and anxiety. We are at the point now where we are looking to find something different, something that is going to put our life together. That's the point the Buddha reached.

The Buddha left the palace, cut off his hair and put on robes. I am not encouraging you people to do that now, although I have my hair clippers, if anybody wants them. [Laughter.] That's not the point—to

change the hair-do and clothes. The point is to change the mind. I think we are similarly at that threshold in our mental development of “We want to change the mind and find something else.”

What the Buddha did, is he left that whole “middle class” life. He did a little bit of spiritual supermarket shopping, too. He went to various teachers and practiced their teachings. It’s like us going to Hari-Krishna, to karma therapy, to past life regression. We do our spiritual supermarket shopping, too. The Buddha did the same. He even went to the point of extreme asceticism, they say eating only one grain of rice a day. He got so thin that they say he could touch his backbone when he touched his belly button. He realized that severe asceticism wasn’t the way to enlightenment. Spiritual practice is more a thing of purifying the mind, not so much the body. It’s good to eat health foods, but eating health foods alone won’t make you a Buddha. It has to be the mind. At that point, he started eating again. Getting strong, he went and sat under the bodhi tree and through very deep meditation, he perfected his wisdom and compassion. When he arose from that meditation session, he was a fully enlightened Buddha. At the beginning, he didn’t want to teach anybody. He didn’t think that people would understand. But then different celestial beings from the god realms as well as different human beings came and requested him for teachings.

Gradually, he began to teach and people began to benefit a lot from his teachings. When Buddha gave his first teaching, he only had five disciples. Five people! The Buddha started with five, and look what happened? Those five got realizations, went out and

spread the teachings to others who also got realizations. They in turn spread the teachings to others. Soon enough it began a major world religion. Start small with a lot of quality, we can get somewhere. This is a very good example.

Buddha spent 45 years going around India teaching. Now, as he went from place to place, he gave a lot of different talks to different groups of people. He didn't teach everything exactly in the order that is presented in the Lamrim. When he talked with educated people, he spoke one way. When he talked with people with a lot of good karma, he spoke one way. When he talked to people with very little good karma, he explained things in a much simpler manner. He gave a lot of different teachings to different kinds of audiences. And then, later, what happened is the major points from all these various teachings, given over time to a wide range of different audiences, got drawn out and systematized into what's called the *Lamrim, the Gradual Path*.

It was Lama Atisha, an Indian practitioner of 10th or 11th century, who drew out the major points and systematized them. Later on, in Tibet, Lama Tsongkhapa who lived in the late 14th, early 15th century, explained everything in much more depth.

SPREAD OF THE TEACHINGS

Buddha's teachings were initially not written down. They were passed down in an oral tradition. The people memorized them and passed them down. Around the 1st century B.C. it began to be written down. Throughout this time, as Buddhism spread

through India, and then down south into Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), there were very learned practitioners, which led to the development of commentaries on the Buddhist texts and different systematization of the Buddha's teachings.

There were great Indian scholars and practitioners (they're called pundits) such as Asanga, Vasubandu, Nagarjuna, and Chandrakirti—you will hear all these names mentioned more often as you get into the teachings.

There were also different philosophical schools. People extracted particular points in the Buddha's teachings, and really emphasized those and interpreted them in a certain way. There was also a system of debate. The Buddhists were always debating each other. The Buddhists never had one party line that everybody bought. There was never fear of ex-communication if you didn't buy that party line. Right from the beginning, there were different traditions developing because people interpret things in different ways. They draw out different points to emphasize and they debate on them.

I think debating is very, very good. It makes our mind sharp. If there were a dogma that we just had to hear and believe in, our intelligence would cease to function. But because there're all these different viewpoints, then we have to think, "Oh, what's right?" "How does this work?" "What do I really believe?" There was this whole system of debate going on throughout ancient India.

The teachings spread south into Ceylon, Thailand, South East Asia, China. From China it spread into Korea, Japan, and into Tibet in the 7th century. The

Tibetans actually have the most extensive Buddhist canon, the most extensive collection of Buddhist teachings, including not only the texts on discipline (the Vinaya) and the Mahayana texts which describe the bodhisattva path of developing love and compassion, but also the Vajrayana or tantric texts, a special method with which we can progress along the path very quickly if we're properly prepared. There they were written down and commented on, and they were preserved for centuries.

Then, due to the invasion of Tibet by China, the Tibetans left Tibet and the world was able to learn the Tibetan teachings. Tibet had been isolated for centuries—difficult to get in and difficult to get out. They have their own insular religious community, but since 1959, when there was the abortive uprising and thousands of people fled to India, the Tibetan teachings became more widespread in Western countries. We are very fortunate in this way.

The Preeminent Qualities of the Gradual Path Teachings

THE PREEMINENT QUALITIES OF THE GRADUAL PATH TEACHINGS AS PRESENTED IN ATISHA'S *LAMP OF THE PATH*

We go on now to talk about the preeminent qualities of the gradual path teachings, specifically in relationship to Atisha's systematization of the Buddha's teachings in his text called *Lamp of the Path to Enlightenment*.

1. It shows how all the doctrines of the Buddha are non-contradictory

One of the benefits of this way of extracting the major points and ordering them is we come to see that none of the Buddha's teachings are contradictory. If we don't have this systematization, and if we don't understand what we're supposed to practice at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end, then when we hear different teachings, we might get very confused because they seem contradictory.

For example, at one point, you might hear that our precious human life is really important, our human body is really a great gift. We need to protect the body. It's the basis for our whole practice of Dharma. We're so fortunate to have a body. Then, you hear another teaching that says this human body is a bag of pus and blood. There's nothing to be attached to, there's nothing great about it. We have to completely give it up and aspire for liberation. If in your mind you don't have an overall view of the path to enlightenment, and where these two thoughts fit in, you are going to say, "What is going on here? These are two completely contradictory things! You are telling me the human body is great, and then you are telling me it's a bag of junk. What's the story?"

But, if you have this overall view, then you can see that for the purpose of encouraging us to practice through recognizing our very fortunate opportunity, we think of the advantages of our human body and this human life. However, later on in the path, when our mind is more developed, then we will see that even though this body gives us a certain fortune to

practice, it is not an end in itself. The real end is liberation. And to achieve liberation, we have to give up clinging to things that don't bring ultimate happiness, for example our body.

Another example is pertaining to eating meat. This is a real hot topic in Western Dharma centers because when the Theravada monks come, they eat meat. The Chinese monks come, and "No meat!" Then the Tibetan monks come, and you can have all the meat you want. You think, "Do you eat meat as a Buddhist, or don't you eat meat as a Buddhist? What's going on?" Now, that depends very much on your level of practice.

In the Theravada tradition, they emphasize very much the idea of detachment. Detachment is actually emphasized in all the Buddhist teachings but it's explained in slightly different ways in different traditions. In the Theravada tradition, it means you are content with whatever you have. And the way they practice that contentment or detachment is they go from door to door to collect alms each day. Those of you who have been to Thailand, you remember seeing the monks go door to door, and the laypeople putting food in the bowl. Now, if you are a monk going door to door, and you decide you are vegetarian, then you'll have to say, "Sorry I don't want that food but give me some asparagus over there." "No eggs please." "Give me the peanut butter." That is not conducive for developing a contented, detached mind.

So in the Theravada teachings, you were allowed to accept meat, provided that it hasn't been killed for you, you didn't kill it yourself, or you didn't ask

anybody else to kill it. Barring those three exceptions, you are allowed to accept meat for the purpose of developing this detached mind that is not choosy and picky.

At a later level of the practice, you get into all the teachings about love and compassion, and altruism. And there, you are saying, it's fine to be detached. But what is really important in the practice is to have love and compassion for others. If we're killing animals to feed ourselves, we are not really respecting their lives. We are not really having compassion for them. Therefore, we practice vegetarianism. At that level of the path, you give up eating meat, you become vegetarian.

Then, you go on into the tantric level of the path, and there, on the basis of detachment, on the basis of altruism and compassion, you start doing very technical meditations, working with the subtle energies of your body in order to realize emptiness or reality. Now, to do those meditations with the subtle energies, your body needs to be very strong. You need to eat meat to nourish particular constituent elements in your body that aid your meditation. You meditate for the benefit of others. At that level of the path, you are allowed to eat meat again. It is not at all contradictory if you have this understanding of the gradual path. You practice different things at different times.

In that way, we can see how the different practices of the different traditions fit together and you develop respect for all of them, without being confused.

2. It shows how all the teachings can be taken as

personal advice.

The second point is that the systematization of the Lamrim shows us how all the teachings can be taken as personal advice. In other words, all the teachings that we hear, we will be able to put them together. It's like having a kitchen with a flower canister, a sugar canister, and another for honey or oatmeal.

When you buy something in the market, you know where the canister belongs and you know how to use it. Similarly, if we're familiar with the step-by-step progression of the path, then if you go hear a lecture by this teacher or from that teacher, you'll know exactly where on the path that subject matter is. You won't get confused. In the Burmese tradition, they talk about vipassana and samatha. "I know where that fits on the path. I know what elements they're emphasizing." Similarly, if you go and listen to a teaching by a Chinese master or a Zen master, you will know where that teaching fits on the path.

You will be able to take all of these different teachings that you are hearing and use them in your own practice. You'll see that they are all meant as personal advice according to what level of the path you are on. One of the big problems in the West is that you hear a little bit here, and a little bit there, and a little bit here, and a little bit there, and nobody knows how to put them together. The real advantage of going through everything step-by-step is you get a whole overall view and know where each topic belongs. This is really, really helpful.

Also, another way in which you begin to see things as personal advice, is that you recognize that we

shouldn't make a split between intellectual studies and meditation. In other words, some people say, "Oh, this text is just intellectual. It's not so important. I don't need to know that material." That's not very wise. If we understand the step-by-step progression and all the different qualities we need to develop in our mental continuum to become a Buddha, we will realize that the way to develop these qualities is taught in those texts. Those texts are actually giving us the information which we need to put into practice in our daily life. Again this is really, really helpful. You don't go to a teaching and say, "Oh, they are just talking about five categories of this and seven categories of that. It's not for meditation. I am bored." Rather, you begin to realize "Oh, the five categories of this, this belongs to this step on the path. It's designed to help me develop these qualities in my mind." You'll know how to put it into practice.

3. The ultimate intention of the Buddha will easily be found

Then, the third benefit is that we begin to understand what the Buddha's intention is. His overall intention is of course to lead all beings to enlightenment. But we will be able to also draw out the important points, the specific intention, in the teachings. We begin to see what the gist of the teachings is all about. Again, this is very difficult to do.

I was teaching in Singapore for a while. The people there, by and large, haven't heard the Lamrim teachings. They get some teachings from the Sri Lankans, some teachings from the Chinese, from the

Japanese, from the Thai and then they go, “I am lost. What do I practice? Do I chant Namó Amítayá? Or do I sit down and do breathing meditation? Or should I pray to be born in the pure land? Should I try to become enlightened in this lifetime?” They get completely confused. They don’t see how all these things fit together on the path and they are not able to draw out the important points of all these different teachings and put them in a way that makes sense. I saw that even though I didn’t know very much, I wasn’t confused. That’s because I was taught the systematic approach through the kindness of my teachers. It made me really appreciate the Lamrim so much.

It’s really an incredible benefit to have this kind of approach because then we can see what is important and how it all fits together. Otherwise, because the scriptures are so numerous and so vast, we can get lost very easily. Through the kindness of all the lineage teachers, who picked out the important points and put them in an order, it becomes a lot easier for us ...

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

4. One will avoid the error of sectarian views regarding a Dharma lineage or doctrine.

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

... Being in Singapore, which has many Buddhist traditions, created the need for me to know more about the other traditions in order to help the people

who were coming and asking me questions about them. I started learning more about other Buddhist traditions and the more I learn, the more I discover how incredibly skillful the Buddha was.

Incredible! By teaching so many different meditation methods, by emphasizing different ways of practice to different groups of people, the Buddha was able to reach out to so many different kinds of people—people of different interests, different dispositions, different ways of understanding things. Seeing all these differences really deepens my respect for the Buddha as an incredibly skillful teacher.

We respect the fact that we all don't think alike. When we talk to other people, we have to talk according to the way they think, and that's exactly what the Buddha did. That's why there are many Buddhist teachings and traditions. He taught according to how they thought so that the teachings became beneficial to them. He didn't say, "OK, this is it. Everybody has to think like me." He wasn't like that. He was completely sensitive. This is a really good example for us when we talk to our non-Buddhist friends or our Buddhist friends, to be skillful in that way. Find the things in the Buddhist teachings that make sense to that person, that help them.

**THE PREEMINENT QUALITIES OF THE
GRADUAL PATH TEACHINGS AS PRESENTED
IN LAMA TSONGKHAPA'S *GREAT
EXPOSITION ON THE GRADUAL PATH TO
ENLIGHTENMENT***

1. It encompasses the entire Lamrim subject

matter

Lama Tsongkhapa was born a few centuries after Atisha. He took Atisha's presentation and added a lot of material to it to round it out and explained a lot of points that before hadn't been clear. The advantage of that is that it encompassed the whole Lamrim, the whole gradual path to enlightenment. The teachings that we are about to receive contain all the essential points of the whole path to enlightenment. This is really nice, isn't it? It's like having the great computer manual that covers all the systems, that doesn't leave anything out.

2. It is easily applicable

In addition, it's easily applicable, because this text is written for meditation. It's written so that we learn and we think about what we hear and then use it to transform our mind. It is not written for intellectual study. It's written for us to think about, and in thinking about it, to change our attitude and our life.

Meditation isn't just watching the breath. Meditation is transforming the way we think. It's transforming our perception of the world. By learning all these different steps on the gradual path, by reflecting on them every morning and every evening, your view of life starts to change. The way you interact with the world starts to change. That's what meditation is about.

3. It is endowed with the instructions of the two lineages (of Manjushri and Maitreya)

The third point is that this presentation of Lama Tsongkhapa has the instructions from the two lineages of Maitreya and Manjushri. The gradual path has two aspects—the method side of the path and the wisdom side of the path. The method side starts out with the determination to be free from our difficulties. It goes on to the development of compassion and altruism. It contains practices such as generosity, ethics, patience—all the activities of a bodhisattva. The wisdom side of the path is helping us to look deeper into the nature of things and how they really exist. We need both sides of the path.

Now, these two sides of the path were emphasized by different lineages of teachings. One lineage of teachings is called the extensive teachings. It deals with the method side of the path, and it came down from Maitreya to Asanga and down to the last lineage holder Trijang Rinpoche. And now, His Holiness holds the lineage.

On the wisdom side of the path, it started with Manjushri, Nagarjuna, Chandrakirti, and all those masters who showed us how to meditate on emptiness, and it went down to Ling Rinpoche, and now to His Holiness.

This teaching has the advantage of having both of these lineages of teachings—one emphasizing the practical way of working with compassion in the world, the other emphasizing the wisdom realizing emptiness.

WHAT TEACHINGS TO PRACTICE

1. Teachings which have Buddha as the source

We want to practice a teaching that has Buddha as the source. This is really important. Why? Because the Buddha was a fully enlightened being. His mind was completely free of all defilements. He had developed all the good qualities to the full extent. What the Buddha said is reliable because he gained the realizations himself.

Nowadays, we have such a spiritual supermarket. Gary got a phone call today telling him about somebody who was coming to Seattle who was enlightened two years ago in Bodhgaya. You have such a spiritual supermarket with all these new traditions of enlightened beings coming up. In *The New Times*, they were talking about karma therapy and they were talking about a Vesak celebration with some spiritual being going to give a talk. But, do any of these people have lineages? Where did all these traditions start? Most of them started right here with that person who's talking. The question is, is that person's experience a valid experience or not? Maybe some of them have valid experiences. It's for us to use our wisdom and judge.

2. Tried and tested teachings

The nice thing about the Buddhist tradition is you can see that, first of all, it started with somebody who is a fully enlightened being. Secondly, it was passed down through a lineage, which has been tried and proven for 2,500 years. It didn't start two years ago. It didn't start five years ago. It's something that's been passed down and it's been passed down in a very strict way from teacher to disciple. It's not that the masters

dredged something up all of a sudden and interpreted it their own way to spread a new religion. The teachings and the meditation techniques were passed down very strictly from teacher to disciple so that each successive generation was able to have pure teachings and gain realizations.

Being aware of this helps give us a lot of confidence in this method. It isn't some new ephemeral bubble that somebody developed, wrote a book and went on a talk show about, and made a million dollars selling a best-seller on. It was something that started out with a fully enlightened being who had completely pure ethics, who lived very, very simply, and who, with great compassion, took care of his disciples. They then took care of their disciples and so on down to the present day. It is important to be assured that something has the Buddha as its source, has a tried and true lineage that is tested over many years by the Indian pundits and later by the Tibetan practitioners. It's now coming to the West.

3. Teachings practiced by sages

Lastly, practice teachings which have been practiced by sages. In other words, people have gained realizations from the teachings. It isn't just something that sounds good and exotic. It's something that people have actually practiced and gained realizations from practicing it.

Review

Let's review. We talked about the qualities of the lineage, how the teachings started with the Buddha.

By the way, I should add, I received the Lamrim teachings from several of my teachers. I received most of the teachings from Lama Zopa, Serkong Rinpoche and His Holiness the Dalai Lama. I also received teachings from Gen Sonam Rinchen, Kyabje Ling Rinpoche and Geshe Yeshe Tobden. Whatever they taught me was perfect. Whatever I remember may not be. Please, if you find things that I'm saying mistaken, please come back, and we will discuss them and figure out what is going on. But just to let you know that I have received them somehow, it has been passed down in that way.

We talked about the qualities of the originators of the system and the qualities of the teachings themselves in terms of Atisha's presentation.

We saw how, if we understand the Lamrim, we'll see that none of the Buddhist teachings are contradictory. We'll know which practices go with which times. We won't get confused when we see different people practicing different things. We will be able to see that all the teachings should be taken as personal advice. They are not intellectual knowledge. They are not something to be chaffed aside. They are actually for us to practice. We will be able to pick out the Buddha's intention, in other words, the important points in all the teachings. We will be able to put them in order systematically no matter what teaching we hear from other sources. We will know where it goes on the path and we won't get confused. By understanding all of those things, the fourth benefit is that we won't develop sectarian views, but instead

will come to really have a lot of respect for other Buddhist traditions, other lineages and other masters.

With respect to Lama Tsongkhapa's particular putting together of the Lamrim, we see that it contains all of the Buddha's teachings. It's nice because we are getting the important points of all of the teachings. We are getting them in a way that's easily applicable and that's designed for meditation. It's complete with information from both the extensive lineage that emphasizes the method and compassion part of the path, and the profound lineage that emphasizes the wisdom part of the path. We are getting complementary teachings, put into the Lamrim structure from both of those lineages.

How to do analytical meditation on these topics

You might be wondering "How am I supposed to meditate on this?" Well, hopefully something of what we have said today has sunk in and made you think a little bit deeper about things. For example, we can:

1. Think about the whole issue of eating meat, and how it's not a thing to get real judgmental about. It's for us to see that different people practice in different ways.
2. Think about the fact that people have different dispositions and develop some respect for that.
3. Think about how important it is to have met a pure system of teachings, a pure originator of those teachings (i.e. Shakyamuni Buddha), a pure lineage, and pure practitioners who have actually gained the realizations.

4. Think about how important the above is, and compare it with other things that we've gotten interested in from time to time. Ask ourselves which kind of lineage do we trust more? Which kind of teacher do we trust more? Something that was developed last year, or something that was developed 2,500 years ago?

These are all different points that we can think about. In your analytical meditation, you take these points, go through the different things we covered step-by-step, and think about them in relationship to your life and in relationship to your own spiritual path.

Questions and answers

[Audience:] I am confused. It seems like you are saying something like this is right and the other ones are wrong. But I don't think that that's what you are saying. Could you elaborate please?

Yes, I wasn't saying that the Buddha's path is the only path and the other ones are wrong. From the Buddhist point of view, there is some of the gradual path to enlightenment in every religion. You will see certain common elements in all religions. Whatever elements there are in other religions that lead to enlightenment, these things are to be respected and practiced.

For example, Hinduism talks about reincarnation. That is very helpful. Now, the Buddhist view of reincarnation is slightly different from the Hindu view. But still, there are certain elements of the Hindu view that are really compatible. If we learned them, they

can help us understand the Buddhist view of reincarnation. In Christianity, Jesus taught about turning the other cheek and forgiveness and patience. We would say these are Buddhist teachings. It may come out of Jesus' mouth but it doesn't mean that because it comes out of somebody's mouth, it belongs to them. These are universal teachings. They also fit in with the Buddhist path.

If you look in Islam or Judaism, I am sure you will find certain ethical principles too, that very much apply to the Buddhist path. We would say those are also Buddhist teachings. Now, I don't know how much other religions would like us to tell them that they practice parts of Buddhist teachings, but the label "Buddhist teachings" is a very general one. It doesn't mean whatever Buddha said. It means whatever you practice that leads you on the path.

For that reason, all these different elements in the various religions are to be respected and practiced. Now, if a religion teaches something that doesn't lead to ultimate happiness, for example, if a religion says, "It's OK to kill animals, go ahead," well, that part of it isn't Buddhist teachings and we shouldn't practice that. Or if some religion says to be sectarian, then again, we don't practice that. We have to have a lot of discriminating wisdom. Other traditions have a lot of good things that we should adopt, but there may be some faulty things that we should just leave alone.

The Tibetans teach very much in terms of levels. In other words, the Tibetans teach that if you practice the Theravada tradition, you can attain arhatship, but just based on those teachings, you can't attain fully enlightened Buddhahood because it doesn't have the

deeper interpretation of emptiness, for example. They would say that the general Mahayana is very good, and it will lead you up to the tenth level of the bodhisattva path, but to become a fully enlightened Buddha you need to enter the Vajrayana. The Tibetans have placed it all into a systematic way.

However, I think that doesn't mean that one teaching is really lower than another, and that if you practice one tradition, you are inferior. I remember one of my teachers saying, "You should never put down Theravada arhats because they have many more good qualities than you do." If you look at it, and face it, many of the people in that tradition who practice that path and have seen results, have many more good qualities than me. This is something to respect and to learn from. Similarly with the general Mahayana path.

Also, you can't say that because somebody is, for instance, wearing the saffron robes of Thailand or Burma, they are not a Buddha. We don't know what that person's realizations are. They might have the complete Madhyamika understanding of emptiness. They might be a bodhisattva who's manifesting in the Theravada tradition. They might be actually, in fact, a high tantric practitioner manifesting as a Theravada teacher. How can we tell? We don't know.

Practitioners corrupting pure teachings

[Audience: inaudible]

We always say that the problem is never really with the pure teachings of the religion. The problem is with the mistaken notions of the people who call

themselves practitioners. The people who practice the religion might not be so pure. It gets all mixed in with greed, power and so on. For example, we have people killing in the name of Christ.

Is that a danger in Buddhism coming to the West? I think it is. Why? Because we are sentient beings, and our minds are completely full of pride, attachment, ignorance, jealousy, etc. As long as our minds are afflicted, they become a danger to the pure lineage of the teachings. It's really our own individual responsibility—if we really respect Buddha's teachings—to try and understand them deeply and practice them from the depth of our heart so that there is a transformative effect on our mind. If there is that transformation, our minds won't pollute the teachings. We won't misuse them. It's up to us individually to practice as well as we can to avoid that happening.

This is where the whole idea of lineage is really important—the importance of having a teacher (we'll get into this subject later)—so that we don't go off on our own trips, don't make wrong turns. We don't want to make Buddhism a part of pop culture and make up our own Buddhist tradition to fit our delusions—have samsara and pretend we are practicing for nirvana at the same time. This is really why it is important to have a close relationship with a teacher. We get a continuous input of accurate teachings. Our teacher can correct us if we start messing up.

[Audience:] To prevent this, would it help to institutionalize?

It is really difficult when a religion gets institutionalized. In one way institutionalizing something protects the core of the teachings from everybody doing their own trip. On the other hand, once you establish an institution, you become protective and you do everything in the name of your institution. This opens you up to greed and power. It's a delicate balancing act, it really is.

Humility in the teacher

[Audience: inaudible]

Well, I have no ability to read other people's level of mind. But I do know of my own experience. For me, the best examples of spiritual masters are people who are truly humble. I can see my pride is a problem and I can see it as a defilement. For me what is really good is a master who is very low key and humble. I look at somebody like the Dalai Lama. The Tibetans are all going, "His Holiness is Chenrezig. He is a Buddha," but His Holiness says, "I am just a simple monk."

What is so remarkable about His Holiness is that he is so ordinary. He doesn't go on big ego trips. He doesn't do all sorts of the extravagant this and that. He doesn't say he is this and that and the other thing. When he is with a person, he is completely with that person. You can feel his compassion for that person. To me, that's what makes him so special. Humble people in our world are very rare.

People who proclaim their qualities are numerous. I know for myself, I need a role model who is very humble. What appeals to me is the kind of teacher

who shows me an example that I know I want to become.

Finding the perfect people

[Audience: inaudible]

I am glad you brought this up because it's something I've thought about a lot too. When we go into Buddhism, all the lamas are telling us about the pure tradition and how wonderful Tibet was etc. You think, "I've finally found the perfect group of people. The Tibetans are so kind and they are so hospitable, they are so generous." It's like, "Finally, after all these hassles in the West, I found some people who are just really nice and pure."

And then you stay for a long while. You stay, and you stay, and you begin to realize Tibet is also samsara. There's greed, ignorance and hatred in the Tibetan community, too. Our Western bubble pops and we feel disillusioned, we feel let down. We had hoped so much to meet the perfect beings. But they wind up being ordinary people. We just feel shattered inside.

There are a few things going on. I think one is that we have incredible unrealistic expectations of finding perfect people.

First of all, in any society where there are sentient beings, there's greed, ignorance, and hatred and there's going to be injustice. Second of all, our own mind is polluted. We project a lot of negative qualities onto other people. Some of the faults that we are seeing might be due to our own projections. We judge

other cultures by our own pre-conceptualized cultural values. We hold onto democracy. We bow down to democracy and money, and we think everybody in the world should. We get disillusioned by our own expectations and preconceptions. Our judgments are based on our own preconceptions. We must not forget the fact that other cultures and people as a whole are sentient beings. They are just like us. Things aren't going to be perfect. We should also recognize that a religious system and the system of teachings can be very perfect, but all the people who practice them may not be. Many of them may be perfect, but because of our garbage mind, we project imperfection on them. Also, many people who call themselves Buddhist may not actually be practicing Buddhism. They may not really integrate the teachings in their hearts.

There is one thing that the Westerners wonder about a lot. In a social system like in Tibet, you talk so much about bodhicitta, and the Tibetans are friendly and they are very kind people, but why is there this whole distinction between the rich and the poor? Why were there no social institutions to show your compassion? Why didn't everybody have good education? Why wasn't there a public health system?

This is just the way their culture evolved. They had a completely different cultural view. They practice compassion in their way. They didn't see practicing compassion meaning equal education for all. We do.

I think Buddhism coming to the West will take on a very different social feeling. I think the Tibetan system is changing as a result of contact with the West and our asking these kinds of questions.

[Audience:] Do you think it is karma, especially collective karma at play in what happened to Tibet?

It is very possible that the people there experience the results of having to leave their country and its being occupied as a result of collective karma. Now, those people who experienced that may not have all been Tibetans when they created the cause for that experience. They may have been Chinese when they created the cause. Later, they were born as Tibetans and they experienced that result. But definitely karma is involved.

Action and motivation

[Audience: inaudible]

What makes an action karmically beneficial or not beneficial is your motivation. There's nothing cast in concrete. A lot of it depends on your motivation and your understanding. For example, if you say "I am a high tantric practitioner," when you are not, and use that as your justification for eating meat, that doesn't hold water. If you go on a big trip, "I am a vegetarian. Everybody has to be vegetarian!" Chances are that pride could come up. The basic thing is what is going in the mind? What's the motivation? What's the understanding?

Different people are going to have different motivations approaching a certain situation. According to your motivation, a certain physical action may be beneficial or it may be harmful, depending not so much on the action as on the mind

that's doing it.

[Audience:] Are tantric practitioners creating negative karma by eating meat?

The real tantric practitioners are not. At their level of practice, your whole intention of eating meat is because you need to keep those elements in your body strong so that you can do this very delicate meditation to realize emptiness and become a Buddha. Your whole mind is directed toward enlightenment.

It's not, "Oh, this meat tastes good and now I have an excuse to eat it." You are using it completely for your spiritual practice. Also the people at this level of the path, they are saying mantras over the meat, they are making prayers for the animal, "May I be able to lead this animal to full enlightenment." It's very different from some guy who pulls up at McDonald's and eats five hamburgers. A tantric practitioner isn't like that. If somebody rationalizes it, that's a completely different ball game.

What the precept of not killing involves

[Audience: inaudible]

Now there're different ways of presenting this subject. They say if you kill a living being, if you ask somebody else to kill it, or if you know it was killed specifically for you, then you have karma involved in the precept of not killing. For that reason, that meat should not be eaten. The lamas usually say just that.

Then the Westerners say, “But what about meat that is already in the supermarket that is killed?” The lamas say, “That’s OK.” And then the Westerners say “But you are going there to buy it, therefore you are killing it.” Then, the lamas answer, “Yes, but you didn’t ask that specific person to kill that for you. They had already done that and you happened to come into the supermarket and get it.” There is a difference involving the karma of killing whether you have the direct influence of having this animal killed for you, or doing it yourself or whatever.

CHAPTER 2

How the Teachings Should Be Studied and Taught

It is good to appreciate the attitude of wanting to attain full enlightenment for the benefit of others, even if we are cultivating it just artificially. Even if it's artificial, still, it's an incredible thing we are doing, considering that we have never ever done it in all of our previous lives! From beginningless time, we have done everything and been everything in samsara, but we've never really followed the path properly. We've never cultivated bodhicitta. Just the fact that now, we are putting in some effort, even though it might seem artificial, just the fact that we are making the thought arise in our mind this one time, you can see it is completely opposite of what we have been doing for eons and eons. It's very, very special.

Review

We have been talking about the Lamrim—the Gradual Path to Enlightenment. We've talked about two of the four basic points. The first two being the qualities of the lineage—the compilers from the Buddha down to Atisha and Lama Tsongkhapa, and the qualities of the teachings, where we talked about the benefits we received from studying the Lamrim, especially in the sense of it giving us a really thorough way of looking at all of the Buddha's teachings in a progressive manner. It is in this way that the teachings make sense

to us in terms of our personal practice. Also, we will not be confused when we meet different traditions and different teachings. We'll know how they all fit together as one whole that can lead us to enlightenment.

The last session, we started on the third basic point, which is the way the Lamrim should be studied and taught. We talked about the qualities of a teacher. First, the qualities to look for in a Vinaya teacher. In other words, the level of the teacher who gives us refuge, precepts and the basic instructions. Then even more importantly, the qualities we should look for in a Mahayana teacher—somebody who will teach us about the altruistic intention and the bodhisattva's practices. We talked about how important it is to really examine a teacher well before making the decision in our mind that he or she is our spiritual master. We should try and get somebody with all ten qualities. If we can't get somebody with ten qualities, then we get somebody with five qualities. If we can't, then get somebody who has more good qualities than bad qualities, then someone who cherishes future lives more than this life or, finally, someone who cherishes others more than themselves.

We also talked about the qualities of a disciple or student. This is not to make us feel inferior if we don't have all of these qualities ourselves, but rather, it is a way to make us see in what direction we want to try and go with our practice, and what qualities we should try and develop because these qualities will aid our progress on the path.

The first quality is being open-minded—not being overwhelmed with all of our own ideas about how

things should be. The second is being intelligent, having some kind of discerning wisdom. Here, intelligence does not mean getting good grades in school. Dharma intelligence and worldly intelligence are very different. You meet some people who are PhDs or lawyers, but if you try and teach them about the fact that our life is transient and we are going to die, they may go, “You’re talking nonsense. I do not understand that at all!” [Laughter.] People with a lot of worldly intelligence may not understand simple Dharma things. This is because of previous negative actions that obscure the mind and present pre-conceptions and afflictions. “Intelligence” here does not mean worldly intelligence; it means Dharma intelligence, which is a very different thing. It depends very much on our merit, our open-mindedness, and our ability to grasp the principles.

Also, Dharma intelligence is not something that we just get at birth and that’s all we have. We bring some Dharma intelligence with us from previous lives, but we can also generate more Dharma intelligence. This can be done in three ways. First of all, by listening to the teachings, then by reflecting on them, and then by meditating on them. Buddhism says, “Yes, our intelligence can increase.” We do not have a fixed Dharma IQ. It can be increased in this very life.

The third quality of a good student is somebody who is sincerely interested in the teachings and has commitment to the practice. Somebody who really wants to make progress on the path. In other words, somebody who is earnest and not just playing games and wasting their time.

Today we are going to go on to the topics “How to

listen to the Dharma” and “How to explain the Dharma”.

The Way to Study (Listen to) the Dharma

How to listen to the Dharma refers to when we are on the side of the audience or students. But I must say that sometimes when I am teaching, I listen to what I am saying and I go, “Boy, I’d better think about this, this is really hot stuff!” [Laughter.] So you listen to yourself, too!

Attitudes to avoid

Some of the attitudes we want to avoid when we’re listening to the Dharma is first of all, having an attitude of collecting teachings. You see this often. People collect teachings or initiations like they are collecting postage stamps. They just want to accumulate more. But the thing with Dharma is, it’s not a matter of just getting a lot, it’s really a thing of having the right intention. We come to the teachings not just to get them, but with the idea of putting them into practice. We want to avoid just collecting teachings without having any real interest in practice.

Another thing we want to avoid is even though we have the intent to come and listen, we do not really understand the benefits of listening to teachings. When some obstacles come, our minds become discouraged and we lose energy. This comes about because we haven’t really understood the benefits of listening to teachings. Sometimes you come to the

teachings and your legs hurt, or your mind's distracted or you are tired. You say, "I should have stayed at home. This is a waste of time," then you just quit. Or maybe you come to the teachings and the teacher's saying all sorts of things that are pushing buttons. You would rather not listen. [Laughter.] Again, the mind gets discouraged or wants to go away. This happens very easily. To some extent, listening to teachings can be somewhat of a hardship. But the more we understand the benefits of listening, the more courage we'll have to overcome our hardships. It's like when you go to work, if you understand the benefits of getting your pay check, you will have a lot of perseverance to overcome the hardship of your job. [Laughter.] Listening to teachings is similar in this way. That's why we have to talk about the benefits of listening to teachings.

CONSIDER THE BENEFITS OF LISTENING TO TEACHINGS

First of all, by listening to teachings, our own wisdom increases. We come in contact with wisdom and compassion. We come in contact with virtuous attitudes. These qualities will then automatically arise within us much more easily. By the power of listening to the teachings, whatever compassion and wisdom already in us starts to come out more and more.

Secondly, the Dharma is our best friend. Whenever we run into difficulties, our one lasting friend is going to be the Dharma. We can't always be with our worldly friends, but we will always have the Dharma. Whatever teachings we've heard stay in our mind.

Whatever situations we find ourselves in, we can then recall those teachings. The teachings become our real friend. Whenever we have problems, if we can't call up a real friend, we can call up a Dharma teaching. We apply the Dharma teachings to our problems.

Somebody wrote me a letter. This is real cute. This person came to a course in Tushita (a Dharma center in Dharamsala, India). We had many interesting discussions there. This person was somebody who was truly taken by the teachings. He was 24 years old and spent a quarter of his life in the Israeli army. Coming from that into hearing the Dharma teachings was a real about face for him. Later, he was traveling and he wrote me a letter. He said in his travels, he would meet different circumstances and he would think, "What would the Dharma be saying about this?" "What would Chodron say about this?" He said it really helped him understand what was going on. This is one benefit that you receive by listening to teachings. You have the internal Dharma friend with you all the time.

Another benefit is that whatever Dharma realization and understanding you have can never be robbed from you. People can take your money, take your credit cards, take your possessions, but they can never rob your Dharma understanding.

This is something really precious. Our Dharma understanding is ours. Nobody can take it with. You look at the example of the Tibetans, after their country was overrun. Having been in Dharamsala many years, I have talked to people who have been in the most incredible situations and heard how their Dharma understanding, their hearing of the teachings

and their own internal integration of the teachings have helped them.

I talked to one Lama who was imprisoned. The place they imprisoned him was his family's house. They took over his family's house and turned it into a prison. He was imprisoned there and in other places around Tibet for 16 years. He told me that he did retreats while in prison. From having heard all the teachings, he knew how to do the meditations. They were only let out of their rooms twice a day, to go to the bathroom and take a walk. The rest of his time he sat in his own room and did all of his practices and made use of his imprisonment like he was on retreat. It was incredible meeting him because after 16 years in prison, his mind was still really buoyant and he was a happy and easy-going person. He wasn't at all neurotic.

At one science conference with His Holiness, His Holiness was astonished to learn that many Westerners had low self-esteem. We also talked about post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTS). His Holiness said that most Tibetans don't suffer much from this. Some of them may have a few problems, but not to the extent of other people in similar situations who had been subjugated to torture and imprisonment. The scientists were completely shocked by this. There was one guy there whose whole profession was dealing with PTS. He could not believe it when he heard these stories about how the Tibetans survived these horrible atrocities in prison—being beaten, having electric cattle rods put on the body. Some of them might have a few problems, but they were not complete basket cases. I think this really comes through the force of

their Dharma practice. By knowing how to put all these horrible things in perspective, and by being able to generate a positive attitude in spite of what's going on around you.

How do we put horrible things that happen to us in perspective? When we have bad situations, we think these happen due to our own negative karma in the past. It is good that it's ripening now and finishing up, rather than ripening in the future into some really horrendous rebirth. One Lama I went to visit, I asked him how he practiced in the prison, and this was what he told me. This exact same technique. This was how he practiced and made his happy mind while in prison. He also said he practiced the teachings on love and compassion. He tried to see kindness in the people who were imprisoning him, and to remember that they were sentient beings who wanted happiness and who didn't want problems just like him. This was how he was able to survive the whole horrendous experience.

We can see the benefits of listening to Dharma teachings through these examples. Whatever you hear you can take with you no matter what situation you encounter, no matter what's going on around you. If we practice the Dharma teachings well now, then when we die—we're all going to have to die—the teachings can be our great friend on the passage to the future life. Dying becomes a joyful thing instead of being something that is feared. We have the Dharma techniques and teachings to make our mind happy at the time of death. These are just some of the benefits that come from listening to teachings.

Also, if people want to meditate, we have to listen to the teachings first. Some Westerners do not

understand this. They just want to meditate, but what are you going to meditate on? [Laughter.] You need teachings to understand what to meditate on. Meditation is not just sitting there making your mind blank. Meditation is a very specific technique—knowing what the subject of the meditation is, knowing how to develop it in your mind, knowing where you want to go with it, and knowing how to do it. The teachings are tools which benefit your meditation.

Also, by listening to the teachings, our ability to help others increases. You'll find that having heard Dharma teachings, when other people come to you with their problems, you're going to have additional tools at your fingertips to help them. You're going to have a much more balanced and loving mind while helping them. The benefits are twofold. First, it increases your ability to help other people because your own qualities increase, and also your relationships with other people become better and more honest. Secondly, by knowing all the different techniques and teachings, you know you're going to have something to give other people when they come to you with different problems.

The trick is to learn to be real skillful when your friends come to you with their problems. You don't need to use a lot of Buddhist words: "OK, you have to sit down, take refuge in Buddha, Dharma, Sangha!" You don't have to talk about anything religious. By understanding attachment and how to be free of it, anger and how to be free of it, you can give guidelines to your friends that will help them without talking about any doctrine. This is possible because

Buddhism is basically a wise way of living. It's a viable psychology. So as you listen to the teachings and learn these things, you'll have more to give to other people as well.

It's important to think of the benefits that we can get from listening to teachings. This increases our enthusiasm to practice and also increases our ability to put up with sore knees! [Laughter.]

SHOWING COURTESY TO THE DHARMA AND THE TEACHER

The second point is showing courtesy to the Dharma and the teacher. People have asked about etiquette in the teachings, and a little bit of that comes in this section. Traditionally speaking, you should have a clean room, and you should set up a seat for the teacher. It's good if the teacher sits higher than others. First of all, it is to show respect for the Dharma. You are putting the Dharma up, not the person. Second of all, so that the teacher can have eye contact with the people. Personally speaking, when I've had to give teachings where I'm on the same level as everybody and can only see the people in the front row, that's a big hindrance to be really effective in talking to the group. Having the teacher sit at a higher level has a double purpose here.

The audience should be standing when the teacher comes in. After the teacher makes the prostrations and sits down, then generally the students make their prostrations and sit down. This is something that has to come slowly and in a comfortable way in the West. I've told you before that when I first saw people

prostrate, I thought it was ungodly—“This is really weird!” [Laughter.] I don’t think new comers should be pressed into prostration. It should be something that comes naturally. You should first understand what it means and how to think when doing it, as well as the benefit of doing it. Prostrating and bowing should be something that feels comfortable to you.

There is a difference in Asian and Western ways regarding this. Actually, in terms of Dharma etiquette, you’re supposed to prostrate after the teacher sits down (before the teaching starts), and also at the end of the teaching, either after the dedication while the teacher’s still sitting there, or sometimes after the teacher leaves. It’s another way of showing respect to the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. Once I was teaching at Kirkland, at a Chinese temple. After the teachings, the Chinese nun said to me, “Oh the people didn’t bow after the teaching!” And I said to them, “Look, I was glad that they did before! [Laughter.] Let’s not push it here.” [Laughter.]

When you’re listening to the teachings, do not put your Dharma materials on the floor. Just as you would not put your delicious cookies on the floor because the floor’s dirty, you also do not put your spiritual nourishment in a dirty place. Incidentally, just while I am talking about this, it’s better not to put figures of the Buddha, Buddha’s texts and sacred items or materials in the bathroom. Somebody might say, “Why? The Buddha should be anywhere. We should be able to take these things to the bathroom. We’re just being too formal.” Well, on one hand you can say that is true. Buddha’s omniscient mind is everywhere. The Buddha is in the bathroom, that’s OK. But on the

other hand, we don't put our bank book in the bathroom, and we don't put our old family treasures in the bathroom. [Laughter.] Our mind does make some difference between what we put in the bathroom and what we don't. So it is better to put your Buddha statues and your Dharma things in a higher place. Of course, you can recite mantra in the bathroom; that is OK. This is just a guideline. You can check it out and see what feels comfortable to you; see if this reasoning makes sense to you.

Also in terms of etiquette, when your legs start hurting and you have to stretch them out, it's better not to point your feet directly towards the teacher or towards the figure of the Buddha. In Asian cultures, your feet are really something dirty because you walk around bare foot, and you're walking around on all sorts of things in Asia. Like when you go to Dharamsala, and you're going into the temple, don't take your shoes off and climb over people with your shoes over their head—they completely freak out. That is part of Asian culture. Then we start to think: What about the American culture? When we sit, do we put our feet on somebody's face? We usually do not, do we? [Laughter.] Where we put our feet does have some meaning in our culture, though it may not be as strong as in Asian culture. It's good to have some kind of awareness about our body language.

Similarly, when you are listening to teachings, we have a setting here where people are sitting on chairs and you are leaning back. This is perfectly OK because it'll be difficult to sit on the chair without leaning back. [Laughter.] But generally speaking, when you are listening to teachings, try and keep your

body erect. This is helpful for you because when you have an erect body, you listen with more attention. It does not mean erect like a soldier but as opposed to lying down. Also it makes it much easier for the teacher to teach when everybody has their head facing up. It is easier for the teacher if you are sitting in a respectful way and it is easier for your own ability to listen. We should be relaxed and comfortable when we are listening to teachings, but not so relaxed and so comfortable that we're going to fall asleep in the middle of them. If you're going to fall asleep you can do that without leaning also—I have done that. I have one friend, a nun. She always sits listening to the teaching calmly and perfectly. I said to her, “You always look so beautiful when you listen to teachings. You're really concentrating.” She said, “Sometimes I'm sleeping.” [Laughter.]

When you are listening to teachings, you do not have to close your eyes and sit in a meditation position. My teachers have said, when you are listening, you should be wide-awake and listening. This is also not the time to be saying mantras with your mala or rosary. If you are saying mantras and trying to listen to the teaching at the same time, you are not as concentrated. It's good to say mantras but not at the time of the teaching.

Also, you do not chatter during teachings. When you're teaching and there are people in the audience talking to each other, it's really distracting. Or if you're sitting next to your boyfriend and girlfriend, that is not the time you should be holding hands and making eyes at each other. By the way, at teachings, the Sangha should sit in the front and the laypeople

behind. But many Westerners don't know this, and they sit in front of the Sangha. I've sometimes gotten stuck behind some couple. They're making gaga eyes at each other and I'm trying to listen to the teaching! That's not the time to be doing that. [Laughter.]

These are just some of the things to be aware of.
Do you have any questions so far on this?

[Audience:] Is it all right to write on Dharma texts?

I think a lot of that depends on our mind and our attitude. We should never use Dharma texts as scratch paper, as doodle paper, to write down people's phone number on them, stuff like that. Taking notes is one thing if you are doing it with a good motivation. If we're writing on our Dharma texts with the thought that this is a way that's going to help us study and learn the Dharma, then we are not using the Dharma texts as scratch paper. My teacher made a comment once. He said to imagine that you are offering color. He said when you write on a Dharma text, underline or jot down a note, think of it like you are offering color to the Dharma text. I think in that way, it becomes an offering rather than you defacing it.

[Audience:] How do we dispose of Dharma texts?

Don't put them at the bottom of the garbage can with your banana peels or orange peels on top [laughter], but you keep them separate and burn them. There's a specific prayer that you can say, or even if you do not have the prayer, it's no big deal. But it's essentially imagining that you're sending the Dharma off and

requesting it to come back again. Save the papers and then burn them in some place that is clean.

[Audience: inaudible]

Actually, strictly speaking, it says in the scriptures that any written words which could be used to express Dharma meaning should be burned. I remember once after we heard this (I was living in a Dharma Center then), we started tearing all the labels off the tin cans. It just became an impossible thing. There's no way that you can burn everything that has written words on it. We have written words on our sidewalk, on our street, on our shoes, don't we? The basic idea is to be aware and to mentally think, "I'm not trampling on the written word." The idea here is not that this is SACRED (where it says "STOP" on the street), but it's the whole idea of appreciating the value of written language and what it can do for us. The teachings were passed down orally for many centuries before they were written down. The ability to use written language is precious. Without it, we would have a difficult time learning, wouldn't we? We couldn't hold everything in our minds. If you're driving over "STOP", or you're walking over written words, it's good to be aware and think mentally, "I still treasure the written word in my heart even if these are not specifically Dharma words. I appreciate the language ability that can be used to express the Dharma meaning."

[Audience:] Is it OK to recycle Dharma materials?

Yes it is. The ink is removed from the paper and just the paper is recycled. It's important for us Buddhist to be conscious of our environment and help the environment. This is part of the practice of loving-kindness.

THE ACTUAL WAY TO STUDY

Avoiding the three faults, using the analogy of a pot

Study means to hear and also read all the different teachings. Using the analogy of a pot, we have to avoid the three faults. This is a really good technique. It's like a mirror for our mind to help us check up on how we are listening or how we are studying.

1. Upside-down pot

There is one way of studying that's like an upside-down pot. When the pot's upside down, you might have this incredible nectar but it cannot get into the pot because the pot is upside down. That's analogous to when we come to teachings but our mind is completely spaced out and inattentive. Your body is here but nothing's going in. Your mind is at work, or it's on a holiday or it's thinking about your friend. Even though your body is here, nothing's going inside the mind. It's like an upside down pot. We can see the disadvantages of that. As soon as you leave the teaching, and somebody who is not at the teaching asks, "What did she talk about?" you go, "Urrr ... hmm ... something about the Dharma," [laughter] because somehow, nothing went in.

That is the upside down pot. The point is when we come to teachings, we should try to be attentive, as attentive as we can. Drink a cup of coffee before coming, or splash your face with water, or generate a strong motivation. When you notice your mind wondering off, tell yourself, “Hey, wait a minute. I am here. I should remember the benefits of listening.” Then put your mind back on the subject again.

2. Leaky pot

The second fault is to be like a leaky pot. A leaky pot has the right side up, and things go in, but they leak out. In the end you are left with zilch. Again, you are here and you are paying attention, but as soon as you go home, you can't remember what was talked about. It doesn't stay in the mind. To combat that, you have to listen attentively and that's where taking notes comes in very helpful. What I find very good is when you leave a teaching, instead of talking about blah, blah, blah, try to recall and remember the points that were discussed in the teaching. That's why I have a little digestion meditation at the end. To help us try and remember at least the major points so that we can remember them and think about them in depth later on.

To avoid being a leaky pot, we need some kind of consistency in our mind, some ability to hold the material not only during the teaching, but also to carry it with us afterwards. What's really very helpful is whatever you've heard, try and use that in your daily life immediately afterwards. Try and think about the teaching when it's fresh in your mind. Try and relate

the different things that happen in your life to the teaching you've just heard. Try and think about certain things that struck you from the teaching as you're walking around.

3. *Dirty pot*

The third kind of pot is a pot that's upright, doesn't have a hole, but is filled with junk. If you pour your nectar in, "Yaks!" [Laughter.] It'll just be polluted. This is like when we are attentive, and we can remember the teachings afterwards, but our mind is so filled with pre-conceptions and wrong motivations that we pollute whatever we hear.

For example, this would be like coming to the teachings with the idea of "I am going to learn a lot so that I can become a big teacher and everybody will respect me." Or "I am going to learn a lot so that I can point out the mistakes of all my fellow students." [Laughter.] When the teacher's talking about anger, instead of looking at your anger, you nudge the guy next to you and say, "Hey, the teacher's talking about anger, look at *your* anger." That's wrong motivation—you are using the Dharma to lay a trip on somebody else. The Dharma should be a mirror for our own mind.

We want to avoid these three faults of being:

1. An upside-down pot where we come to teachings but nothing goes in
2. A leaky pot where we come to the teachings, we listen, but we forget it right away.
3. A dirty pot where we come, the teaching enters,

we remember it, but our motivation is completely polluted, so there is no real sense in our coming for teachings.

Go over these examples when you are doing your analytical meditation. Think what are examples when I'm like a leaky pot, and what am I going to do about it? Think, am I a dirty pot, and what can I do about it? Think about these examples.

Relying on the six recognitions

We will now go on to “How to listen to teachings by relying on the six recognitions.” These are six things we should try and recognize. They are actually very, very fruitful for contemplation. Think about them in terms of your own life.

1. Oneself as a sick person

The first recognition is to recognize oneself as a sick person. They say that if you get this one, the other five come real easily. This is the basic one. What does it mean to recognize oneself as a sick person? It means to be perfectly honest with ourselves about the fact that everything is not hunky-dory in our lives. It's funny, because somehow in our country, we always put on a big facade that everything is great, don't we? “How are you?” “Oh, I'm FINE!” It is almost as if something is wrong with you if you have a problem. Here, what we are trying to understand is to admit that “Hold on, I don't have to put on a big show that everything is fantastic in my life, and that I am a super

together person.” “I am going to be honest and admit I’m not a completely together person. And everything isn’t wonderful in my life.” Not in the sense of admitting these things and “Poor me! All my problems!” but just in the sense of recognizing them with a wise mind, “I’m a sick person. I suffer from ignorance, attachment & anger. I suffer from the results of my own harmful actions. I suffer by being selfish but like any sick person, I want to be well. And I have the potential to be well.”

Recognizing ourselves as a sick person—what it comes down to, is being honest about the fact that we are in samsara. Samsara is full of problems but we are capable of having a higher state and a greater happiness. It also comes down to the point of approaching the teachings in a very humble way. When you’re sick and you go to the doctor, you go with a very open, receptive mind. You want to learn what’s wrong with you. You don’t go to the doctor real arrogant “I know it all!” It’s similar here. If we come to teachings with the attitude of “I’ve heard these all before. I know it. Why don’t you tell me something new?” Or “What do you know anyway?” An arrogant and proud attitude completely closes our mind down and prevents us from learning anything from the teaching. But recognizing that we are sick with ignorance, anger and attachment makes us humble, makes us open and then we can receive benefit from attending the teachings, reading Dharma books and discussing the Dharma with our friends. An attitude of humility is important.

2. The teacher as a skilled doctor

Not only are we a sick person, but we see whoever is teaching as a skilled doctor. The person who is teaching is like a doctor who can diagnose our illness and then prescribe the medicine.

3. Dharma as the medicine

The Dharma is medicine. When you are coming to the teachings, it's like going to the doctor's office. You're getting medicine with which to deal with your problem. It is very important to listen to the Dharma with this attitude: "This is medicine. All my emotional turmoil, all my confusion, my whole situation of being in this life where I get old and sick and die without choice—these all could be cured by what I am hearing." When you have this attitude, then what you hear, even one sentence is very precious and it really goes in your mind. It becomes very powerful. If you contemplate this well and can try to come to the teachings with that attitude, then even one sentence can make an incredible impact on your mind. The Dharma becomes a remedy for whatever problems you have.

4. Practicing the Dharma as the way to get cured

We are a sick person, the teacher is the doctor, the Dharma is the medicine, and practicing the Dharma is the way to get cured. After the doctor gives us the medicine, we do not just take it home and put it on the shelf. We have to take the medicine and put it in our mouth. Similarly, when we come home after a teaching or when we've read Dharma books or gone

to discussions, we have to come home and put what we learned into practice in our life. One of my teachers, Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey, used to say to us, “You write so many notes in class, note book after note book after note book, and then they all go on the top shelf and collect dust!” He said that shouldn’t be the way. We should take what we’ve heard and practice it. When you take the medicine, then it can heal you. When you practice the Dharma, then it transforms your mind.

5. Buddha as holy being whose medicine of Dharma is non-deceptive

Try also to recognize the Buddha as a holy being whose medicine of Dharma is non-deceptive. In other words, we are getting the right medicine. We are getting real, solid medicine that’s really effective in curing our illness. The Buddha is a holy being who is able to teach us that. Why? His great realizations made it possible.

6. Methods we learn are things we should pray exist and flourish

[Teachings lost due to change of tape. See “Questions and answers” below for a brief explanation.]

How to Explain the Dharma

CONSIDERING THE BENEFITS OF

EXPLAINING THE DHARMA

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

... Also your friends tend to be more steadfast. Again I think this happens because if you are teaching, then you try to practice what you preach. Automatically, your relationships with people improve. Your friendships are more steadfast. Your words are respected. What you have to say is worthwhile. When you're talking about the Dharma, you are not just blah, blah, blah, gossip, gossip. It has a real purifying effect on your speech. You can feel it. When you spend the whole afternoon gossiping about everybody else's mistakes, how do you feel afterwards? If you spend the whole evening in a Dharma discussion, you will feel differently about yourself. Your speech will be different. There is a purifying effect on your speech when you talk about the Dharma with other people. Your mental happiness increases. You might get sore legs too, [laughter] but mentally, the mind becomes very happy. I can say this from my personal experience. Somehow after I teach I always feel really happy. It's happened to me many times. I may not have felt well before the teaching, but while teaching, I forget that I was sick. The same with going to a group meditation session. There are times when I haven't felt well but I kind of dragged myself to puja, and somehow I came out feeling great. It's also happened going to attend a teaching. I wasn't feeling well, physically, or sometimes mentally, but that feeling vanishes in the process of being close to the Dharma.

These are some of the benefits of offering the Dharma.

ENHANCING THE COURTESY SHOWN TO THE BUDDHA AND DHARMA

From the teacher's side, enhancing the courtesy shown to the Buddha and the Dharma. In the Tibetan tradition, at the beginning of a teaching, the teacher comes in and bows three times. When you as the teacher are bowing, you are imagining before you the whole lineage of teachers—from the Buddha through all the Indian sages, through the Tibetan sages, the whole lineage of teachers—and bowing to them. You connect with that lineage and sincerely pay respects to all the teachers, and the teachers' teachers who have so kindly passed the Dharma on down to you from the time of the Buddha. When you are prostrating, you are prostrating to that whole lineage. When you sit down you imagine that all of them dissolve into you.

You may have noticed that the teachers sometimes snap their fingers when they sit down. This is to remember impermanence. Like a finger-snap, things do not last long. This is also to counteract pride so that you don't get proud as a teacher. You don't think "*I am sitting on a higher place than everybody else, I am teaching them all these things and they are paying respect to me!*" To prevent your mind from getting into any of that kind of rubbish, you snap your fingers and remember every single situation is impermanent. There is nothing to get attached to, nothing to cling on to. Then people will usually recite some homages to

the Buddha and the Heart Sutra. The idea of reciting the Heart Sutra is to dispel interferences by clearing karmically and mentally dispelling any kind of interferences. We also take refuge and generate bodhicitta. The Seven-limb prayer is also often done, as well as the mandala offering.

Offering the mandala is actually the part of the students, the idea being that the students offer everything in the whole entire universe to the teacher to request the Dharma teachings which are even more valuable than the entire universe. You'll see this in the Tibetan tradition. Often at the beginning of the teachings, the students will do the mandala offering. On the first day of the teachings, somebody (usually the people who requested the teachings) will stand up and make three prostrations to the teacher. They have a tray with a statue of the Buddha, a Dharma text and a stupa. The statue represents the body of the Buddha, the text represents the Buddha's speech and the stupa, the Buddha's mind. Then using a khata, a white cloth, they first offer the mandala (representing the universe). The teacher accepts it and puts it aside. Then they offer the Buddha's statue (representing the Buddha's body), and the teacher accepts it, touches it to their head and puts it aside. Then the text, and then the stupa are offered, followed sometimes by an additional offering. The idea of making offerings is to show respect for the Dharma teachings. It's also a way of creating a lot of positive potential before listening to teachings. If you create positive potential and purify your mind, then the Dharma goes in at a much deeper level.

Now, here in the West, at teaching sessions like

this, I usually do the Heart Sutra silently. This is a habit I've got into because most of the people in the West don't know the Heart Sutra. If I sit and chant aloud before teaching, people are going to think, "This is some weird, Tibetan thing!" So I usually just have people meditate and then I mentally recite the Heart Sutra and do other preparatory practices for teaching. Also, for people in the West, it's very good to meditate before teachings because we've been running around so busy all day. We really need that time to sit.

It's interesting. One time, someone asked one of my teachers for advice on making a center in the West. Geshe-la advised that when people come together as a Dharma group, it should be for teachings and discussions, not for meditation. People can do meditation on their own. Geshe-la's translator who was a Western woman and I, both told Geshe-la, with all due respect, that we felt the situation is different for Westerners. First of all, people need to meditate but they lead such busy lives that for many of them, the time when they come together is the only time they have to sit. When they go home, there are kids, TV and so many other distractions. Even if people have time to meditate at home, they need to calm their mind down after a busy day before listening to a teaching. In this way when they listen to the teachings, the teachings go in.

Meditation is a really valuable thing to do together as a group before teachings. I really think so, and it is for this reason that I change the usual protocol when I teach and have people meditate beforehand. Also, if I am teaching an old group of students, it's one thing

(you people like saying the prayers). But if I go to teach at a bookstore, I am not going to take prayer sheets along and have these people reading prayers before a talk. It just doesn't fit. When I talk to different groups, I change the protocol accordingly to fit the different audiences. But for Westerners, meditation is definitely very important. The Tibetans like doing a lot of rituals and chanting. Some of us like doing that too, but I think our lives are so full of words, it is nice just to be able to sit quietly. That's why I had us do the silent meditation, preceded by the prayers—the prayers to help us generate a proper motivation, the silent meditation to calm our mind down.

We also try to generate bodhicitta. Even though we have already generated it when we say the prayers (before the meditation), we do it again strongly (after the meditation) before the teachings because the motivation is the most important part of any action. It's really important to constantly cultivate a good motivation for what we are doing.

These come under the responsibility of the teacher in showing courtesy to the Buddha and the Dharma when one is teaching.

THOUGHT AND ACTIONS WITH WHICH TO TEACH

As a teacher, you don't teach for fame. You teach not because you want everybody to go around saying, "Oh, these were such good teachings, you should invite this person to come teach at your center." You also do not think, "Yes, I'm such a good teacher.

Look how many people are inviting me.” As a teacher, you don’t get into any kind of ego trip for fame or reputation. This is completely counter-productive. It is very harmful to yourself and the students. Also, you don’t want to get into a mind that is thinking about offerings, “If I go and teach, how much are they going to give me?” Teaching out of a desire to receive offerings is a very bad motivation. It completely pollutes the process. You should teach with a good motivation, out of a genuine sincere care for the students.

You should give unmistakable teachings. In other words, you teach as you have been taught by your teacher in the lineage of teachings. You don’t make up your own thing. You don’t mix the Dharma in with all the other things you read in the new age newsletter. Or if you do bring other points in that relate to other fields, you say, (like you’ll hear me say sometimes) “This is something I learned when I studied Communication,” or “This is something I’ve learned from Mediation Theory that I’m applying here to the teachings.” If you bring in any other material, then you introduce it like that. As a teacher, you should always give pure teachings, something that is the Buddha’s word, coming down in that way.

They also say you should teach in an intelligible way so that people can understand your words. You should not be mumbling. You should teach with examples from daily life so that people can make the Dharma applicable to their life, so that they can understand it. This is a great challenge I find as a Western teacher. I have listened to the teachings with all the Tibetan stories and examples. Like the story

about the guy who danced around and hit the bag of tsampa on the ceiling and the tsampa bag crashed down on his head and killed him—that was to illustrate death and impermanence. [Laughter.] They have certain stories written into the Lamrim, but I think our challenge as Westerners is to bring in stories that relate to our life.

When you teach, you should teach enthusiastically, and not think it's hard work. "I've got a teaching again tonight—what a horrible thing!" Instead of having that attitude, you should enjoy it. You see teaching as a pleasure.

You should teach only what's useful. In other words, you don't teach everything you know simply because you know it. The idea isn't to spell off everything you know so that other people are impressed. The idea is to teach what is useful to the other person. I think this is something that is very helpful for us even in our general life. Teaching Dharma is to speak what is useful to the other person, not everything we know about the subject. We should also not be miserly in teaching, not to feel "The Dharma teachings are mine, and I don't want to teach you because then you might know more than me." In other words, we should teach with a real generous heart, with a real open-heartedness and attitude of sharing. Not "I'm keeping the teachings for myself, I don't want you to have these teachings because maybe you will learn them and become more famous than me." Our minds can get into weird things. This is getting into the point of always having a good motivation.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WHOM TO TEACH AND WHOM NOT TO TEACH

Generally speaking you don't teach unless you've been requested. Again, in the West, some things are a little bit different because people don't know that they're supposed to request teachings. [Laughter.] They think that you as the teacher, are supposed to come and say, "Now this is what we are going to study." But in actual fact, the way it's usually done is you're supposed to request, and you're supposed to request three times. That's the more traditional way. This is to let you know that you shouldn't be shy about asking for teachings. If there is a particular text or whatever that you want teaching about, it's perfectly all right to go and request the teachings. Generally speaking, in the old style, you only teach when you've been asked to. But in a way, it fits now too because teachers only come when Dharma students ask them to come. There are exceptions, but basically it depends on the people. By people's interest, you draw a teacher and request teachings.

The teacher should also be able to discriminate which students are ready for which subjects. The teacher should not just teach anything to anybody. They should really know different people's level of mind and teach them accordingly. If somebody has a disposition for Theravada teachings, you give that. If they have a disposition for Mahayana, you give that. You give something that is suitable for the person. You need to know the students as much as you can before giving the teaching. Obviously that is impossible if you have a huge crowd. When His Holiness teaches,

there're thousands and thousands of people. He doesn't screen everybody in advance. But you will notice when he teaches, in the course of one teaching, he will give something for everybody. His Holiness is so skillful. He will start out a Dharma talk talking about something so simple that mom and pa who just came from Tibet and are illiterate can really understand. Then he will go into this incredibly deep philosophy that only the people in the front row will understand. And then he will come out and crack a joke to wake everybody up and say something again that everybody can understand. Even though he can't screen the audience, he gives something in the teaching for everybody. Sometimes he does screen an audience. There've been times when he says, "OK, I am giving a certain tantric initiation. Everybody who comes to this should have been a Buddhist for at least five years." There are times he will give conditions like this.

Review

We talked about the way to study and the way to explain the Dharma. In terms of studying, we should think about the benefits of listening to the Dharma. This will increase our enthusiasm and perseverance. The benefits include increasing our wisdom, the fact that our Dharma understanding is our best friend, our Dharma realizations can't be stolen away from us, and learning the teachings gives us the whole foundation for meditation.

We also talked about showing courtesy to the Dharma and to the teacher, in the sense of arranging

the seat, making prostrations, offering the mandala, sitting in a respectful position.

The actual way to study is by avoiding the three faults: an upside-down pot where nothing goes in (we are inattentive during the teachings), the pot with a hole (things coming in but we forget the teachings afterwards), and the dirty pot (the teachings come in, we remember, but because our motivation is to pick at others' fault, or to become famous ourselves, we completely pollute what we've heard).

We talked about the importance of relying on the six recognitions. Especially the first one, recognizing ourselves as a person who is suffering from attachment, anger and ignorance, who is under the control of our previous karma. It is like going to a doctor, our teacher, for treatment. We see the teachings as medicine. We see taking the Dharma teachings home and practicing them as the way of taking medicine and getting cured. We regard the Buddhas as holy beings who have given us an undeceptive medicine. We also regard the teachings as something very precious that we pray will exist and flourish in the world.

Then, we talked about how to explain the Dharma and the benefits of teaching the Dharma. The gift of the Dharma is the highest gift. Giving Dharma books to friends is a very nice gift. At Christmas time, your friends have already received ten fruitcakes. They don't need another fruitcake! It's nice to consider Dharma books as gifts for people. At one retreat, a woman came up to me. Her goddaughter was graduating from University. She wanted to give her a Dharma book and had me write something in it. She

said her goddaughter doesn't know anything about the Dharma, but because they have a good relationship, the girl will at least read this and take something in. I thought this was really nice. It made me really happy.

The gift of Dharma is the highest of all gifts. It benefits ourselves too when we teach. The Dharma helps us get the material clear in our own mind, develops our intelligence, and develops our mindfulness to practice. It makes our speech more powerful, clearer and more reliable. It makes our relationships with other people better. It makes our own mind happy. Sometimes it makes your throat sore too but we don't pay much attention to that. [Laughter.] It's true. When you can talk about the Dharma with people, you feel as though you are really giving others something that's worthwhile. You are giving something from the heart and something that can be beneficial to them. It's a nice feeling to do that.

We also talked about showing courtesy to the Buddha and the Dharma from the teacher's side. You make prostrations to the lineage of lamas, they absorb into you as you say the Heart Sutra. You lead everybody in doing the various prayers. Then there's the mandala offering and then you lead everybody in cultivating the motivation. And then, the Tibetan style is you unwrap the text and you touch it to your head before you start the teachings. You'll see the Tibetans do this a lot, touching things to their head. It's a way of showing respect.

Then we went over the thoughts and actions with which to teach. The most important is the motivation. In other words, not for fame and offerings, financial

gains, but out of real sincere care for the people that you are teaching. You should teach intelligently. They say you shouldn't teach like an old man eating something—he chews the soft parts and spits out the hard ones. [Laughter.] You shouldn't teach only the nice things, but try and make yourself capable of teaching even the hard things. Give examples that are related to people's lives. Give pure and unmistakable teachings. Do not think it's hard work, but approach it with joyfulness. Teach only what is useful to other people. Do not be miserly when you're teaching, wanting to hold the teachings for yourself or being lazy.

And then, we talked about the difference between whom to teach and whom not to teach. Generally speaking, you teach when you're requested. You don't go around inviting yourself, "Here I am. The great guru is here to teach." You teach because other people asked. As I have said, usually you have to ask three times. (When somebody tells you "No" the first time, don't despair.) You should also get to know the audience, to know what level the audience is at and teach according to their level of understanding. If you are doing some kind of high teaching, you should either screen the audience beforehand or make sure they have the adequate preparation.

Here we've talked about the first three of the major points in the Lamrim—the qualities of the compilers, the qualities of the teachings and how the teachings should be studied and practiced.

Next, we'll get into the fourth point which is the basic "soya" of the material—any vegetarians around

here [laughter]—how to lead somebody in the Gradual Path. Now, as I have said in the first talk, the Gradual Path as written by Lama Tsongkhapa presupposes a whole lot of other material. This is a good point to talk about some of the things that are pre-supposed, for example, rebirth. Rebirth is a subject that can be very difficult for us. I will use the next session to explain rebirth and ways to approach it to gain some conviction. Much of what we are going to learn is easier to understand if you have an understanding of rebirth. I will also talk a little bit about karma. Karma is actually discussed later in the Lamrim. But again, some understanding of karma will help you to understand a lot of the things that come early in the text. I will talk a little bit about the different realms of existence too, because they're mentioned earlier in the text. If you don't know anything about them, it can create obstacles in your mind. Also, feel free next session to bring out any other things that you feel are preconditions to learning Buddhism, that haven't been explained fully. For example, the existence of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. They assume at the beginning that you believe Buddha exists. But we Westerners, when we come to the teaching, we don't assume Buddha exists. We will talk about some of these things so that as we get into the rest of the text, they will become much easier.

Questions and answers

[Audience:] Should we ask teachers questions, or should we be considerate of their time?

I think we need to do both. I think it's extremely important to ask questions. If you don't ask your questions, then the same issues just stay inside you and they can become difficult. It is good to ask our questions and to be very frank and honest about our questions. I asked all the questions that good Buddhists are not supposed to ask. One lama cautioned me, and I already knew, to be careful who you ask what questions. If it's a real, real traditional teacher, don't go in with those questions about things they wouldn't understand. But, it is important to ask your questions. Pick the people whom you feel a good rapport with, who will be open to the kinds of questions you have, and ask. This is how we learn.

At the same time, it's good to be considerate. Let's say you attend a course. The break time is important for the teacher. They do have to rest their voice. They do have other practices to do. But you can still go up to them and say, "Can I meet with you for a few minutes?" Pick a time when it is convenient during the course to meet with them for a few minutes. Or if you want to meet them after the course is over, when there is more time, then you make an appointment for a later time. Similarly with the other Sangha members at the course. You can sometimes get a sense of who are the ones who like to speak a lot and who are the ones who don't. Don't be shy in approaching them. I mean, if somebody says "I am eating and I prefer not to speak when I am eating" or something like that, be sensitive. I think it's basically just being aware and having common courtesy. But we shouldn't go to the extreme of being so shy that we lose out.

[Audience:] Did Shakyamuni Buddha pass on because he wasn't requested to teach?

It wasn't that the Buddha passed on because he wasn't asked to teach. One time the Buddha made some reference to leaving the world, and Ananda, his attendant didn't immediately ask him to continue living. After the Buddha passed away, everyone got on Ananda's case. I, personally speaking, I am sticking up for Ananda. I don't think it's fair to blame him. It's due to collective karma that the Buddha dies. Maybe Ananda could have asked the Buddha to live longer, if he had thought of it, but I don't think it's any sense to blame anybody.

Interdependent relationship between teacher and student

[Audience: inaudible]

Yes. It is a very dependent relationship. I mean, you are not a teacher in and of yourself. There is only a teacher because there are students. There're students because there are teachers. If the students are not interested, then the teachers go somewhere else, or they die, or something like that.

[Audience:] Sometimes I feel that I'm wasting my time practicing Dharma.

Sometimes you find yourself wondering, "What in the world am I doing? I should be making myself useful!" That comes to everybody. Why? Because we've been

brought up, not only since beginningless time, but also in this lifetime, with certain views of what is worthwhile. And a lot of the Dharma is the complete opposite. Sometimes, these old habitual ways of thinking come up. They come up very strong, especially when the Dharma's really starting to penetrate—ego throws a complete temper tantrum. [Laughter.] It does. The ego becomes like a little baby that just wants to make a big chaotic scene to distract us. When this happens, be aware that this is ego making a temper tantrum. We don't need to follow it. I think it would be very interesting to write down at that time, exactly what you think is valuable, what you should be doing instead of sitting on your cushion meditating or attending teachings—stock market and these kinds of stuff [laughter]—and then look at them with the Dharma mind. Examine: “If I did that, would it make me happy? If I did that, is that the real meaning to having a precious human life? If I did that, when I die, will I feel satisfied with how I lived?” Ask yourself those questions. That will help a lot to break through the whole storyline that ego is giving you. Don't be alarmed when this stuff comes up, it's very natural. It won't just come up once, it will appear many times. [Laughter.]

The Sixth Recognition: Praying that the Dharma exists and flourishes

[Audience: inaudible]

At that time, we see ourselves as a sick person, the Dharma as the medicine, the teacher as the doctor,

and taking the medicine, that is, practicing the Dharma as a cure. We, therefore, see Dharma as something that's very, very valuable. Like if you are a cancer patient, you go to the doctor and he gives you medicine which cures your cancer. You will then want other people to know about this cure so that all other cancer patients can benefit. Similarly here, you see the benefit in the Dharma and cherish it. You want to make sure you create the cause to continually meet the Dharma in future lives. You also want other people to benefit from the Dharma. You pray that it can spread to other places, touch other people's hearts, and that these people can also find relief from their attachment, anger and ignorance.

[Audience: inaudible]

Yes. You are making the prayer for all of the Dharma teachings to spread and flourish.

[Audience:] Not just one teaching?

No. Not just one teaching. You could concentrate mostly on one teaching but if you like all the teachings, you don't have to leave them out.

[Audience:] How do I include all teachings in the prayer—do I have to list them?

You don't have to list to yourself every single Dharma teaching. You can pray for all the teachings—and maybe make a few examples in your mind of teachings you've found really valuable—to spread in

the world.

[Audience:] Does the dirty pot refer only to motivation? Or does it refer also to comparing the Dharma to something else you are studying or something along that line?

This is a very interesting question. This is a tricky thing because very often we come in with a mind that instantly wants to compare the Dharma to something else we know. This can be a block in our mind sometimes. We have a certain pre-ordained structure, and we're trying to take the Dharma and squeeze it into that. We're seeing the Dharma through a veil, through a matrix of what we want to see and don't see. This can be confusing at times. What's best to do is when you are studying one philosophy or whatever, study only it. When you study the Dharma, study only the Dharma. When you have some familiarity with both philosophies, then, make the comparisons. It is difficult to compare two things when you don't understand either of them very well.

Now, you may have studied other philosophies or psychologies or science before, and now as you listen to the Dharma, certain things will ring bells and you go, "Wow! This is just like what I heard before." That's fine. You don't have to suppress that thought. In fact, that's really useful because then you see how the Dharma relates to something that you already feel comfortable with, and you already see the purpose of. This doesn't harm you in any way. It's when you have a pre-ordained structure, and you are trying to squeeze the Dharma into that, that then problems can

arise.

[Audience:] One of the qualities of a student is to be open-minded. But we all come to teachings with our own preconceptions, don't we?

To some extent, it is true that we all come with our own preconceptions. The idea is to try and listen with as fresh a mind as possible. For instance, you come to a teaching for the sole purpose of finding out “Does Buddhism believe in God?” Then all you’re going to listen to or listen for is “Does Buddhism believe in God?” You’re going to miss everything else, because you’re only concentrating on that. This attitude impedes your learning. To some extent that is true, we all come with our own preconceptions. We have to do the best we can within our preconceptions. When you observe that you are acting like theatre critic in a Dharma teaching instead of as a student, then you know it’s time not to listen as a critic or as a professor of comparative religion, but to listen as a sick person.

[Audience:] One of the faults we want to avoid as a student is being a dirty pot. But if we wait for the “pot” to be perfectly clean before attending teachings, we’ll never get to attend Dharma teachings. To clean the pot we need the Dharma teachings.

Right. I am glad you asked this question. This is very good. It’s true we shouldn’t have to wait until the pot’s perfectly clean to get the Dharma. We would have to learn the Dharma in the first place, to get the

pot perfectly clean. We want to be aware that “Yes, the pot is dirty,” but at the same time we are trying to be more aware of what kind of dirt it is, and as much as we can, gradually eliminate that dirt. In other words, you shouldn’t feel that you have to be a number-one grade A bodhisattva before you step into a Dharma teaching room. [Laughter.] As much as we come with this attitude of “I really need the teachings”, then that much more they can help us. We feel we need the teachings knowing that we are a dirty pot. It comes down to the point that when you see your garbage, don’t get discouraged. You should be *happy* when you see your garbage. The garbage has been there all along. If you don’t see it, the garbage will sit there and fester. You should be really happy to see it because that gives you the opportunity to then do something about it. Don’t get depressed when you see your faults. Instead be really happy, “Ah, now finally I see this! I have the opportunity to work on it.”

I once met a Catholic nun. She had been a nun for fifty years. I was so impressed. She was a beautiful, beautiful woman, and she came and stayed at our monastery in France because she was interested in Buddhism. I asked her one time, as she had been a nun for so long, how did she do it; how did she keep her mind happy doing that? She said that there will be times when you go through a crisis, but every crisis is an opportunity. Before the crisis happened, the level of understanding you had was sufficient. You were satisfied and complacent with that level. A crisis signifies that now you’re probing deeper, that you’re ready to understand more. What was satisfactory

before is now insufficient. The crisis situation is your opportunity for growth. This holds true no matter what crisis it is or whether you are a nun or not. She said she really welcomes it when it happens. I thought this was such a beautiful attitude.

OK. So, let's sit quietly and digest.

CHAPTER 3

Mind, Rebirth, Cyclic Existence and Enlightenment

Before embarking on the actual path, let's take a little detour. The Lamrim assumes a lot of prior knowledge. Even though it is said to be the perfect path for beginners from A to Z, in fact, as someone said, if you look at the teaching on the six recognitions, baby beginners don't recognize Dharma as the medicine. Baby beginners don't recognize Buddha as the undeceptive guide, who gives undeceptive medicine.

There are a lot of assumptions being made that:

- We have some underlying faith in the whole path that Buddha has presented.
- We have some underlying faith that Buddha, Dharma and Sangha exist.
- We have a possibility to attain enlightenment.

So, before we go into the actual subject matter, we should really go over some of the presupposed material.

What is Consciousness?

The first point is to establish the existence of consciousness.

Let's talk about what consciousness is and what

your body (or form) is, and how they are the same and how they are different. We really have to understand what is this mind or consciousness that is the whole foundation of the gradual path. If consciousness doesn't exist, if there is no mindstream, then what are we practicing gradual path to transform our mind for?

When we say “us”, when we say “I”, we usually associate it with body and mind.

Our body is something physical, made of atoms. You can see it, taste it, touch it and hear it. It's something that can be detected by our five senses, something that can be put under a microscope and examined atomically. And it has its own continuity. The principal cause of our body, or what we call the perpetuating cause of the body, is the sperm and egg from our parents. The corporative condition of our body is all the food that we've eaten. And the continuation of this body after we die is going to be the breakfast, lunch and dinner of the worms. So, it has a physical continuity: coming from the past, into the present, going into the future. And it's impermanent. It's changing.

Every moment, the body is changing, isn't it? We always feel that our body is very solid but even the scientists tell you the electrons don't stay in the same place at any two split seconds. On the atomic level, it's changing. Even on a cellular level, how many cells are getting laid off every day? What's happening with the cells? Even on the gross level, our body is always changing. Now, that's one part of us—the body.

The mind (consciousness)

The other part of us is what we call mind. The mind is not a really good English word for what we mean. We usually tend to think that mind means brain. Mind is not brain, because brain is the gray stuff in here, whereas mind is not something physical.

Or, we think mind means intellect. But here, mind is not limited to intellect. So, whenever we use the word “mind”, we are talking not only about the intellect, because that is just a small part, but anything that is conscious experience within us.

For example, we have the visual consciousness that sees colors and shapes. The auditory consciousness hears sound. The olfactory consciousness smells smells, etc. We have our five sense consciousnesses. We also have our mental consciousness that thinks and can perceive some things directly as in clairvoyant powers. These six types of consciousness perceive the basic nature of an object.

In addition to these primary consciousness (five sense consciousnesses and mental consciousness), we also have a lot of mental factors that shape our whole cognition. Mental factors such as feeling (pleasant, unpleasant and neutral feelings). Mental factors such as discrimination—being able to tell or distinguish one object from another. Mental factors, such as the ability to contact an object, or concentration, intention, attention and wisdom.

We have all sorts of good mental factors, like confidence or energy, compassion, a balanced mind, a patient mind and a mind that isn't ignorant. All sorts of very positive mental factors that arise—not with every cognition, but from time to time.

And we have other mental factors that sometimes contradict the very positive ones. They can be skepticism, anger, belligerence, greed, laziness, lack of self-respect, lack of consideration for others, etc.

So, when we talk about mind, even mind isn't one solid fixed thing. It's these six types of primary consciousness (the five sense consciousnesses plus our mental consciousness) and all these varying mental factors that can pop up, in a wide variety of combinations from time to time.

So, even mind has parts. Just as the body is a "continuity" even though it has parts, the mindstream or mind or consciousness is also a "continuity", although it has parts.

Now, the mindstream is not atomic. It's not made of atoms and molecules. Now, this is the part that is difficult for Westerners to understand. Because of the scientific development in this part of the world, sometimes we feel that the only things that exist are things that can be measured by scientific instruments. We have this preconception that it doesn't exist unless you can measure it, unless the scientists can prove it.

But, if we just look at our life, there are a whole lot of things that we know exist, that are not the object of investigation of science because they are not molecular atomic entities. For example, love. We all know love exists, we all know anger exists, but we all know that you can't put anger under a microscope. And you can't cultivate it in a petri dish.

It is the same with love. These are the mental things. They are "consciousnesses". They exist but they are not made of color and shape. They don't have sound or smell or taste because they are not

molecular substances. Other things like freedom, or beauty, or democracy, or communism, all these things exist, but they are not made of atoms and molecules. So, our preconception that something only exists if science can measure it is actually quite incorrect.

Scientific tools talk about measuring things that are form in nature. But there are a lot of other things that go beyond the scope of physics or chemistry or biology and so on. So, if we accept mind as a consciousness, we have to rely on experience to prove it.

When you sit there and you feel what it feels like to be alive, there is some conscious experiential element, isn't there? It is not just plain atoms and molecules that feel alive. If atoms and molecules were all that was necessary, then a corpse should be alive. Then the rug should be alive. So, it isn't just atoms and molecules that make something alive, it's this consciousness, this formless entity that has the ability to experience objects.

The clear and knowing mind

The mind is defined as that which is clear and knowing. 'Clear' in the sense of being formless, but also in the sense of having a reflective ability. In other words, the mind is something that allows other objects to dawn in it, allows other objects to be reflected in it.

The second quality of mind is 'knowing' or awareness. This is the ability to experience or engage in objects.

So, the reflectibility, the arising of objects, the engagement with them—this is what is meant by

consciousness. Again, it is not made of atoms.

Now, when we are alive, our mind and our body are together. On top of that, we label “I”. Now, here is where Science gets a little bit fuzzy and it’s very interesting. I have been to some of these Science conferences. Some of them say that mind just doesn’t exist. There is no conscious experience. It’s just all atoms and molecules. Others say that mind exists, but it’s a function of the brain. But when you ask them what mind is, they really can’t tell you. Science doesn’t have a clear definition of mind.

Some of them are really “reductionist”, saying that there are only atoms and molecules, that’s all human experience is about. But it seems so discordant with real life experience. I remember at one Science conference, His Holiness the Dalai Lama was talking a little bit about rebirth and these kinds of things, and one scientist kept saying, “What’s the proof? What’s the proof? What’s the proof?” They want some scientific measurable evidence for everything. And yet, when he went home and said to his wife: “I love you, dear,” she didn’t say, “What’s the proof? I want to see your heart. I want to see your EEG. I want to see your EKG. I don’t believe you love me unless I see some statistics on it.” I am sure he didn’t relate to his family that way. And yet, his professional view is that only material things exist.

And so, they don’t fit well together. The way we actually live our lives, we don’t really think of ourselves as just atoms and molecules, do we? If all we were were atoms and molecules, we might as well all die. Because if there are no future lives, there is no consciousness, there are only atoms and molecules,

then, what is the use of all the headaches we have in our lives?

But, we don't feel that way, do we? We feel like there is a person there, that there is consciousness, there is experience, and there is something valuable. When we talk about human life and taking care of human life, it's not because human life is just atoms and molecules. If we wanted to take care of carbon and nitrogen, we don't need to take care of just human beings. So, somehow, just in our automatic way of living, I think we have a feeling that there is consciousness. There are living beings that experience things.

Mind & body connection

The body and the mind are inter-related. What happens in our mind, in the conscious part of us, influences the body. Similarly, what happens in the body also influences our mind. So they are inter-related. But that doesn't mean that they are exactly the same. This is, I think, where science gets confused.

For example, when we perceive things, when our visual consciousness perceives things, there is a physical base. You have the light rays. You have the retina in the eye. You have the nerves going in and going back into the brain and all the different areas of the brain. And all of that is working. But all of that alone is not conscious experience. That's just chemical and electrical energy. But that is a physical base upon which we have conscious experience.

So, the brain acts like the organ for the mind, the

nervous system is the organ enabling our gross levels of mind to function and operate. And so they mutually influence each other. We can see that. When we are in bad health, our mind “goes down”. When we are in a bad mood, we easily get sick. It goes hand in hand. They influence each other.

Death and Rebirth

But although on the gross levels of mind, with this body, there is a lot of this mutual influence, the mind is not just the gross level. The mind has many different levels. By gross mind, I am referring to the five sense consciousnesses and our gross mental consciousness that thinks and develops conceptions and things like that. Now, what is happening at the time of death is that these gross levels of consciousness are losing their power, because the body that is their base, is also losing its power. It can't sustain these gross levels of consciousnesses, so they kind of dissolve into a more subtle form of consciousness. And that subtle consciousness dissolves yet into the subtlest, or what we call the extremely subtle consciousness.

So, while somebody is dying, the mind is going from being gross, where all the senses are intact, to being subtle, when they've lost control of the senses. You can see this when somebody is dying. They are separating from the physical world. They can't see and hear and so on. Then, the subtle mind dissolves into an extremely subtle mind that by nature is non-conceptual. And it is this extremely subtle mind that

goes from one life to the next life.

Now, this extremely subtle mind that goes from life to life is not a soul. It is not a concrete personality. It is not something you can draw a line around and say: “This is it! This is me!” Why not? Because this extremely subtle mind is changing moment by moment by moment. You can’t pin it down and tack it and say: “This is it! This is me!”

It’s changing, changing, changing. So, what happens during the death process is, the mind goes from gross mind to subtle to subtlest mind—changing, changing, changing ... at each moment. This subtlest consciousness leaves one body, goes into the intermediate stage, and then goes into the next body. In the next body, let’s say as a human being, when the consciousness enters into the union of the sperm and egg, then the gross consciousnesses slowly again start to develop.

So when the consciousness first enters the sperm and egg, you first have some mental consciousness and the tactile consciousness. You obviously don’t yet have eye consciousness because the embryo doesn’t have eyes. But as the organs develop inside the womb, and the baby gets the eye organ, the ear organ, the nose organ, and so forth, then the respective gross consciousnesses also come into existence.

This is just a simple outline of rebirth. So, we have the body and the mind. When they are together, we call it alive. When we die, the body has its continuity and the mindstream has its continuity. The body becomes chocolate cake for the worms and the mind goes on into the next life.

Let’s look at this life. We have this moment of

consciousness. Whatever moment of consciousness is happening right now, it had a cause, didn't it? Everything had a cause. This moment of body had a cause—the previous moment of body—didn't it? Our body now depended on our body last year, our body when we were two years old, our body in the sperm and egg as the fertilized egg, and a physical continuity that went back to before this body, didn't it? There was the continuity of this body before this body actually existed, because the sperm and egg of our parents were there. And that had a physical continuity—all the nitrogen and oxygen and carbon and things that went into the sperm and egg. So there is always a physical cause going back, back, back, back.

Continuity of mindstream

Every moment of the mind also has a cause, doesn't it? It's changing. It's something that changes, that arises and ceases each moment. So it depends on other factors; it depends on previous moments of cause. So, our mindstream right now depends on the previous moment of mindstream, doesn't it? You can think right now because you were able to think last moment—because you had consciousness in that last moment.

That moment of mind depended on your mind from yesterday and the day before, and the day before that. And it depended on the continuity of our mindstream last year. And when we were ten years old and when we were five years old. And when we were babies. Now, we can't remember when we were a babies. Most of us can't anyway. But, we know we had

consciousness when we were babies. Would you agree?

You can't remember it, but you know you had feelings as a baby. We look at babies now and they obviously have feelings. So, we also had feelings, conscious experience as a baby. So that baby that just came out of a womb, where did its consciousness come from? Well, the continuity, the previous moment of consciousness, the consciousness of the mind of the baby in the womb. And that consciousness can get traced back and back, and back to the moment of conception when the sperm and the egg and the consciousness came together. Now, just as the sperm and egg had their previous continuities before the moment of conception, also that moment of mind also had previous continuity. It couldn't have appeared out of nowhere. It couldn't appear without a cause. Something like a mind can't arise out of nothing.

So, that moment of mind had to have a previous cause, and a previous cause that was similar to it. So, what do we have? A previous moment of mind. A moment of mind before it entered into that fertilized egg. A mindstream that existed before this lifetime. And that moment of mind had a cause—its previous moment, previous moment, previous moment, back and back and back and back and back—infinite regression of moments of consciousness.

Is there a “beginning”?

According to Buddhism, there was no beginning. It would be impossible for a beginning. There are many, many logical fallacies if you assert a beginning. Like,

if there were a beginning, then because there was a beginning, nothing existed before the beginning. If nothing existed, how could something arise out of nothing? What was the cause for this, if there was nothing before?

If you assert there is a fixed moment of beginning, then what existed before the beginning? And what made the beginning come at that moment and not at any other moment? As soon as you assert a beginning, you also have to assert that causes existed before it. And as soon as you assert that causes existed before it, your beginning is not the beginning anymore, because there were causes prior to it.

Is there a creator?

And if you assert some kind of creator deity, you run into a lot of logical fallacies too. Like where did the creator deity come from? Where did God come from? And then you have questions like: “Why did God create?” And if you say, “Well, God created to give human beings the chance to develop and be happy”, then somebody could ask: “Well, why didn’t God create them happy to start with if God is all powerful?” Or if you say God created human beings because he or she wanted company, then it sounds like God has some problems. [Laughter.] So, you run into a lot of logical fallacies if you adhere to the idea of a creator. This is not said to criticize other religions. It’s merely said as a way of getting us to look logically at things, to discern what is possible to exist and what is impossible to exist.

Infinity

So, from a Buddhist point of view, there is just this infinite continuity on a physical level and also on a conscious level—there is no beginning. Now that's hard for our mind that likes nice, neat, little boxes. We don't like the idea of infinity. We get scared by infinity. When you study Math, and you come to the square root of two, we get a little shaky. When we come to π , we get a little shaky, we round it off to 3.14, making it nice and concrete. But in actual fact, you can't isolate it. There is no end to π , is there?

Computers have done how many millions of digits, no end to it. No square root of two. No beginning or end on a number line, is there? Either way you go on a number line, positive numbers, negative numbers, there's always more. Just the whole idea of space, when you look out into space, are we going to come to a brick wall at the end of our universe? And if there is the edge of space, what is on the other side of it?

This whole idea of infinity is really beyond our nice, compartmentalized, categorical mind. But, as we can see from Math and Science, infinity is a definite reality. And likewise in Buddhism, it is very much existent. So, when we talk about the mindstream, we're talking about an infinite regression.

Now, what has the experience of our mindstream been in this whole infinite regression? Well, we have first of all the pure nature of our mind, which we call the Buddha potential or Buddha nature—just the raw clear knowing of the mind—"empty of inherent existence". That's like the clear sky. And on top of that, we have ignorance, anger, attachment and so on.

They are like the clouds in the sky. So they are “running together”.

Like today, you go outside, the sky is there, the clouds are there. You can't see the sky, because the clouds are obscuring it. Now, let's imagine that the clouds have always been there. This is very similar to the state of our mind. We have a pure Buddha nature that from beginningless time has been obscured by the clouds of ignorance. But, the two things, like the sky and the clouds, are not inseparably meshed. They are not the same things. They are two separate things.

Just as the clouds can eventually go away and leave the pure sky, so all the defilements of our mindstream can eventually be shed, leaving the pure nature of the mind. Since beginningless time, all these clouds have been with the mind, obscuring it. And that's why we have so many problems. Because we've never been wise. We've never been completely patient. We've never been completely balanced.

We've always been under the influence of ignorance, anger and attachment. So, somebody might say: “Well, where did ignorance, anger and attachment come from? All you can say is that they come from the previous moment, previous moment, previous moment. Nobody created it. It was just always there. Why was it always there? I don't know. Why do apples fall down? I don't know. That is just the way it is. In other words, nobody created an ignorant mind. Nobody created ignorance. That's just the way things have been.

Buddha's practical approach

“But I want to find out how the ignorance got there to start with!”

From a Buddhist point of view, the Buddha says that worrying about that kind of thing is just going to give you ulcers and headaches and not really produce any kind of fruitful result. Buddha was very, very practical. He didn't believe in getting stuck on questions that were impossible to answer such as: Where did the first moment of ignorance come from? Or why are we ignorant to start with?

Buddha said: “Look, it's silly to fret about that. What's more important is to recognize that our mind is under the control of ignorance, anger and attachment now, and do something about it.” Buddha used the example of an arrow. You got shot by an arrow. It was right there, sticking out, and you are oozing blood. But before you pulled the arrow out, you are sitting there saying: “Now, how many inches long is this arrow? Who made it? Let's see, it's made in Japan. Who shot the arrow? What was his name? How many inches deep is it and what was the arrow tip made of?” And you wanted this whole analysis of what was going on with the arrow sorted out before you went to the doctor to pull it out.

People would say you are a little bit nuts. Look, who cares where it came from? It's in there now! And it is going to kill you, so go and get it out! So, Buddha says likewise that worrying and fretting about what was the first moment of ignorance and where it came from isn't really relevant.

What's important is that right now we are under the influence of our ignorance, anger and attachment.

And if we don't do something about it, it's going to continue to permeate our experience and produce more and more problems for us. So, let's do something about it now. It's a very practical approach.

Comparing the mindstream to a river

I like to compare the mindstream to a river. When you look at a river you have the rocks and the mud on the side and you have all these different molecules of water. When you start to analyze, can you find anything that is the river? All you find is rocks, and mud, and water, isn't it?

If you look at the whole continuity of the river—upstream when it's trickling, and then when it goes over a waterfall, when it goes into a wide valley, and then when it goes into the sea—can you say that any particular moment is the river? You can't, can you? River is something that is merely labeled on top of the parts, such as the water, the banks, the mud and the rocks. River is something that is merely labeled on top of this sequence of water that is flowing downwards—this sequence which in and of itself, is constantly changing. Every moment, it is different, different, different, different ...

You can't find something there and say: "THAT IS THE RIVER, I've got it!" You can't pull it out, can you? The river exists but it's something that's merely labeled on all of those different parts. That's all.

So, likewise with our mindstream. It has many different parts, many different kinds of consciousness—visual, mental and so forth. It has many mind moments, one after the other, changing, changing,

changing. And we label ‘consciousnesses, or ‘mind’, on top of that. It’s not a soul. It’s not something solid and concrete. So, when we talk about the mindstream, going from life to life, think more of the analogy of a river, something that is constantly changing. Don’t think of the mindstream like you are playing checkers and it goes from one square to the next square. It’s not like that.

It’s not the same personality or mind that is in one body that then goes to the next body, and then goes to the next one. Because the mind is always changing, isn’t it? Never remains the same. So, thinking of it as a solid entity is not the correct way to think of it. It’s more the idea of a river: something changing, changing, changing. Always dependent on what it was before. But each moment is something different from what it was before. Likewise, with our mind. Who we are now depends upon who we were before, what ...

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

Ignorance

When you go around with sun glasses all the time, everything looks dark. If you have been wearing sunglasses since the time you were born, you think everything is dark but everything isn’t dark. Your sunglasses are making it look dark. Similarly, because of the ignorance on the mindstream, things appear to us to exist in and of themselves. And we grasp at that appearance as true. But this whole appearance is a complete hallucination. So, we’re grasping at a mode

of existence that is completely non-existent. The guy with the sun-glasses grasps at the appearance of a dark world thinking it is reality. He thinks that all these phenomena are dark from their own side and independent of him.

Similarly, we think that everything has in it some essence, some independent existence, that is separate from causes and conditions, separate from parts, separate from the consciousness that perceives and labels it. Things appear that way to us. And on top of that appearance, we grasp at that as true and we say: “Yes, in fact, that’s how everything exists.”

So we concretize everything. We give it a mode of existence that it does not have. And because of that, we get terribly, terribly confused. Because we grasp at everything as existing in and of itself, independent from us, we overreact to everything. So, the things that seem pleasurable, we grasp on to, we want more, more, more. And the things that interfere with our happiness, we completely reject. So, out of this ignorance, you get the attachment. And you get the aversion, or anger. And from those, you get all the other myriad of different defilements. So, they all come out of the ignorance.

So, this is the root cause of the problem. Recognize how much we project onto reality. For instance, when we see a person that we label “obnoxious”, that person appears to us to be obnoxious from their own side and independent of us. But if that were the case, if that obnoxiousness existed in that person, if that evilness existed in that person objectively, then everybody who saw him should see the exact same thing. That is not the way it is, is it? Everybody who

looks at that person sees him differently. Some people see their best friend. We see a complete idiot. Now, that goes to show that qualities do not exist inside the things themselves, that they exist dependent upon the perceiving mind.

But we are so unaware of that. We think that everything that appears to our mind actually exists the way it appears to us. So we're hallucinating, and then we think our hallucination is reality. That's our problem. This is the root cause of all the problems.

It is this ignorance that propels us to take one body after another. Why? It's because we have the wrong idea of ourselves as some concrete entity. We think: "Here I am, and to preserve 'I', to preserve this entity that is ME, I need a body."

We identify so much with this body. That's why death is very frightening to us. Because we feel that if we separate from this body, we might not exist anymore. And yet at the same time, as we're fearing that, we're grasping very strongly onto I, I, I, I.

So, there's this incredible confusion of grasping. And so, because of that, mind is always looking: "I want a body. I want a body." So, at the time of death, when it becomes obvious that we have to separate from our body, instead of relaxing about it and saying, "Why do I need this body for anyway, it only gets old and sick and die. It's not so wonderful after all," or saying: "What's so precious about this? It's just nitrogen, potassium, oxygen. That's all there is, nothing so precious about it," we see it as something so precious that we are being separated from. And so, to continue our identity, foremost thing is we've got to have another body. So that grasping mind pushes us to

seek another body and that grasping mind makes some of the karmic imprints—the imprints of the actions that we’ve created previously—ripen, and depending upon which imprints are ripening, those imprints propel us into the next body.

The Different Realms of Existence

If we’re in a situation under the influence of our ignorance where some of our good imprints are ripening—for example, being kind and considerate—and those ripen at death time, then we’re grasping for a body but we are also being pushed by the ripening of the kind imprints. Then, we’re going to take rebirth as a human being, or as a god, as a celestial being.

If on the other hand, at the time of death, this grasping makes a harmful or destructive imprint ripen, then that’s going to push our mind to take rebirth as an animal, or what we call a hungry ghost or a hellish kind of being.

Here, we have the existence of different life forms. Now the question always comes: “Are these different life forms real existent life forms? Are there different places? Are there real beings there or are they just mental states?” Well, my personal opinion on that is well, how about our human life? Is it a place? Is it real? Or is it just a mental state? It seems to me that as real as this one seems to us now, that’s how real the other ones seem to us when we are born there. Whether it is a mental state or whether it is a place, it seems real, doesn’t it? We have contact with the animals. I am sure they feel that being an animal is

quite a real thing. It's a mental state but it's an animal body, isn't it? So, similarly, I think, with the other ones as well.

Now, it might help us to be able to understand how our mindstream could be born in those other life forms. Think again about impermanence. Because one of the obstacles that prevent us from understanding these different life forms is that we think that we have always been who we are now, don't we? You sit here and you think: "ME, this body, this mind, this character, ME." But even looking at this life, has our body always been the same? One time, our body was a fetus. Do you associate 'I' with that little thing that you see drawn in the science book? But that was what we were one time, wasn't it?

How about the old and decrepit man or woman? Do we associate 'I' with that? Look at the changes that our body goes through in one lifetime. Look at the changes our consciousness goes through in one lifetime. Imagine what it was like to be a new-born baby, to have that kind of perspective on the world. Very different from our present consciousness, isn't it? Completely different! And yet that's just within one life, isn't it? And see how much our body has changed. Look at how much our mind has changed. We haven't always been who we are right now, have we? Always changing. Always changing.

So, if you begin just by thinking about that, it loosens some of this grasping that "I am who I am right now." Because we see that within one life, we go through very different mental states. So, it gives us a little space to consider that the mind could also have other different mental states when our mindstream is

associated with another body. Why not?

Another way that helps us to understand the existence of different life forms is to look even at some characteristics that our human mind can share with the minds of those other life forms. For example, you take a celestial realm—glorious Disneyland all day, except you don't have to pay, you don't have to wait in line, and your ice cream doesn't melt all over you. It's like Disneyland with all the perfections. That's what the god realm is like. Now, we can imagine that, can't we? And there have been times in our life where it has almost seemed, at least for a short period, that our mind was just completely saturated with pleasure.

Of course, in our human existence, that doesn't last so long. We have this complete pleasure explosion but then it ends fairly quickly. But in the god realm, it's like a pleasure explosion that just lasts for a long, long, long time. Why? Because the karmic imprint that ripened into that life was able to perpetuate that life for that long. So, we can see a certain similarity that our human mind has with the mind of a being that's born in a super duper sense pleasure deluxe celestial realm, can't we?

Now, take our mind when we are incredibly obsessed about something. Where your mind is just completely on: "I've got to have this, I've got to have this, I've got to have this." Completely obsessed, craving, longing and grasping. Frustrated because you can't get what you want. Dissatisfied because what you want evades you. We've all had times like that, haven't we?

Imagine that mind state being born in a body—

that's the realm of a hungry ghost. The hungry ghosts have the mental state of perpetual craving and dissatisfaction because they can't fulfill what they want. So, you can see, there is some connection between that mind-state and the environment that it manifests.

You take a dissatisfied mind and imagine it manifesting as an environment to become a hungry ghost environment.

You take an angry mind (completely overwhelmed by anger, enraged and out of control, belligerent, when we won't listen to anybody and we just want to strike out at the world) and make it manifest as a body, make it manifest as an environment, and that is the hellish realm.

Our mind has a lot of different potential in it, doesn't it? It has the potential to have the sense pleasure deluxe, super-duper pleasure of a god realm. It also has the potential to have the incredibly painful paranoid existence of a hellish being.

The clear light nature, the clear and knowing nature of that mindstream is all the same. But, when it is overcast, overwhelmed by some clouds, it becomes born in one body. When other shapes of clouds overwhelm it, it's born as another body. And all along there is the general pollution of the ignorance covering it.

So, our mindstream as it goes from body to body can experience many different things. Sometimes, we can be born in incredibly happy places and sometimes in incredibly awful places. They are all propelled by the imprints of our actions that we've created. And all these actions that we created are not some mystical

magic thing. Karma isn't mystic and magic. We are creating karma right now. We're creating intentional action right now, aren't we? We are acting right now. We have intention right now. What we are doing right now happens to be a very positive action because we've come together for a good reason, so, we are putting a lot of good karma on our mind. We are creating karma right now.

On the other hand, when we get really belligerent and we start gossiping about people and criticizing them left, right, and center, our mind is acting, we are using our speech, and sometimes we get so angry that we physically act. So, all these actions leave imprints on the mindstream and then depending upon which imprints ripen at the time of death, the mindstream then gets propelled into one body or another.

And each body we take doesn't last forever because that karmic imprint is an ever-changing phenomenon. It's a limited phenomenon. It only endures for a certain amount of time. So, the resultant life form that we get born in, as a result of that karma, also exists only for a limited amount of time.

When that karmic energy runs out, then our rebirth in that life form runs out, and we die and then we get reborn in another body. So, we can go up and down a lot. Let's face it. Look at our mindstreams right now. We have a lot of different imprints, don't we? Just take today. You did some kind things today? Did anybody get angry or annoyed today? Anybody didn't get attached to something today? So, you see, just within one day, so many different imprints are getting left on the mindstream. So our mindstreams are just like computer records; there're so many different

things. We have the potential to go up or down or around or whatever, depending upon what ripens. We are not necessarily guaranteed some kind of upward mobile path. The GNP isn't always increasing at a certain annual rate. It's like the economy—it goes up and down. It's similar with our rebirth—not at all consistent. Up and down, up and down. And it's all done under the impetus of ignorance.

We have this Buddha nature that is obscured by the clouds of ignorance. This ignorance makes us create actions that then propel us to get into this Ferris wheel of existence of one body after the next in all these different life forms.

But it doesn't need to be like this. There is another way to live. Ignorance is a complete misconception. A mind of ignorance does not look at things realistically. If we can see how things do exist, we will be able to eliminate the ignorance, and along with it, the branches of attachment and aversion, as well as the results of all these karmic actions. So, it's possible for us to attain a state free of the ignorance and of the karma. How? By generating the wisdom that clearly shows that the ignorant view is incorrect.

Liberation through Ethics, Concentration & Wisdom

How do we generate that wisdom? Well, we have to have some concentration in our mind, to be able to hold the reality steadfast in the mind, and we have to have a firm foundation of ethics. So, the path to liberation is what's called the three higher trainings:

ethics, concentration and wisdom. Liberation is the cessation of the ignorance, anger and attachment and all the karma that causes rebirth. In other words, liberation is the cessation of the causes of all the sufferings and problems. Liberation is also the cessation of all those problems and difficulties.

The four noble truths

The first truth is the truth of suffering. It doesn't mean suffering as in "Oh, my tummy hurts." It means something is not right in life. What's not right in life is that we aren't in control, and we take one body after another. And experience so many problems in each rebirth.

The second truth is the truth of the cause of that problematic condition of suffering: the ignorance, anger and attachment and all the karmic actions we've done.

But, because ignorance is a wrong conception, it's possible to remove it, and by removing it, you get a cessation of the suffering or the problems and their causes, which is the third noble truth: the noble truth of cessation.

And there is the fourth truth—that there is a definite path to get to that cessation, there is a method to follow i.e. the three higher trainings of ethics, concentration and wisdom.

Now, on the basis of that, if you also generate the altruistic intention: "I want liberation, not just for my own benefit, but I want to attain full enlightenment to gain all the capabilities to help others. I seek not only my liberation but the liberation of the infinite number

of sentient beings”, then, what you have is the altruistic intention to attain highest enlightenment and you could attain the result of a Buddha.

So, liberation from the cycle of existence is not the same thing as Buddhahood.

What is liberation and enlightenment?

Liberation means you’ve freed your own mindstream from the ignorance and the karma.

Enlightenment means that you’ve also generated the altruistic intention. You have not only freed your mindstream from the ignorance and the karma, but you have also freed it from a very subtle kind of stain left after the ignorance and the karma have been removed.

We have what’s called two levels of obscuration:

1. The afflicted obscurations, which is the ignorance and the karma, the afflictions and the karma; and
2. The subtle obscurations or cognitive obscurations.

The afflicted obscurations are what keep us bound in cyclic existence. When we remove them through practicing ethics, concentration and wisdom, we attain the state of an arhat, or a liberated being. The afflicted obscurations are like the onions. When you take the onions out of the pot, there is still the smell of the onions. The smell of the onions is like the subtle obscurations on the mindstream. So, with an altruistic intention to benefit all, you want to remove even

these subtle obscurations from the mindstream. You still practice the three higher trainings. But in addition, you practice the altruistic intention and all the bodhisattva's actions. And you meditate on emptiness in a very, very deep way until you get to the point where you can actually remove even these subtle stains from the mind. It is like getting rid of not only the onions, but also their smell. And at that point, you attain full enlightenment or Buddhahood.

Somebody who has generated the altruistic intention to attain Buddhahood is a bodhisattva. There are different levels of bodhisattvas; it's a progressive path. Some bodhisattvas are baby bodhisattvas and they are still bound by their own ignorance. Higher level bodhisattvas are no longer bound by their ignorance. They've been able to attain liberation from cyclic existence.

Review

To review, we've talked about the mind. And the difference between body and mind, the fact that they both have continuity, that the mind's continuity is without form and that both the physical continuity and the mental continuity existed prior to this birth, and they both will exist after this birth.

When we die, our mindstream dissolves into a subtle form and goes into a next body propelled by ignorance, propelled by whatever karma is ripening. And we can be reborn as a variety of different things according to whatever karma happens to ripen because we have many different imprints on our mindstream.

When we get fed up with the situation and we see that actually the nature of our mind is pure and that it's only all these clouded garbage that makes the whole mess come about, then, we get some interest in practicing the path. We want to eliminate the clouds and let the sky remain, eliminate the ignorance and let the pure nature of the mind remain. So, the principal tool that we need here, besides ethics and concentration, is wisdom. Because the wisdom will definitely eliminate the ignorance—they can't both exist at the same time.

By eliminating ignorance, the Ferris wheel of one rebirth after another comes to a halt. And one can attain liberation or arhatship.

Buddhahood

To attain highest Buddhahood, highest enlightenment, one has to generate the altruistic intention and remove not only the ignorance and karma that make the afflicted obscurations, but also the stains, the subtle imprints or subtle tendencies left on the mind.

Then, through deep meditation on emptiness and a great accumulation of positive potential by practicing the bodhisattva path, then, we can attain highest Buddhahood. A Buddha is somebody who has eliminated all the defilements in their mind (such as the anger, attachment, ignorance and all those karma) and also eliminated all the subtle stains on the mind, so they've eliminated all the garbage.

A Buddha has also developed all the good qualities to their full perfection. So, the patience, the

concentration, the loving kindness, the open heartedness—all of the good qualities—are fully developed.

So, there is continuity between a Buddha and us. We aren't completely separated by this huge chasm in the middle. The same clear light nature of the mind goes through all these different states. It's a continuum. By gradually purifying our mind and gradually developing its qualities, then this same mindstream can go on and become the mindstream of a Buddha.

Questions and answers

[Audience: inaudible]

You are saying that it seems like people live under a lot of obscurity and a lot of handicaps and so, then, only a few people seem to really have the capability, at least in this lifetime to attain liberation. And that is kind of disturbing.

I wish I could say something else. But it's true. We can say, however, that all beings have the potential to attain full awakening, full enlightenment.

[Audience: inaudible]

Let's take any example of a human life. Let's say these people have a human life in the previous lifetime, and in that human life, they created some good actions. They also did some not so good ones. So, just like us, in the previous human life, they had a whole composite of many different kinds of imprints.

We, as Westerners, very often bring our whole Christian background and super-impose it onto Buddhism. Firstly, it's important to understand that Buddha is not like God. From the Christian point of view, there is a judgment. God says, this, this, this, this. From a Buddhist point of view, Buddha does not judge and discriminate and condemn. Buddha did not create this whole scene. Buddha didn't create anything. Our mind, our actions, previous things influence future things. If you plant an apple seed, you get an apple tree. You plant peaches and you get peaches. Buddha didn't create the peaches. He didn't create the peach seeds. Buddha only described that if you plant peach seeds, you get peaches. So, Buddha isn't "zapping" anybody. Buddha just described that when we act harmfully, we could get painful results as a result of our actions. When we act kindly, we get pleasurable effects as a result of our own actions. But Buddha didn't create that whole system.

Secondly, it's not a case of somebody screwing up, and somebody being evil. Because again, that's our whole Christian framework that we have learned since we were young. And we tow it along like a knapsack on our back that we don't want to put down, simply because we've heard it our whole life. But, I think this is the time when we really have to say, "Hey, I don't need to carry this around."

Buddhism is simply saying that when certain causes are created, certain effects come. If you get harmful effects, they come from a harmful cause. If you get nice effects, they come from a nice cause. If you've created a harmful cause, it doesn't mean you are a bad person.

The person and the person's actions are two different things. People are good. People have Buddha-nature. Sometimes, under the influence of our greed, anger and ignorance, we can create harmful actions. Those harmful actions become like the clouds that are set in the sky. So, it doesn't mean that whenever we suffer, it means we are horrible, sinful, evil and condemned people.

In other words, it doesn't mean that when we experience painful things now, it means we are completely horrible because we must have done something so evil in the past. And similarly when we mess up now, it doesn't mean that we're horrible, evil, condemned people. It simply means that we made a mistake and we are going to experience the result of our mistake. So, it's a Christian super-imposition to say that because the action was harmful, the person is evil.

[Audience: inaudible]

Now, that's true. Their actions will create the future. Causes do bring effects. But it doesn't mean that the people who create negative causes are evil people. It just means that they are under the influence of their ignorance.

We say that at a basic level, people always have a choice. But, whether or not we take our choice is another matter. Very often, we are on automatic mode. We're so strongly propelled by the things of the past, that we don't take our choice. We just let the past propel us. So, for example, when somebody comes up and insults you, at that moment you have a

choice whether to get angry or not. But we're so well habituated with anger, that automatically the anger comes without our mindstream even considering that: "Oh I don't have to get angry". We still have that choice at that moment not to get angry. But because the past habit is so strong, it's like we are on automatic. So, the process of practicing Dharma is going from automatic to manual. It's taking the choice.

[Audience: inaudible]

So, you are saying, for example, take all these people in Bangladesh who are suffering from the flood. We could say: "We're sorry folks. This is your karma. Why do we need to send you aid?"

Now, if somebody has that view, and uses that politically, they have not correctly understood Buddha's teachings. That is an incorrect understanding of Buddha's teachings. Why? Because, just because you messed up, that doesn't mean you deserve to suffer. See, this whole thing of "You DESERVE TO SUFFER, you've got to suffer, you've got to be punished!"—that's our Christian superimposition. Buddhism teaches that suffering is suffering, it doesn't matter whose is it, our suffering or other's. If we see it, we should help. So, people who misuse karma for political reasons don't have a correct understanding of Buddha's teachings.

Then, you brought up another point about whether people, let's say who are insane, or people who are retarded, actually have free choice ...

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

... And I think this is where we get really hung up. The person who doesn't choose to be sane, we blame them, "YOU choose to be insane, IT'S YOUR FAULT!" That is our garbage. There's no blame in the situation. It's again a complete perversion of Buddhist teachings, to use it as a justification to point fingers and blame.

If we want to put down other people, and to criticize other people, and say some people are inferior, we don't need to use Buddhism to do that. We don't need to make up another philosophy to do that. There are already plenty of philosophies in our world that like to put down other people.

But our big problem is that we grew up in a Calvinistic environment. We grew up in a society that talks about blame, evilness, original sin, fault and "misusing free choice so you separated yourself from God, so therefore you are a sinner and you are condemned forever." We grew up with that. We have that baggage with us. And then, we come to Buddhism and we take our Christian filter and put it between Buddhism and us. And we say: "Oh that looks just like what I grew up with." But we are not seeing Buddhism. Instead, we are just seeing our filter. So this is the time I think when we have to recognize that filter as a filter, throw it away and then try and understand what Buddha is really talking about here.

I think this is a real challenge to Westerners because we come right up against all these cultural preconceptions we grew up with since we were two years old. They all come up and we project them all

over the place. And this is the time for us to begin to recognize how much we project outside. And to, then, throw away a lot of that mental garbage because we really don't need it.

And to understand what Buddha is really talking about and how the basic philosophy of Buddhism is incredible respect for the individual, incredible confidence in the pure nature of human beings.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama is always saying that basic human nature is good. Basic human nature is pure. So, we have to remember that. And not superimpose original sin on it. Buddhism isn't talking about that.

[Audience: inaudible]

Christianity goes on the assumption that you HAVE to suffer, doesn't it? If you suffer, it's because you are evil. You've got to suffer to approach God.

Buddhism says suffering is useless. Who needs it? Let's get rid of it. However, when we suffer, the suffering does come about because of causes. Some of the causes have to do with the external environment. The social, political and cultural ambience we live in. Some causes of suffering are our internal mental mind state. How we interpret the environment around us. Some of the causes of suffering happened to be connected with actions we've done previously. In other words, why we find ourselves in that particular situation and not in another situation.

So, any experience of suffering has many different causes. It has a karmic cause created previously that resulted in our being in that situation. It has an

environmental, social and political cause. It has a psychological cause—our main mental state now. But that doesn't mean that suffering is good. And that doesn't mean you DESERVE to suffer. It just means that things grow out of causes. And so when your causes are ripening, it's good if you can accept that situation.

One of the things that increase our problem is that we don't like to accept the situations we are in. And we battle and we say: "This can't be. I don't want it to be. My best friend died, it can't be!" We refuse to accept the reality of somebody's death. So, we just get incredibly overwhelmed by the grief of it. That's our refusal to accept the reality of the situation that causes the pain.

So, when these people said that they were wearing off previous karma when they were tortured, they're merely accepting the fact that results come from causes. And that part of the causes of our present suffering is harmful actions that we did in the past. That's all it's saying.

[Audience: inaudible]

Sometimes in the church, like prior to 1965, you beat yourself. And if that was the best way you remove all your obstacles to God, you torture yourself and you put on the nettle things and you go on the ice in the Arctic Ocean naked at midnight. You do all these things to make your body suffer as a way of purification. Buddhism says: "Look, we suffer already without trying. We don't need to cause ourselves suffering."

That's really dumb!"

The Buddha, for six years, lived as an ascetic eating one grain of rice a day and got so thin that when he touched his belly button, he felt his backbone. And then he realized that this is stupid, that it doesn't lead to purification. So he went out and had a good meal. And then he went under the bodhi tree and being well nourished, he was able to concentrate and he attained enlightenment.

So, deliberately causing yourself suffering is not part of Dharma.

[Audience: inaudible]

That every thought perpetuates samsara? I would think it would probably be every *ignorant* thought perpetuates samsara.

It's not: "I am ignorant therefore I can't get pure". We are under the influence of ignorance right now. So what we are trying to do, the first step is at least to not fall under the influence of aversion, attachment, jealousy and pride as well. First step is to get rid of those really harmful attitudes. Even if you are ignorant, you can still act kindly. You can still create good karma. Then, all that positive potential you build up on your mindstream by the creation of good karma sets a good ambience—it's like fertilizer on your mindstream—so then, as you hear teachings, especially teachings on emptiness, you can contemplate them and begin to understand them. And then, the more and more you understand the teachings on emptiness, the more and more you are able to eliminate the layers of ignorance. So, there is a way

out.

[Audience: inaudible]

You are saying that in approaching these things, we can approach it from the idea of proving it and trying to get some rational hold on it. But you feel that somehow, up until now, you haven't been able to get sufficient proof. However, there is part of you that trusts and has faith that it generally makes sense. And there seems to be a whole lineage of people who have somehow gotten somewhere believing this. So, you're willing to kind of follow along and see what happens.

Check it out and see what happens.

[Audience: inaudible]

This is the kind of subject that really requires a lot of thought. And I suspect that there might be some way to logically prove it. It's a question of coming up with the logical proof. It's a question of making our minds capable of understanding it. So, it's two things. I am not saying that I've presented a coherent case, because of my own limitations. Also, whether or not we are capable of understanding a coherent case if it was presented, that is another question as well.

But, I do feel that it's perfectly all right if the thing in general makes sense to us now as it is. And it's one of those things that we say it makes general sense, so I am going to start to engage in it and practice it, knowing that as I practice it, I'll understand it better so I will be able to prove it or disprove it. In addition, I'll purify my mind so my capability to understand it

better will improve. And then we will see what happens. And I think that's perfectly all right.

[Audience: inaudible]

So, your basic criterion is: "Is it useful or not useful, rather than is it true or not true." That is a very useful approach for you. However, not all people think like you. So, there are logical explanations given to the people who don't think like you. Because for those people, they need another kind of approach. We all think differently. So, different presentations are given because different people hold on to different criteria. So, the logical part may not be our "baby" but it might be somebody else's. That's OK, isn't it?

[Audience: inaudible]

All things are inter-related but they aren't all one. So, the object and the subject are interdependent but the object is not the subject, and the subject isn't the object. But they do inter-relate. They are dependent on each other.

But you can't say that you and I are exactly the same thing. If I moved into your house and said that this is my house because we are one, I don't think you'd be too happy. [Laughter.]

[Audience: inaudible]

You can become enlightened, that doesn't mean I become enlightened at the same time, because if I have not created the cause for it, it's not going to

happen. However, your mindstream and my mindstream definitely influence each other. And they both have very similar natures, in the sense that they both have Buddha potential.

[Audience: inaudible]

You mean can you do an action and I experience the result? No.

[Audience: inaudible]

You don't take a computer file with you, and put all your karma nicely on it that you can take in your hand. When a person creates the actions, the one who is the continuity of that person will experience the result. Otherwise, it would be like I kill somebody and you get thrown in prison, or you generate loving kindness and I become a Buddha. It doesn't work that way. Cause and effect, it works in appropriate ways. If you plant a seed in one field, it doesn't grow in the other field.

[Audience: inaudible]

Well, it does help other beings. Because we interrelate, don't we? Let's say that Cindy is a bodhisattva. She can't create good karma for you. She can't create it and then transfer it to your account. Karma is not like having a bank account. However, Cindy is a bodhisattva, so she can do a lot of things that influence you in a very beneficial way so that you become a better person and so that you will become a

bodhisattva. Because she can teach you, she can be a good example. She can inspire you and guide you. She can do all sorts of things that influence you.

[Audience: inaudible]

Buddhism doesn't talk too much about the brain. There isn't really talk about the brain, and the role of the brain and perception and memory. They would say all these are stored in the mindstream. The scientists would say they're stored in the brain cells. They can both be right.

[Audience: inaudible]

Well, memory is a mental factor. The ability to remember is a mental factor. They say the imprints get placed on the mindstream. A subtle memory is there. As your mental factor of memory gets better, these things can surface. Or as you develop clairvoyant powers, you remember more and more clearly. Buddhism doesn't talk too much about the brain's role, but that doesn't mean the brain doesn't play a role.

CHAPTER 4

The Six Preparatory Practices

What I want to go into now in this talk is the fourth point in the outline: “How to guide students to enlightenment”. We will start on the first sub-point: “How to rely on a spiritual mentor as the root of developing the path,” but, actually, this section is not on the specific topic of “How to rely on a teacher”. First comes the whole discussion on how to set up a meditation session. This whole topic of how to set up a meditation session has been put in here in preparation for the first actual meditation that we are doing, which is “How to rely on a spiritual teacher”. These instructions also apply equally to all the forthcoming topics that are going to be explained, like ‘precious human life’, ‘impermanence and death’, and so on. They are the basic general instructions for setting up a meditation on any of these topics.

Setting up a Meditation Practice

In general, it is very good to meditate on the Lamrim teachings in a retreat setting, where you cut out a lot of your extraneous activities and focus on the teachings. You would do maybe four meditation sessions a day or six sessions. For those of us who have very busy lives, who can’t take out time to do retreats, we can still continue to do the Lamrim

meditations, doing one session a day or, if possible, two sessions a day. The important thing is to be continuous in the practice, to not break the continuity. It is like anything you train yourself to do, you really need to practice every day. If you practice the piano for one day and then don't do it for another month, you lose everything you have gained. It is really important that every day you do some meditation.

Keep your sessions short at the beginning, maybe half an hour. If that's too long for you, just do twenty minutes. Don't make your session too long. Don't squeeze your mind nor push it, but rather it is really important that when you meditate, you come off your cushion wanting more; not come off your cushion saying, "Oh, this is so long and I'm so tired. I'm glad it's over! I don't want to do that again." But instead, you want to come off with the feeling, "Oh, I could have done more because this was really nice." You should be eager to want to come back. So keep your session to a reasonable length, don't push them and make them too long.

Then go through the path sequentially. Spend some time, as I'm teaching the different meditations, to concentrate on those particular meditation subjects. After we have gone through the whole text, then you can do each subject for a week, or one subject for three days, and then go on to the next subject. You can time it yourself but do it in a sequential manner and then go back and start again at the beginning because in that way you'll get through all the different subjects. But this is for after we have covered all the subjects. Right now, while we are teaching the text, try and really spend time on the particular subjects

that are being taught so they're fresh in your mind and you can gain some experience with them. It is good to meditate in the same place every day, if you can. Set aside one corner of your house and establish a shrine. Keep the area where you meditate clean so that every time you walk by that place, you get the feeling of how you feel when you do your meditation and prayers. Every time you sit down there, you're building up that same energy. So do it in a quiet, special kind of place in your house. Don't meditate in front of the TV. Don't do it in the kids' playroom. Meditate in a quiet, pleasant place that is really going to build up the energy inside of you.

If you can avoid it, don't meditate on your bed. Why? Because when we see our bed, what do we think of? [Laughter.] Right! We are not really thinking of the lucid, clear mind of meditation when we see our bed. That's why they say try and sit somewhere else; not on your bed. Also, don't sit on the pillow you sleep with, which you lay your head on. Have your own meditation cushion. I am describing the ideal conditions. If you have your own home, this isn't too difficult to do, and it really pays off.

Six Preparatory Practices

Before we actually start the meditation on a specific subject matter—for example, relying on the teacher or the precious human life or death and impermanence—first, there are six preparatory practices that are done. These are very important. Often we like to skip the preparatory things and go right into the main, juicy

part. But in actual fact, the preparations are very important. If you ever go to teachings in Dharamsala, His Holiness will spend about half an hour doing prayers before the session. We do it for just a very short time. We do the Western condensed version, but His Holiness always says that if you prepare the mind properly through contemplating the meaning of these prayers, then when you actually meditate you get somewhere in your meditation. But if your mind isn't prepared properly, then even if you spend a long time on the meditation, your mind is still very much like a piece of rock and you don't really get anywhere.

Now, I imagine different questions will come up as we're going along doing these six preparations, because it does involve talking about devotional practices. Some people like devotional practices and feel that they are really beneficial. Other people get very turned off by them. That's because we have very different dispositions and different personalities. If you are a person who likes them, you can do the longer version of the different prayers and practices. If you are a person who doesn't like so many prayers and practices, you can do a short version. The reason we do the prayers that are written down by others is because we don't always know what kind of attitudes to cultivate in our prayers. We don't always know how to train our mind. The lineage teachers, out of their kindness, wrote down different prayers and prescribed different practices as a way of giving us very specific instructions on what thoughts to develop and what specific things to do. My personal feeling is that if you understand all these steps and the attitudes you want to develop, and if you feel more

comfortable saying the prayers in your own words, this is fantastic. The guidelines from the lineage lamas are there to help us because we don't always know what to think about.

We have six preparatory practices. I'll just list them and then we'll go through them in depth. Before the meditation session we have to:

1. Clean the room and set up the shrine or the altar.
2. Obtain offerings and arrange them very nicely.
3. Sit in the eight-point posture, which refers to establishing a good motivation and sitting in the correct physical composure, and then you take refuge and generate an altruistic intention for your meditation.
4. Visualize the field of positive potential, which are all the holy beings—the lineage teachers, the Buddhas and bodhisattvas and so on.
5. Do the seven-limb prayer like we did before the teachings here, and we offer the mandala which is symbolic of the universe.
6. Request inspiration.

If you look closely, the prayers that we do before the teachings are all contained in these practices. Here we are going to get into some explanation of the prayers that we've been doing.

Preparatory Practice 1: Clean the room, set up the shrine

Before we actually sit down, the first thing we want to

do is clean the room. This is very helpful for our mind because our environment is a reflection of our internal state of mind. Having a clean, neat and tidy environment is usually suggestive that your mind is clean and neat. That's not to say that if your house is messy, your mind is messy. But sometimes it happens that way. It's something to check up. However, we can say that when we go into a clean environment, our mind feels much more relaxed than if we go into an environment that is completely cluttered. Many objects overload you sensually if the whole place is filthy. Clutter and mess does something to put our minds off.

So we clean the room. They talk about five advantages of cleaning the room:

a. You get your mother off your back. No, Lama Tsongkhapa didn't say that. [Laughter.] Rather, your room becomes clean and pure. You've set up a good environment for yourself.

b. You help other people's minds because when other people come into your place, they feel relaxed. They feel that it's clean. We know what this is like. We get certain feelings when we walk in certain areas.

c. They talk very often of different kinds of gods, or different kinds of spirits—other beings who are still within the cyclic existence who have certain powers to be able to help practitioners. The gods that are attracted to virtue and attracted to Buddhism are also attracted to a nice, neat environment. They tend to come and also influence the energy of the place and

help to protect us. This, by the way, is why they say not to smoke around temples and Dharma centers—not only is the smoke offensive to human beings, but also to these different gods, and it chases them away. I don't think the tobacco companies will believe me, but you know what to do. [Laughter.]

d. You create the karma to have a beautiful body in future lives, an attractive body that is pleasing to other people.

e. You also create the karma to be born as one of these gods or devas, or even in the pure realm. In other words, cleaning your environment is like cleaning your mind.

When you clean the environment, it is a meditation in and of itself. They always tell this story about one disciple at the time of the Buddha. He was very, very dumb. He had one teacher, a non-Buddhist teacher who was trying to teach him two syllables, 'Om Bum'. When he remembered 'Om,' he forgot 'Bum,' and when he remembered 'Bum,' he forgot 'Om.' Eventually the teacher got fed up and kicked the student out. This guy was just completely overwhelmed. "I can't learn anything. I am so dumb, my teacher kicked me out!" He was crying and crying and crying.

Somebody brought him to the Buddha. The Buddha, because he had so many skillful means, gave this guy a meditation practice suitable for him. He gave him a broom and had him sweep the courtyard in front of the temple where the monks and nuns were

doing their prayers. He had to sweep one side of the courtyard and then he would do the other side. When he swept the other side, the side that was first swept became dirty so he had to go back and sweep that again, so he spent all his time going back and forth cleaning both sides of the courtyard. The Buddha told him as he was cleaning, to say, “Clean the dust, clean the stain.” This man went all day long with his broom saying, “Clean the dust, clean the stain,” as he was sweeping. At some point, through the force of offering service with faith and devotion to the Buddha and to the Sangha, and through the force of continually thinking about what does “clean the dust, clean the stain” mean, he realized that it means to clean the two levels of obscurations.

Remember at the last talk, I spoke about the two levels of obscurations? The first one being the afflicted obscurations—the ignorance, attachment, and anger—and the karma that cause rebirth? These are considered the dirt, so you clean that. “Clean the stain” refers to the subtle cognitive obscurations that are like the smell of onions after you had taken the onions out of the pot. In other words, the dualistic appearance of phenomena. He began to understand exactly what the obstacles of the path were and he began to understand the value of the wisdom realizing emptiness ...

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

... Because we don't have the karma to meet Shakyamuni directly, our spiritual master becomes the one that helps us contact Shakyamuni's teaching. This

is why we put the picture of the teacher higher, OK? Then you have the Buddha image right below that and then below that, or surrounding that, you would have pictures of different meditative deities such as Manjushri, Tara, Chenrezig and whatever other ones that you happen to have faith in and that benefit your practice. Your photographs and statues represent the body of the Buddha, the form of the Buddha. You also want to have a representation of the speech of the Buddha by putting a text on your shrine. They recommend putting on the Prajnaparamita sutra if you can, or at least the Heart Sutra (this is the short version), or some kind of Dharma book. Your figures of the Buddha and the teacher would be in the center. On their right, (in other words on your left as you look at the altar), you would put the text. The text represents the Buddha's speech, the means of communicating the Dharma. We would also want to have a symbol of the Buddha's mind. On the other side, in other words, from the side of the Buddha, on the Buddha's left (or on your right as you are looking at it), you would place the figure of a stupa, like the stupa at Bodhgaya that represents the Buddha's mind, or, a bell. In the tantric practice, the bell represents the wisdom realizing emptiness. So there you have the three representations or symbols of the body, speech and mind of all the holy beings.

When you put your Dharma text on the shrine it is nice to have it wrapped up and kept clean. If you use the book a lot, I don't think you necessarily have to wrap it each time, but do keep the whole area clean. Also, generally, your Dharma books are kept higher than the statue of the Buddha. Very often, like when

you go to the main temple in Dharamsala, you have the statue of the Buddha in the center and you have the Dharma texts on each side, but the Dharma texts aren't down on the ground. They are raised up.

Sometimes you go into rooms and the shelf on the top is the one with the Dharma books and then lower, below that, is the altar and the pictures of the teachers and the Buddha and the deities.

Now, the reason that the Dharma texts are kept higher than the pictures is because the Buddha's speech is the way in which the Buddha benefits us the most. It is through the power of speech, through the power of the teaching that we come to understand it. Of all the qualities of the Buddha, the communicative ability—the Buddha's speech—is the one that directly benefits us the most. Since the Dharma texts represent that, they are kept higher up.

Also, keep your Dharma books on a separate shelf. Don't mix your Dharma books up with all your sexy novels and your gardening books. Don't put your gardening books on top and your Dharma books below. You could say, "These are a lot of rules and regulations. Why is everything so picky-finicky?" I am not saying that you have to do it this way. What I am saying is, check up your own mental attitude and see if it makes a difference to you how you treat the physical representations of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Does your mind feel better if you treat the representation of the Dharma teachings in a very respectful way—keeping them high, keeping them clean, and not mixing them up with Newsweek, Business Review, and Wall Street Journal? Does that make your mind feel different than when you just

have your Dharma books thrown here and there and mixed in with the TV guide and everything else? Just check up on your own attitude and see if it makes a difference to you. If it does, then you can see a bit of reason in keeping your Dharma books high and all your other books in a separate place.

Do keep them clean. Sometimes you go to people's homes, the Dharma books are all up there on a nice high shelf, you go to pick one out, and all the dust just falls off all over the place. Try to keep it clean. This is a way of learning to be mindful, a way of training our mind. Again, it is something that might take you time to see the sense of it. It is not just a bunch of needless rules and regulations. It is not done to show respect to the Dharma texts because the Dharma texts, from their side, what do they need to be shown respect for? A book does not need respect.

This is all done to make us more aware of our relationship with physical objects, how we treat physical objects and the meaning of these different physical objects to us in our life. It is a way of making us aware, making us mindful so that we do cherish the internal realizations of the Dharma and how they help us. Seeing what the books really do represent—they communicate the path to us—therefore, kind of automatically, we treat them well. If you are married and you have wedding pictures, you treat your wedding pictures well. Why? Because they are something that's very valuable to you. You don't just throw it here and there and everywhere. It is valuable, so you take care of it. Similarly, if your Dharma books are valuable, then you take care of them in the same way. But it's something to think about, to check up

and observe your own mind. See if it makes a difference to you.

This is basically how you set up a shrine. The teachers, then the Buddha and the deities below, and then on your left (as you face the altar), or the Buddha's right, is the symbol of the Buddha's speech—a Dharma text, hopefully one of the perfection of wisdom sutras. On the Buddha's left, or on your right as you face the altar, a stupa or a bell, representing the Buddha's mind.

Preparatory Practice 2: Obtain offerings properly and arrange them nicely

In front of these, you set up the offerings. There are various ways to do offerings. Sometimes you see a set of seven water bowls. This is one way of making offerings. Seven, because they talk about the seven qualities of enlightenment, sometimes called the seven kisses of enlightenment. Maybe seven water bowls to represent that.

Water is offered because it is easy to offer in the sense that we don't have a lot of attachment to it. Water becomes a very pure offering. The purpose of offering is not just to worship the Buddha, make devotion, and try and win the Buddha's good favor. The purpose of the offering, what we are really offering, is our pure intention, our confidence in the Triple Gem and our understanding of the Dharma. It is important that when we offer, we do so without attachment. Water is something that we can get easily. We aren't usually attached to it. Water becomes a

very pure offering. I will come back in a few minutes to tell you specifically how to set up the water bowls. But I just want to briefly go over some of the different offerings now.

Sometimes you'll see the eight offerings. This is prevalent in tantric practice. You have the water for drinking, the water for washing the feet, flowers, incense, light, perfume, food and music. These eight offerings are based on ancient Indian culture. Whenever you had a guest into your house—and in India, remember it is very hot and dusty—first you give them something to drink, then you let them clean their dusty feet. You offer flowers because India is full of flowers, and incense and light, perfume (something to make the environment nice), then you offer them food and you have a good meal. After that, you have some entertainment or music. These eight offerings that you find in tantric practices come from this ancient Indian tradition. Even if you don't have a tantric initiation, you can still offer these eight. It is perfectly OK.

When you offer these eight things, they are in that specific order but you can offer more of one thing. For example, it is not necessary to have just one candle on your altar. You can have two candles or five candles, or you can have an electric light. It doesn't really matter. Some kind of light is nice. Similarly, you can offer different kinds of food and things like that. The Chinese have a custom of offering four or five pieces of fruit because that's how big the plates were. Some people would ask, "Can we offer six pieces of fruit?" or "Can we offer two pieces of fruit? Do I create negative karma if I offer only two pieces of

fruit?” I said, “No, no, no, relax!” It is just the Chinese custom that you stack them up in a certain way with four or five pieces. But that’s just a cultural thing. If you only have two pieces, offer two. If you have more, offer more. OK? The idea is that you do it with a very good motivation.

Giving the best quality

Also, when you are offering, you want to offer the best quality to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. You can see here the purpose of offering. It is a very skillful way to help us overcome attachment and miserliness. The Buddhas and bodhisattvas from their side, they don’t need our offerings. If you are enlightened, you don’t need apples and oranges and incense sticks. But we need to make the offerings because we need to cultivate happiness in giving—to train our mind in that. We also need to get rid of our attachment and miserliness. One way to do that is to offer the things of best quality. You can see how our ordinary mind works: if you have a bunch of apples, you would like to keep the good ones for yourself and give the bad ones away. That’s the way we usually are, isn’t it? We put the bad ones on the altar and we keep the good ones. That’s saying something about our way of thinking, isn’t it? When we keep the best for ourselves and we offer the not-so-nice ones to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, it says something about our way of thinking.

If you really love somebody and care about them very deeply, you usually offer them the best quality. And you take the second best with a completely

happy joyful mind because you care so much about the other person. Similarly here, when we are making offerings on the altar, we should really remember the qualities of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Remember their kindness towards us. Develop a sense of respect and admiration. And then have even more desire to bring them happiness than we have for our samsaric friends. Really try to offer the best things on the shrine.

Giving with an attitude of completely giving

When you offer things, you should offer them with an attitude of completely giving. Even though later on, as the caretaker of the shrine, you can take down the different offerings and you can give them to friends or you can eat them yourself. When you offer them, it is really important that you give them with an attitude of completely giving. You don't give with the attitude of "I'm offering to the Buddha so that I can eat them later."

When I taught in Singapore, I remember one day, we were having some big puja at the center so everyone brought lots of offerings. They put all the offerings on the altar. We did the practice, and then we sat down to have lunch. Coincidentally, after lunch, when it was dessert time, they decided that it was the time the offerings needed to be taken off the altar. It was very curious because each person went up and took off the altar the thing that they had offered, and then passed it around to all the other people there. I said, "Hey! Hold on a minute. What's going on here? How come you decided to clear the

altar just when it happened to be dessert time? When we offer, did we really offer with a pure motivation? Did we really give it to the Buddha completely? Or did we just give it to the Buddha to watch it until we wanted it for ourselves? Did we really give it, or was our mind still clinging because when it came to passing it out, everybody went and got what they offered?”

The idea here is that when you offer, you really give. Of course, as the caretaker of your shrine, you can't just leave the apples and oranges there and let them rot. You wouldn't like rotten food on your plate. After a day or whatever, you take the offering down. But it's good to do so with the remembrance that you are the caretaker of the shrine. You are the helper of the Buddha to clear away these offerings. You don't do it with, “Oh! Now they are mine,” but, “Now the Buddha is distributing them to me and to others.” Then you may eat them yourself or you may give them to other people.

There are certain offering pujas, for example, the tsog offering (some of you may be familiar with) which is a special offering puja (the Lama Chöpa puja). It's usually done on the Tibetan 10th and 25th and it is a tantric practice. During this offering, you offer many things on the shrine and then in the middle of the puja, all the offerings, after they have been actually offered to the Three Jewels, are distributed among all of the people present. Many people who don't know about this say, “Oh! OK, we just did all these nice singing chants, now it's time to have tea and eat!” They just see it as a kind of tea break in the middle of the puja. But it's not a tea break. Well, it is,

in that sense, but it's not just, "now we are eating and munching something really nice." With this tsog offering ("tsog" means assembly or gathering), you understand that these things have been offered to the Triple Gem. You imagine yourself as a Buddha and when the things are distributed, you are eating and enjoying these things as a Buddha. This is part of the meditation. It is not just, "Oh goody, now we get to eat biscuits and drink tea." I'm saying this so that you will have a good attitude when you're doing pujas and the offerings are being passed out.

How to dispose of the offerings

Also, things that have been offered to the Buddha, if you do discard them, should be placed in a high and clean place. In other words, when you take the water down after you have offered it on the altar, don't flush it down the toilet. Instead take it outside and put it on the flowers. When you've offered some food and if you haven't had time to eat it or give it to someone else, and it has gone bad, then you put it up somewhere. If you can, get it on your roof! Here our roof is slanted and it would all fall off, so I put it on the bench outside. Put it in a high and clean place, you don't just give it to the dogs, because these are things that have been offered to the Buddha. When you eat them yourself, try and eat them with some kind of mindful feeling that you are eating these things that have been given to you by the Triple Gem.

Motivation for making offerings

When you make offerings, it is important to understand the reasons for making them. It is for us to develop a sense of joy at giving and to overcome our attachment and miserliness. It is important to cultivate a good motivation when you are making offerings. In other words, to cultivate the wish to become a Buddha for the benefit of others and to think, “I am making these offerings on the altar in order to become a Buddha for the benefit of others. By making these offerings, I’m purifying my negative qualities, and by making these offerings I’m also accumulating a lot of positive potential. I need to create this positive potential so that my mind is enriched. I can actually gain the realizations of the path for the benefit of all sentient beings.” It is important to cultivate the bodhicitta or the altruistic intention before you make the offering.

How to actually offer

As you make the offerings, you consecrate them with the syllables “Om Ah Hum.” Like when we do the food offering, we say “Om Ah Hum.” This is to consecrate the offerings. In other words, you have visualized the Triple Gem in the space in front. You are looking at your offerings as manifestations of blissful wisdom, and you are offering them in that way. The “Om Ah Hum” consecrates the visualization. It is helping you to understand that you are not just offering ordinary apples and oranges and water but somehow by the power of your meditation, you’re trying to see these things as incredibly pure substances. You are trying to see them as

manifestations of blissful wisdom. You say “Om Ah Hum” to help consecrate.

As you are offering, really use your imagination. In the seven-limb prayer we say, “We make offerings, actual and mentally transformed.” The ones that you place on the shrine are the actual offerings. While you are placing the actual ones on the shrine, you’re also mentally transforming them. You might offer one apple, but you imagine from that apple comes seven other apples, and from those apples come seven others and so on. They are all manifestations of blissful wisdom. You have the whole sky completely filled with these beautiful offerings. Even though physically you might offer one single flower, or one donut—whatever it is, mentally you amplify it, you enlarge it. Often in the prayers, you hear the expression, “clouds of offerings.” This is what we are talking about—imagining the whole sky with incredibly beautiful pure objects. When you visualize that, your own mind gets very happy and joyful. It’s nice to imagine beautiful things, isn’t it? It is important to think of the things that you are very attached to and imagine lots of them and offer them mentally.

Again, don’t just offer to the Buddha all the things you don’t like. You like peanut butter, but you offer the jelly to the Buddha because you don’t like jelly and you keep the peanut butter to yourself. No! You offer the peanut butter and you also imagine lots of peanut butter. And it’s not just the peanut butter that sticks to the roof of your mouth, but it’s wisdom and bliss. It’s this exquisite celestial offering. Really use your imagination. Be creative. This isn’t hard because

we are doing this kind of thing all the time, right? When you want to go out to dinner with your friend on Saturday night, you have a great visualization of how the dinner is going to taste, don't you? We visualize and imagine all the time. Here we're deliberately making them even greater and even more beautiful and then we offer them! Why? To free ourselves of all greed and attachment.

At the end, after you have made the offerings, you dedicate the positive potential for the benefit of all beings. Here you have complete constructive karma. You have the motivation (the altruistic intention), you have the action of offering the substances and the action of elaborating the offerings and consecrating them with "Om Ah Hum." You have the dedication, sharing or distributing your positive potential to all others. It is also important, while you are offering, to really imagine the Buddhas and bodhisattvas and truly think that they are receiving your things and are very happy to get them. In other words, you are not just putting apples and oranges in front of a statue.

There is a story of a little monk who stayed up late at night appearing at the meditation hall to see if the Buddha actually reaches out his hands and takes the apples. Don't think that you are just putting your offerings in front of a statue and that the Buddha doesn't really get it. By the force of your imagination recognize that the Buddhas and holy beings are there and what you are giving them is a purified offering. Imagine that they are enjoying that purified offering. Even though the actual apples and oranges stay there, they are enjoying something that is more transcendental than that. This makes your own mind

happy when you imagine them enjoying something. It's like when you really care about somebody, and you imagine giving them a Christmas present, you think of how happy they will be and that makes you happy. It is a similar thing. Except here it's the holy objects, instead of just giving to the people that we are close to.

How to do the water offering

Let me just show you how to do the water offering. I'll show you how to do the seven water bowls. By the way, you don't always have to have seven bowls. There is a story about one great meditator who was very poor and had only one bowl. In the morning he used to offer one bowl of water to the Buddha. Whenever he had to have tea, he asked the Buddha if he could borrow the bowl back. The idea is that what you have, you offer. Offering doesn't necessarily mean offering many things. But on the other hand, if you have a lot of things, don't be miserly. If you don't have a lot of stuff, that doesn't matter—just offer whatever you have. You could offer water; it doesn't cost anything. But the idea is what you have, what you can offer purely without attachment, you do that. Then you offer a lot mentally—with your 'clouds' of offerings. But if you have the ability to make nice offerings, don't rationalize and say, "Well, it's OK to only offer a little and visualize the rest." What I am getting at is, don't rationalize here. Just do what is comfortable according to your capability.

With the water offering, you want to think that you are offering this wisdom nectar to the Buddhas and

bodhisattvas. You are not just offering ordinary water with chlorine in it; you are offering wisdom nectar. You transform the water.

Usually, to do this completely perfect, you light a stick of incense—incense represents pure ethical conduct—and then you take your bowls. By the way, you don't leave empty bowls upright on the altar—it's just like when you are hungry, you don't like somebody to offer you an empty bowl. Symbolically, we don't have empty bowls on the shrine as we don't want to offer the Buddha nothing. If your bowls are empty, they should be put upside down.

Before you make an offering, you have to clean the bowls, just like you clean your own plates before you eat. Have a clean cloth, not an old rag. The cloth represents the wisdom realizing emptiness. Then, any dirt or dust or whatever on the bowl, you think of it as the defilements of sentient beings. Then you wipe the bowl. You don't need to sit and scour it for half an hour. You wipe it out, cleaning the minds of sentient beings. Then you would hold the bowl over your incense stick, which represents pure ethical conduct. You hold the bowl over the incense to purify it, and then you stack it again face downwards. You do your other bowls in the same way, so you clean all of your bowls and they're all faced downwards. If don't have the kind of bowls that you can stack one on top of another, it doesn't matter. If you have the kind that you can only line up, just put them upside down before you offer them.

After you've cleaned them all, hold the stack of bowls right side up and pour some water into the top bowl as you are saying, "Om Ah Hum,". You take out

the top bowl, pour almost all the water out of it into the next bowl in the stack, leaving a little bit of water (in the top bowl), and then set this first bowl down (on the altar). In this way you are not offering an empty bowl—you have something in it. With the next bowl, you pour almost all of the water out and then you set it down. Place your bowls in a straight line, starting from your left going to your right. Again, this is a practice to develop mindfulness. We are not just throwing things all over. We are really taking the time to watch our relationships with the physical objects in our environment. We put them down quietly and gently as well as in a straight line, not zigzag. You leave about the distance of a grain of rice between them. In other words, don't put your bowls touching each other. Nor don't put them two inches apart. This is again a training in mindfulness. About the distance of a grain of rice. Don't ask me long grain or short grain. [Laughter.]

Once you have all of them set down on the altar, each with a little bit of water, take your pitcher again and go back to the first bowl. It is nice to offer with both hands. Also, when you're putting fruit or anything on the altar, it is nicer if you can do with both hands. It is more respectful. I mean, when somebody gives you something, if they give it with both hands, it is different than if they were to just toss it across the room.

Now go back to the first bowl on the left and start to fill it up. Again, don't fill it completely to the top. Leave about the distance of a grain of rice from the top because you don't want it to be so full that it spills all over the place. That's just being sloppy. You don't

want it so empty like you are being miserly. You want it somewhere in the middle. Consecrate it by saying “Om Ah Hum” three times as you are offering. You are imagining offering this blissful wisdom nectar to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas and you are imagining that they are being very pleased with it. Do the first bowl and then do the second one, filling it up. Fill up each of the remaining bowls in the same way.

You may leave your bowls on your shrine for the duration of the day. In the evening, as it is getting dark, you take them down. When you set them up, you start from your left going to your right. When you take them down, start from your right, going to your left. You would take the first bowl on the right, pour the water out and turn the bowl upside down. You don’t have to dry the bowl—just allow it to drain by itself—but put it upside down. Do the same for each of the remaining bowls. If you know the Vajrasattva mantra, you can recite the mantra while you are doing it, or you may just think of purifying sentient beings—removing all the sufferings and causes of suffering. Again, you are transforming the action. Take the water and put it on your plants or in your garden, some place like that.

Now, maybe I’d better stop and open it up for questions. There are some more things to say about offerings but I’ll talk about them next time.

Review

To review a bit, right now we are on the section talking about how to set up a meditation session. It is important to meditate regularly, to do it every day.

Start by making your sessions short, making them consistent so that you'll feel happy to do it. Have a separate place in your house where you meditate. Every time you see that place, you should feel good about it and want to go there. Set up a shrine. Some people like to have their shrines as a very private thing. That's OK. Other people like to have their shrines where other people can see them because when their friends come over, they get some good imprints on their mind. It is completely up to you.

You have your area, and you clean it as a way of cleaning your mind. You think as you are sweeping, you're cleaning your defilements and those of sentient beings with the wisdom realizing emptiness. Then you set up your shrine with different photographs of the teachers that you've directly received teachings from, then the Buddha, then the meditational deities. The statues and pictures are the representations of the Buddha's body. Then you have the Buddha's speech on his right side, represented by the perfection of wisdom text, and then a stupa or a bell on his left side representing the Buddha's mind.

In front of these, you set up your offerings, remembering that the purpose of offering is to purify our mind and create positive potential, to free ourselves of attachment and miserliness and to develop the happiness of giving. We cultivate a good motivation, the altruistic intention. We make the actual offerings according to our own ability. If we're poor, we offer a little bit. If we're rich, we offer more. No matter how much we offer, we try and imagine it as beautiful and grandiose. We imagine it being blissful and that the Buddhas and bodhisattvas are

enjoying it so much. Then we make a dedication at the end of the offering.

There are different ways that you can set up offerings. You may set up the seven water bowls. Or if you don't have seven, do five or three or however many you want to. You may even do more than seven. Or, you can do the eight offerings—the water for drinking and washing the feet and so on. You could also offer flowers on your altar, lights, or different kinds of food—however you may want it. By the way, don't offer meat on the altar. That's not good because it's somebody else's body, and it usually involves killing. Try and make the offering something that is a vegetarian offering, unless it is a tsog puja. The tsog puja is a very special tantric practice where you have a little bit of meat, a little bit of alcohol, and in your meditation these substances are transformed. But that's a particular, special kind of offering.

When you dispose of the offerings, do so at the end of the day, with the attitude that you are taking care of the things for the Buddha. Either put them in a high and clean place or give them to other people or take them yourself.

The next session is a really interesting teaching about giving pure offerings without the five wrong livelihoods. I really like this one. Anyway, you have to come back next time to hear it. [Laughter.]

Questions and answers

[Audience:] Please repeat what the eight offerings are.

Firstly, water for drinking. Secondly, water for washing the feet. Then you have flowers. Flowers represent the qualities of the Buddha. Then you have incense, which is the fourth one, representing pure ethics. Fifth is light, representing wisdom. You have perfume, can't remember what it represents. The seventh is food. It represents samadhi because when you have samadhi you don't need to eat a lot—you nourish yourself through your meditation. And finally, you offer music. When you are offering these individual things you can also think about what the offerings represent. Like when you are offering flowers, "I am offering all the qualities of the stages and paths to enlightenment." When you offer incense or sweet smells, "I am offering pure ethical conduct." When you offer light, "I am offering the wisdom light of myself and others illuminating the darkness of ignorance." You can think in this way as you are offering all these different things.

[Audience: inaudible]

The eighth offering is music. If you are doing tantric practice, then when you play your bell or your drum, this is music offering. That's why sometimes people offer seven and not eight water bowls. Or, if you are not doing that, then you may put a bell or a conch shell—they blow the conch shell to make a sound—on the altar. Or if you have any other kind of musical instrument ... put your trumpet on the altar. [Laughter.]

[Audience: inaudible]

Not at that time, you don't. When you are doing certain rituals, then you do play music. If you like playing music, then you can think when you are playing music, that you're making offerings to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, rather than just for enjoyment or because you want everybody to think you are such a classy musician. You can again transform the music and think you're making offerings.

[Audience:] If time is a problem, how do we fit these all in?

Well, you can do a big cleaning once a week—like when you do your house—and the rest of the time, you can just dust it very quickly. Doing the offering bowls really doesn't take too long. Once you are in the habit, it only takes about five minutes to do. Putting out a bowl of fruit doesn't take too long. It is nice to do the visualization and things so you get a really pleasant feeling from offering. If you are too busy in the morning, then when you come home from work, if you have a little bit more time after you have done your grocery shopping, for example, then before you enjoy the groceries yourself, you can take some things out and offer them.

[Audience: inaudible]

How to balance it all? Again, what I am showing you here are just suggestions. You can take it and integrate it into your practice as you see fit, according to your schedule. Maybe on the weekends when you have

more time, you can really do the offerings slowly and do a more elaborate visualization; take longer with the motivation and such when you have more time. Maybe on the days when you are working, you learn to abbreviate things. This can be very helpful because our mind needs to be able to make things extensive and we also need to be able to get to the point and make it concise. On workdays focus the mind, quick bodhicitta, quick visualization of clouds of offerings. Basically, do what feels comfortable to you and remember there are long and short ways of doing everything. This is the nice thing about the Tibetan tradition. There are long and short ways and according to your time, you can stretch it or shrink it.

Types of offering

[Audience: inaudible]

There are many kinds of offering. There are offerings of physical things. There is offering of service and time and there is offering of your Dharma practice. All three are forms of offering. Offering your Dharma practice, in other words, your understanding of the teachings and cultivating those attitudes, is the best kind of offering. That type of offering can permeate offering your service and time, and offering physical objects. Whenever you help others, you can see that as an offering to the Buddha, because that's the kind of offering the Buddhas like.

[Audience:] How do we offer our food?

With the food offering (it's laid out on the back of the prayer sheet), visualize the Buddha at your heart, the food as nectar, and consecrate it. When you are offering food before meals, it is also very helpful to think, "I'm not offering this food just for my own enjoyment, I'm not offering it just for my own health and beauty, but I am offering it to keep my body alive so that I can use my life to practice the Dharma and to benefit others."

[Audience:] Please elaborate on the two levels of obscurations.

We have 'clean the dirt' and 'clean the stain.' 'Clean the dirt' is the first level of obscurations. It is called afflicted obscurations—and this refers to the ignorance, anger, attachment, and the karma that causes rebirth—because the afflicted obscurations are those things that keep us bound in cyclic existence.

When you free yourself from those, you become an arhat.

The second level of obscurations are the cognitive obscurations. The afflicted obscurations are like the onions. The cognitive obscurations are like the smell of the onions after the onions have been taken out. They are a subtler obscuration. This refers to the appearance of inherent existence. It is a false appearance to the mind, and when you've eliminated this, your mind is able to see all phenomena extremely clearly. In other words, you're able to have an omniscient mind and you have attained the state of full enlightenment or Buddhahood.

[Audience:] Why do the water bowls have to be taken down at the end of the day?

In one way, it is like cleaning up for the day—you take it down. This next one is difficult for us Westerners—that certain spirits might come and get frightened when they see their reflections in the water in the evening. You take down the bowls so they don't get frightened. But to me, it is more like cleaning up at the end of the day.

[Audience:] Can we leave the offerings on the altar for more than a day?

You can leave those more than one day but don't leave the flowers to the point where they are wilted. Take them down if they're starting to droop.

Flowers represent impermanence

[Audience: inaudible]

Actually, in the Theravada tradition whenever they offer flowers, they think of it as representing impermanence because a flower that looks so beautiful quickly decays. There is no sense in getting attached to anything.

Let's just sit and digest for a little bit. Try and remember, slowly applying the different things we have talked about.

Review

Lamrim is a gradual path—something we develop gradually in our mind. This course is to try and give you a general overview of the Buddhist path so that when you “meet” other teachings, or when you go on short courses and so on, you will know where to put whatever you have learned in terms of the whole path.

This overview will help you “fill in the gaps”. Many of you have had teachings in the past but you haven’t been able to put them all together in a consecutive framework. I’m trying to fill in the gaps so that you may be able to do so. So it is taking a lot of time and I want to ask you to please bear with me. My intention in doing this course was, like what I said, to give you an overview and to fill in the gaps. If I go quickly, I won’t fulfill either of these purposes. It would wind up being another short course and you will be, again left without a framework and many “gaps”. I can’t tell you when it is going to be over. But, as in most things in life, we should be concerned with the process of taking in the teachings and not the goal of finishing them.

Very often when we go into a retreat, we are so anxious to go but as soon as we start, we count how many days we have left because we can’t wait to finish. We are always very goal orientated.

Here, we are really trying to work on learning the path as a gradual process. I hope that by doing it slowly, the purposes I have described will be fulfilled. So far, we have talked about the qualities of the compilers, the qualities of this particular teaching (the lamrim), the fact that it’s set up as a gradual path so that we know where all the other teachings we hear fit

into the path. It helps us to avoid becoming sectarian. It shows us how all the teachings fit into a path for us to follow.

We have also covered:

- How the Lamrim should be studied and taught
- Qualities of the teacher and how to select a qualified teacher
- Qualities of a student so that we will know how to gradually develop them within ourselves
- How to listen to the teachings, the benefits of listening to the teachings
- How to listen without the faults of the three vessels
- How to give the teachings
- The etiquette that is involved on the student's part and the teacher's part

And then I took one session to describe to you the whole framework of Buddhism covering:

- The body and mind, reincarnation & karma
- Cyclic existence and rebirth

Even though the Lamrim is said to be a gradual path, in fact, it requires knowledge of the whole path.

It is not taught like in the Western system, where things are in sequential order. With the Lamrim, the more you understand the beginning, the better you understand the end; the more you understand the end, the better you understand the beginning.

Consistency in meditation

In the last session, I started getting into the preparatory practices and how to construct a meditation session. Remember that meditation should be done on a daily basis. You can do meditation retreats—with four to six sessions a day—but it is really important to be very consistent in your daily sessions, to do some meditation every day, whether you are sick or not sick, whether you are rushed or not rushed.

Keep consistency and be very patient with yourself

You have to find the right amount of effort in your meditation. You don't want to push yourself so badly that you get stressed out. On the other hand, you don't want to be lazy and not use all of your potential. It is a process of finding a delicate balance within us. This is something that we have to learn by trial and error.

Before we start the meditation session, first we clean the room to provide a clean environment for ourselves and to invite the Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

And then we arrange the altar. I've described how to set it up, where to put the different pictures and so on and the reasons for doing that. Then we talked about how to make offerings.

A hundred thousand offerings

Incidentally, when you do your preliminary practices, there are certain practices that many people do a hundred thousand times, to purify and to accumulate positive potential or merit. The practice of making a

hundred thousand water bowl offerings is one of them.

Others include refuge recitations, prostrations and mandala offerings. You don't have to do a hundred thousand. Don't worry. You don't have to do it tomorrow. But just to let you know that it is a very beneficial practice, so beneficial that many people actually undertake to do a hundred thousand.

The reason for doing a hundred thousand times, as one teacher put it, is that it gives you an opportunity to do one right. In other words, to really fully offer something or to fully bow down to the Buddha, it really takes a lot of practice.

Making meaningful offerings

We, Americans, sometimes get so hung up on the numbers. We're so production orientated—"I want to do one hundred thousand. I have done how many thousand today and then this multiplied by how many days ...” We are so concerned with the numbers and how long it is going to take us, as if we're producing merit on a production line.

We completely forget about the attitudes we're trying to generate and the feeling of confidence in the Buddha, the willingness to make offerings, the joy in making them, or the humility with which we want to show respect to the objects of refuge.

It is really important not to get so hung up on numbers but to really look at the meaning. For example, when you watch Lama Zopa prostrate, he'll just sit there for one minute. Then he does his prostration, and he'll do it so slowly, really

concentrating on everything, so that one prostration is really meaningful.

Whereas, the rest of us prostrate quickly and our mind is all over the place. We shouldn't get so hung up in the formality. Try and concentrate on the meaning, even if it means doing less.

Obtain offerings properly

The second of the six preparatory practices is obtaining the offerings properly and arranging them nicely. I've talked about how to arrange them nicely. Now I want to talk about obtaining them properly.

There are two ways that we can look at the kinds of things not to offer—things we obtain dishonestly.

This dishonesty can be in terms of:

- Obtaining things through stealing, lying and other negative actions like that.
- Offering things with the wrong motivation, e.g. offering them in order to obtain reputation so that everybody can come to your house and say, “Oh wow, you have such a fancy altar!”

Sometimes that happens in our mind. We want to make a really impressive altar—not because we really regard the Buddha with any special respect—but because we want all our friends to respect us for having such expensive statues and antiques.

Actually, it says in the scriptures we shouldn't differentiate between an expensive statue and a cheap broken statue. The Buddha's body is beyond value.

So we shouldn't look at one statue and say, “This

statue is beautiful. It costs ten thousand dollars and I got it at this really expensive store. But that statue is really ugly—it is broken and it is cheap!”

We are not looking at the material of the statue. If we do, it is basically regarding Buddha statues like we do cars. Our spiritual practice helps us go beyond that.

We think of the Buddha statue as a representation of the enlightened form. It reminds us of the qualities of the Buddha so that we generate those qualities in ourselves.

Making offerings with a pure heart

Here’s a really interesting story about making offerings with the wrong motivation. A hermit was up in the mountains and his patron was coming that day to bring him food and offer him things. So the hermit thought, “I am going to make my altar really nice.” So, he cleaned everything and he put out extra offering bowls. He made extra *tormas* and decorated everything really nicely.

Just as he was done, all of a sudden, he realized that his motivation was to impress his patron so he could get more stuff. As soon as he realized how rotten his motivation was, he took up some dirt off the floor in his cave and he threw it all over the altar.

At that time, there was another hermit in another place who had psychic power and he saw this first hermit do this, and he said, “That person just made a very pure offering. That person just practiced the Dharma by throwing dirt on the altar.”

What he was doing at that moment wasn’t throwing dirt at the Buddha. He was throwing the dirt

at his own rotten motivation.

When we offer things, let's do it with a really pure heart of confidence in the Triple Gem. Do it without attachment to the things or hoping to receive reputation or get things from somebody else.

It's good before you make your offerings, to pause and really try and generate the altruistic intention and check your motivation before you do it.

Making dishonest offerings—the five wrong livelihoods

There is another way in which we can obtain and make offerings in a dishonest way—according to the five wrong livelihoods. There are five sub-categories.

1. Offerings obtained through flattery

We have a friend and we flatter them, “Oh you're so nice! You're so generous! You're so kind!” And the reason we're praising them is with the hope that they would like us and then give us things. So the problem isn't in praising somebody. The problem is praising them with the intention to flatter them so that you get something out of it for yourself.

And we do this all the time. Being kind to other people with the intention that they would like us or give us something.

Even at Christmas time, when you give your mailman and the newsboy a present, do you really give it to them because you like them and you want them to be happy? Or do you give it to them because you want them to deliver your mail and not to mess up?

What is really our intention? Are we giving with an honest mind or to flatter them so that we get something for ourselves? Anything obtained through flattery that we use to make an offering is something obtained through one of the five wrong livelihoods.

2. Offerings obtained through hinting

This is something we do a lot. “Oh you know, what you gave me last year was really, really useful!” meaning, “Why don’t you give it to me again this year!” [Laughter.]

In all sorts of little ways, we drop hints. “Oh gee, this is really helpful! Where did you get this? It is so hard for me to go over there and get it.” We say such things with the intention to somehow manipulate the other person so that they give us what we want.

I’m not talking about genuinely thanking somebody for something they did for us. That’s one thing. But when we thank them with the intention of dropping a hint so that they do it again, then that’s one of the five wrong livelihoods.

3. Offering a small gift to get a bigger gift

You give your boss a small present with the hope that he will give you a big bonus. Or, during Christmas, giving someone a small present with the intention that they’ll open our present after they have already given us one that is worth more. Or giving your grandmother something with the hope that she will leave you her legacy. Giving of small gifts, not because we really care, but in order to receive more than we give is a

form of bribery, isn't it? I give you something so you would give me something back in return.

4. Using coercive methods

This happens when we put people in such a spot that they must give us something. This depends so much on our motivation.

If I give you a whole big teaching on the merit of generosity with the intention to hit you with a donation basket as you're leaving, then that would be wrong livelihood on my part. Because my intention is to make you feel, after having this teaching, that you can't walk out of the room with a good conscience without giving. [Laughter.]

Whenever we manipulate people in such a manner, we are forcing people into making charity, even though we might be doing it with a beautiful smile on our face, looking completely innocent.

5. Obtaining things through hypocrisy

This is pretending to be something that you aren't. Imagine that you happen to come over and I decide to do a big elaborate *puja* and take out my *dorje*, bell and drum; and put on big clothes and burn things and do all sorts of extravaganza, to make you think: "Wow, she must be a great tantric practitioner! I am going to make offerings."

Pretending to be a great practitioner when you aren't in order to get offerings is being a hypocrite in your practice. When your patron comes over, or someone who makes offerings comes over, then all of

a sudden, you start doing a lot of practice. All of a sudden, you start looking like a very pure practitioner and behave properly. But as soon as your patron is away, then you are lying and stealing and being rude and inconsiderate again.

I remember the first time that I heard this teaching about the five wrong livelihoods, I was so shocked because as a child, I was actually taught that these were things I was supposed to do in order to get things.

In other words, it is very rude to ask people to give you something directly but it is OK to hint; it is OK to flatter; it is OK to give them a small present so they'll give you a big one. It is OK to do all of those things. But to ask a person directly would be very rude. We weren't allowed to do that. I remember thinking how curious this is—how all these dishonest ways of procuring things are so deeply ingrained in our society!

Offering our practice

If we get anything from these five wrong livelihoods, and offer them to the Buddha, it is not a pure offering. What pleases the Buddha is not having the material on the altar. What pleases the Buddha most is our own practice.

If we use all sorts of devious methods and dishonest motivation to get things and then offer them, our practice is very impure and so the offering is impure.

When we are offering a substance on the altar, we

are really offering our practice. We are not offering a material. The Buddha doesn't need the candle but what does please the Buddha is if we practice properly, if we get the candle in a proper way.

This is something to think about—to go over our lives and see how we get the things that we have. How much do we use these five ways to get gifts or to get things from other people or to influence other people?

And, then, try and think how we can cultivate a more honest, compassionate and kind motivation towards these people so that how we interact with them is coming from a really kind heart and not any devious method.

Preparatory Practice 3: Sitting in the 8-point posture, in a positive frame of mind, take refuge and generate bodhicitta

Sitting in the 8-point posture: there are seven points with regard to the physical posture and the eighth point refers to the mental attitude.

1. The legs

In terms of your physical posture, the ideal to aim for (but we have to modify it according to our physical ability) is sitting in the Vajra position. This is sometimes called the lotus position but from a Buddhist point of view, it is not called 'lotus', it is called 'Vajra'. You put your left leg on your right thigh and then the right leg on the left thigh.

Now, many people can't do that. It hurts too much. So, you can sit cross-legged. You can sit in a 'half-Vajra'—with your left leg up on the right thigh and the right leg down.

You can sit cross-legged in the Indian style like what we did in kindergarten. You can sit in Tara's position where your legs aren't crossed at all but you have your left leg tucked in and your right leg right in front of it. That is also very comfortable.

Sit on a cushion. That prevents your legs from falling asleep.

If you are uncomfortable sitting in any of those ways, then sit on a chair. That's OK because we all aren't great meditators from day one. It takes time. It is good if you can slowly try and sit in a Vajra position; maybe do it for thirty seconds or one minute or five minutes at the beginning of your meditation session. Sitting in a perfect position makes some kind of imprint in your mind so that gradually—as you improve physically and mentally—you can do it longer.

Be comfortable

It is important to be comfortable in your meditation posture for most of your session because you are trying to work with your mind. Meditation is what you do with your mind, not so much with your body.

But like I said at the retreat, don't lie down when you meditate. It is a very bad habit to get into. It is too much like sleeping and you'll probably wind up sleeping.

We want our mind to be alert when we meditate.

So, we should try to have our body in an alert position. When you go to university, you don't lie down on the floor and listen to your professors. When you take your exams, you don't lie down.

If you have some incredible physical ailment, which some people have, in which sitting cross-legged or sitting on a chair is just too painful, then lie down. Or when you are sick and you are trying to meditate but you can't sit up, then lie down. But in normal circumstances, try and sit erect if you can.

2. The back

The second of the seven-point position is to have an upright body, to have your spine erect. It is very helpful to imagine that you're pulled up by a string from the crown of your head that helps you to keep your back straight.

3. The shoulders

The third point is to have your shoulders level. You don't want them slumping forward; you don't have them back like in the army. But they are level and you are sitting up straight.

4. The hands

The fourth point is to have your right hand on your left, about four fingers' width below your navel. Your thumbs are touching, forming a triangle, which puts your thumbs at about the level of your navel. Your hands are in your lap and against your body.

Sitting in this position helps the circulation of the inner energies in your body. And since our mind is related to these inner energies, if the energies circulate well, then the mind becomes more manageable. And by the way, with your arms, there is a little bit of space between your arms and your body. They are comfortably relaxed so that air can circulate.

5. The eyes

Lower your eyes. If it is possible, keep your eyes open a bit. Firstly, because light will enter and that prevents you from going to sleep. Secondly, meditation is purely a mental thing. It is not done with a visual consciousness.

If your visual consciousness is still functioning (there is light entering your eyes) and you can meditate, then you are really developing the ability to meditate while you are having some sense stimuli. That will help you a lot during the break time when you are walking around so that you can still hold the visualization or hold the mindfulness of the breath.

You look downwards—sometimes they say towards the tip of your nose, but it doesn't mean cross-eyed because you'll get a headache. You can gaze downwards, but your eyes aren't really focused on anything. It is just to put your eyes somewhere so that you no longer pay attention to the visual stimuli but you really rely on the mental consciousness. Don't roll your eyes back in the socket.

6. The mouth

Keep your mouth closed, unless you have a cold or something like that. And keep it in a relaxed position.

7. The tongue

Have your tongue touch the upper palate. This prevents a strong flow of saliva.

8. The attitude

Before we meditate, we have to check our frame of mind and see what's going on in our mind. You don't just sit down and then start to meditate right away. But you have to sit and check, "What frame of mind am I in?" That's why it is recommended to do a little bit of breathing meditation and you check: "Am I under the influence of the attachment? Am I angry right now? Am I jealous? Am I falling asleep?" Check what's going on in your mind right now.

Is your mind really scattered—under the influence of a lot of attachment? Day dreaming about all sorts of things you would rather be doing than meditating—pizza and chocolate cake, boyfriends and girlfriends, bowling alley and the mountains, or whatever your thing is.

Instead of letting the mind wonder excitedly or agitatedly, do the breathing meditation to calm it down.

If you are angry when you sit down to meditate, then you have to meditate a little bit on patience to calm your mind down and get rid of the anger.

If you don't deal with these things at the beginning, then as you start to do the meditation, they will keep

coming up and definitely distract you from the object of meditation.

If you sit down and you are falling asleep, then when you are doing the breathing meditation, you can inhale the light and exhale the smoke. All that heaviness of body and mind, you imagine as exhaling in the form of smoke. And then you inhale light—that is a very alert mind and all the good qualities you want to develop. You imagine that light permeating your body and mind.

Or you can imagine a very bright pinpointed light between your eyes. A really bright light that completely illuminates your body and mind through and through. This helps to dispel the dull mind.

So, do a little bit of breathing meditation at the beginning to get your mind in a neutral frame of mind—to make that transition from running around all day to sitting down and trying to direct your mind towards a positive object.

Sometimes, the breathing meditation is a whole meditation in itself. In this particular context, we are talking about it as a preparation for doing the prayers and for your analytical meditation session.

Then, we have to take refuge and generate bodhicitta. Now, we get into the refuge visualization. This is quite an extensive teaching, this teaching on refuge, and actually the subject of refuge comes up much later in the Lamrim. So, I will just briefly explain to give you some idea of it ...

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

The idea is that when you hear something, try to

practice it as best as you can, but don't expect yourself to understand everything. Don't expect yourself to do it perfectly. We've got to pull our mind out of this Western achievement-orientated education and really see learning Dharma as a process.

In Dharma education, it isn't sufficient to hear a teaching one time and say, "Oh, I heard that teaching. Look, I have my notebook. I know exactly how to do the visualization. I know exactly what the points are in the meditation. So I don't need to hear it again."

In Western education, once you have all the information written down, you don't need to hear it again. For Dharma, that is not true. It isn't a matter of getting the information. It is a matter of meditating.

And so the first few times when you hear a teaching, you're busy taking notes because you're trying to get the information. The more you hear the same teaching, then, you can put down your pen and start to really contemplate while you are hearing the teaching.

You come to have a really deep feeling in you when you are listening. This is a very different approach to education. It is an experiential approach. You should be having an experience when you listen to the Dharma teaching, not just collecting information.

So, that is a little bit of sidetrack but I hope it will help you when we start talking about refuge here, so that you'll begin to understand that it is an understanding that we develop very gradually.

The Dharma refuge

In the lesson that we had on rebirth and karma, we had talked about our mind being under the influence of ignorance, attachment and anger. Due to these afflictions, we do actions with our body, speech and mind that leave imprints on our mind stream.

Then, at the time of death, due to the propulsion of the karma, due to the grasping of our ignorant and attached mind, we crave for another body, grasp for another body, and the karma ripens and throws us into a particular body. And so, cyclic existence carries on from one rebirth to the next.

Now, the way to stop this is to stop the cause of cyclic existence, which is the ignorance—this fundamental misunderstanding of who we are, how we exist and how phenomena exist.

With an ignorant mind, we superimpose a way of existing on reality that it doesn't have. What we need to develop is the wisdom mind that sees that our superimposition has never existed and will never exist. In other words, we see the complete lack of our superimposition; we see the emptiness. (The absence of all that super-imposed fantasized ways of existing.) So, with wisdom, we cut the root of ignorance.

The wisdom is the essence of the Fourth Noble Truth, the truth of the Path. With the Path, we cut off the first two Noble Truths of suffering and its causes, and achieve the third Noble Truth, which is the truth of cessation, in other words, the absence of suffering and its causes; the emptiness of the suffering and its causes. So, these last two Noble Truths—the true path and the true cessation—those two are the Dharma refuge.

When we say, “I take refuge in the Dharma”, that's

what we're taking refuge in. The path (ethics, concentration and wisdom) and the result (cessation of all the sufferings and their causes) are the real Dharma refuge.

The text, the teachings and the scripture that explain how to develop that path and obtain the cessation are the conventional Dharma. The real Dharma is those realizations themselves.

The Buddha refuge

If we understand that, then we'll understand who the Buddha is, or who Buddhas are. Buddhas are beings who have the true cessations and true paths developed to the fullest extent in their mind streams. Buddhas who are founding Buddhas—like Shakyamuni Buddha who taught the Dharma in a historic period when it wasn't visibly present in the world—are the expounders of the Dharma, the ones who show us the path to attain the cessation. So, that is the Buddha refuge.

The Sangha refuge

The Sangha refuge refers to all the helpers on the path. The people with the initial insight, direct insight into emptiness and who have some level of cessation. In other words, they have some levels of the real Dharma, of the true cessations and true paths in their own mind stream. These highly realized beings are the real helpers on the path. The monks and the nuns are their standards or their representatives. But when we say we take refuge in the Sangha, it is really taking

refuge in these beings who have the direct perception of emptiness. We are not referring here to monks and nuns.

The Guru embodies the three jewels of refuge

We have these Three Jewels of Refuge—the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. You’ll notice that we always say, “First, I take refuge in the Guru”. So some people ask, “Do the Tibetans have four jewels of refuge? What’s wrong with them? All the other Buddhists have three—Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Isn’t three good enough?”

The answer is that the Tibetans still have three jewels of refuge. But they see the Guru as the embodiment of all three. The Guru embodies the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

The Guru is regarded as special here because it is our spiritual master that gives us access to all of the inspiration, from the Buddha down through the lineage, to the present day. The spiritual master provides the link between the Buddha and us through this transmission of inspiration from generation to generation.

We have talked a lot about how important a pure lineage is. About how we feel that we’re stepping in a historically spiritual way, from generation to generation—not in the “blood” way but in the sense of the inspiration of the Buddha getting passed down from teacher to student, teacher to student.

So, our teacher is highly regarded because they are the ones who give us access to that lineage. But they are not a fourth object of refuge.

Refuge visualization

In refuge visualization, remember that this is on an imaginary level. Don't expect to see anything with your eyes. If I say, "Think of your mother"; you can have a picture of your mother very easily in your mind. Visualization just refers to that image coming to your mind. If I say think of your workplace, then that image comes to your mind.

In the context of taking refuge, to visualize this or that, just means that mental image coming into your mind. It doesn't mean that you see everything vibrantly clear with your eyes. It just means to imagine.

We are trying to visualize things that will enhance us spiritually. So we are going to visualize the three objects of refuge and then generate the attitude to actually take refuge in them.

The elaborate visualization

There is one big throne and on top of it, you have five smaller thrones—one in the center, one in the front, side, back and the other side.

On the big throne, on the smaller center throne (which is slightly higher than the other four thrones), you imagine your root spiritual master in the form of the Buddha. You are not taking your spiritual master's personality and imagining them as the Buddha, but you are trying to connect with what is the essence of your spiritual master.

The essence of your spiritual master isn't their sense of humor. It isn't their patting you on the head.

It isn't their kind look.

Their essence is compassion. Their essence is wisdom. You are not imagining the personality of your teacher as the Buddha but the qualities of your teacher appearing as the Buddha. So, it is like seeing your teacher in a pure way. So, your root teacher (root guru) is in the form of the Buddha.

Then, in the throne in front of your root teacher, you have all your other spiritual masters—all the other teachers you have directly taken the teachings from and whom you've made that connection with, are in the front in their normal form. You can also visualize your root guru there in his or her normal form.

To the left of the Buddha on the big throne (to your right if you're facing the Buddha), you have Manjushri and all the lamas or spiritual masters of the profound lineage on a smaller throne. This is the lineage of teachings that primarily emphasizes wisdom, primarily emphasizes emptiness. These lineage lamas of course have all the different techniques. But that tradition emphasizes the wisdom aspect of the path. You have the lineage lamas like Nagarjuna, Chandrakirti, Buddhapalita, down to Lama Tsongkhapa and the Kadampa geshe and so on.

To the right of the Buddha on the big throne (to your left if you're facing the Buddha), you have Maitreya and all the teachers from the vast lineage emphasizing the teachings on bodhicitta, on altruism, on compassion, on a smaller throne. And here you have Maitreya, Asanga and down the line to Lama Tsongkhapa and the Kadampa masters. So you have

Lama Tsongkhapa and the Kadampa masters on both sides.

For the smaller throne at the back of the Buddha, you have Vajradhara surrounded by all the lamas of the experiential lineage. This would mean, if you're practicing specific deities, the lamas of that lineage. Like if you're practicing Dorje Jigje or Yamantaka, then visualize all of those lamas. Or if you're practicing Heruka, then all of those lamas of that lineage.

Sometimes they call the lineage on the back throne the lineage of the blessings of the practice. Or they say it is Shantideva there and all the lamas of that tradition. So there are different ways of explaining the back throne.

Around these five smaller thrones but still on the one big throne, you have circles of the different tantric deities. You have circles of all the other Buddhas, like the thousand Buddhas of the fortunate eon or the eight Medicine Buddhas. You have a circle of bodhisattvas, a circle of arhats, a circle of dakas and dakinis which are special beings who have realized emptiness and help us along the path, and a circle of Dharma protectors. All of them are made of light, so don't worry about how you see them: "This guy is sitting in front of that one, so I can't see the one at the back." Everything you're visualizing is made of light—not concrete forms. Visualizing them made of light helps us to remember also that none of the objects of refuge are inherently existent.

At the sides of the lamas or in front of them, you have the Dharma texts. Here, you have the three objects of refuge. You have the Buddha in the form of

Shakyamuni in the center, the essence of what is your teacher. Also the Buddha in the form of the meditational deities and all of the other Buddhas in these concentric circles. You have the Dharma in the form of the texts that are sitting either in front or to the side of the lamas. You have the Sangha in the form of the bodhisattvas, the arhats, dakas and dakinis and the Dharma protectors.

When you try to visualize, don't expect to have all the details crystal clear. If you just get a basic general feeling of where everybody is sitting, that's good enough. Like when you are at a party, you can't see the people behind you but you have a feeling of who is behind you. It's like that. Be gentle with yourself. Don't worry about whether they have blue eyes or brown eyes. But do get a feeling for the objects of refuge.

So, you have all the objects of refuge. They are all made of light. They are all looking at you with a very friendly and delighted expression. This is actually very important: when you think of the refuge objects, think of them smiling at you. Don't think of the Buddha looking and saying, "I saw you, you were naughty today!" [Laughter.]

We shouldn't import our Christian ideas into Buddhism. Remember that whenever the objects of refuge look at us, they look on us with a pleased and delighted face, not with a critical and judgmental one. They look at us—pleased and delighted—because they have great compassion, because they have such a kind heart and love for us.

Also, they look at us—very pleased—because they are very happy that we are practicing the Dharma.

When we are imagining them, it signifies that we are starting to practice, doesn't it? Even though we might behave in all sorts of not-so-nice ways some other time, by the very fact that we are now sitting down to practice and put our mind in a good direction, that causes the Buddhas and teachers to look at us with a kind face.

They are all made of light. You can imagine they're all talking to each other too. They are not just sitting there, falling asleep. [Laughter.] All the different lamas, they can be debating and discussing the Dharma.

As for yourself, you are sitting in your ordinary form. On your left you have your mother; on your right your father; in front of you everybody you don't like; and around you all the other sentient beings. All are looking towards the Buddha. You put all the people you don't like in front of you, the idea being that we can't escape all the people that we don't like. We especially have to develop a compassionate attitude, wanting to lead them to enlightenment.

When we do the refuge, imagine that we're leading all the beings including our enemies. It is really important. So you imagine that the people you don't like, having faith in the Buddha. You imagine your mother and father having faith in the Buddha.

Attitude of caution, conviction and compassion

What is the attitude to cultivate when we take refuge? This attitude has a couple of main ingredients. The first aspect is a sense of caution or dread towards the sufferings of cyclic existence, specifically the

sufferings in the lower realms. In other words, we really dread having a lower rebirth. Or we're very cautious about the danger of being stuck in samsara.

The more we understand the disadvantages of samsara, the deeper our refuge will be. Because it is the wish to escape all of those unsatisfactory conditions that is propelling us to go towards the objects of refuge for guidance.

The second aspect is the mind of faith and confidence in the Triple Gem and their ability to guide us. So, here you can see that we need some understanding of the qualities of the Triple Gem.

Taking refuge isn't like an on-and-off light switch. It is not whether you have taken refuge or you haven't.

Taking refuge is a matter of degree—a process— not a goal

When you start to practice and do this visualization, you probably don't have much refuge. You don't understand the visualization much. You don't understand the Dharma much. But then as you begin to learn the whole path, you begin to understand things, you start putting them into practice in your own life, then things make much more sense and then your sense of confidence in the Triple Gem's ability to guide you really increases. Refuge is something you develop over time.

The more you practice, the deeper your refuge becomes. Because the more you practice, the more you become convinced that the methods really work, and that what the Buddha said is really true. So your

confidence and your faith automatically grow from dimmer to brighter.

The basic practice in taking refuge is the sense of caution or dread, and confidence in the Triple Gem. And, especially since we want to be practitioners of the Great Vehicle, the third aspect is to have a sense of compassion as well. Out of compassion for all the sentient beings who have been so kind to us, we want to attain the state of full enlightenment so that we can be most effective in benefiting them. And we are convinced we are capable of attaining it.

So, we have compassion for others. We have the aspiration for enlightenment. We have the conviction that it is possible to do it. In that way, our refuge becomes a Mahayana refuge. Taking refuge, not only to prevent our own sufferings and to lead us to liberation, but also for the benefit of others. By transforming our own minds, we become more capable of helping others, of leading them on the path to enlightenment.

First of all, we do the visualization, we think of the reasons why we are taking the refuge—the caution, the conviction and the compassion. And then, saying the words, ‘Namo Gurubhya, Namo Buddhaya, Namo Dharmaya, Namo Sanghaya’ is just a natural, spontaneous expression of our own internal feeling.

It is not the words that are important. It is cultivating the feeling of refuge. So sometimes what you might want to do is to really sit and meditate on these factors beforehand to cultivate the wish to take refuge and then say the words afterwards.

Other times as you are saying the words, you can think of the reasons and try to develop the feeling. It

is not the words of the refuge formula that is important; it is the feeling of it.

Not a matter of blind faith

When we take refuge, it takes a lot of internal questioning. Very often, our refuge isn't really stable. Taking refuge in the Triple Gem doesn't mean having blind faith in them. If we are taking refuge out of an attitude of blind faith, we are approaching it wrongly. It isn't a case of: "I believe in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha because everybody says so and everyone else does it. And mummy and daddy said so."

We are really trying to develop through our own understanding, awareness of their qualities and awareness of the entire path to enlightenment. Understanding how important the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are, in our own spiritual development.

Again, the deeper our understanding of the path, the deeper our refuge. And refuge isn't a wavering mind. Refuge is a very clear mind. When I was in Montana, I met one man. He had just taken refuge and had been studying with one Geshe. But he was telling me that he was also thinking of becoming a Catholic. Somehow, his mind wasn't at all clear about what he believed in. It was kind of like, "Buddha is nice and I like the Dharma teachings, but I also like the Catholic Church".

His mind wasn't really clear about what is the source of our problems and difficulties. What is a reliable guide on the path? What is the path? What are we aiming for? His mind wasn't clear on all these questions. It was just more caught up with what feels

good.

Many of us may initially come into the Dharma because it feels good. But what we want to do as we progress is to deepen our understanding so that we have a very sound philosophical basis for our refuge. It's not just because it feels good. Because Buddha, Dharma and Sangha feel good one day and then the next day you're saying God created the world. And so you are not really clear in your own mind what you believe in.

It is something we have to work on because very often our minds aren't clear about what we believe in and what we don't believe in. That's usually the case. We shouldn't think, "Oh, I am bad because I am not convinced."

But just recognize the level of clarity in our mind and know that with time, we are going to have to study more and contemplate more to figure out: "Do I believe in reincarnation and karma, and in emptiness and wisdom as the path to enlightenment? Or do I believe that God created me and that receiving God's grace is the path to enlightenment?" So we're going to have to think about these things.

And as we do, then our refuge becomes clear. Most of us have grown up in other religions. Sometimes, it is not rejection of other religions that we take into Buddhism. Sometimes, it is our affinity with other religions that we take into Buddhism. We're each going to be slightly different. It's good to be aware of this.

When you take refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, for the people who feel close to Jesus or to the prophets, it doesn't mean that you have to

disavow Jesus and say, “I don’t believe in Jesus anymore.” But you have to be very clear what is your philosophical basis that explains what the problems are, what are the causes of them, what is the path to the cessation, and what is the liberation from them. You have that philosophical basis cleared and then you can say, “Jesus was a bodhisattva.” He had some understanding of emptiness; he had some understanding of compassion; he was helping a lot of people.

You can still have faith in Jesus and in the example he had set. But your philosophical framework for that is not that he is the Son of God, but rather, that he was a bodhisattva appearing in that form to correspond with the mentality of the people in that historical time.

So, if any of the Saints are really inspiring to you, you can see those Saints but through a Buddhist philosophical view. I have a special liking for Saint Francis. I think he is really quite remarkable in his simplicity. If you have seen the film, *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*, you can see his whole simplicity—when he took all the fabric of his father’s shop and threw it out of the window, he was just really saying, “I am not attached to all these worldly things.”

Of course it doesn’t mean that we need to do that to our father’s shop. But you can look at what it symbolized and recognize that he had some awareness that material things and sense pleasures were not the way to happiness. He definitely had some compassion. So, you can still admire those beings with those qualities but see them within a Buddhist philosophical context.

Understanding the philosophy behind symbols

Another thing that I've noticed sometimes with people in approaching Buddhism is that they blend Buddhism with a lot of other things, so that their refuge becomes very unclear.

I was just reading one book. The woman in it seemed to like Buddhism because she liked the symbol of Tara. But, similarly, she liked Catholicism because she liked the symbol of Mary. She was actually in her spiritual search—searching for these feminine symbols. So her mind wasn't really concerned with the philosophical view—what is suffering, what are the causes, what is the path and what is the result. But her mind was more focused on: 'I want some symbols that make sense to me'. So, that's OK. That's where this particular author of this book was at, and it was beneficial.

But what I am saying is, if you have that idea, don't just leave it at that. If you start asking yourself, 'Do I believe that Mary was the mother of God?' or 'Do I believe in Tara as the emanation of wisdom and compassion?'—you have to have this very clear philosophically. In other words, refuge doesn't mean that you like the symbols of the refuge.

Symbols are symbols. Symbols do speak to us, but symbols represent something behind them. So, our refuge shouldn't be because we like the symbols. The refuge should be because we understand the philosophy behind them. And the symbols help us to communicate with that philosophy. This takes a lot of searching and working with things on our part.

Taking refuge is not an easy thing. It is really a

developmental process that extends over years and lifetimes. And the deeper our understanding of the entire path, the deeper is our refuge.

But we should try and be mindful of exactly what do we believe in. Have clarity because the clearer we are, then the more heartfelt our refuge and our spiritual practice is going to be.

Imagine light entering you

When we are saying, “I take refuge in the Gurus”, imagine that from all the refuge objects (especially from the spiritual masters), much light is coming and entering into you through the crown of your head. It is also entering all the sentient beings around you—including all the people you have fights with who are sitting in front of you.

You are leading all of them into enlightenment. And the light is coming in and purifying all of you. And it is purifying all the negative karma and especially any negative karma created in association with your spiritual masters. And then the light comes and it gives you inspiration. So, it gives you the feeling that you can develop the path, that you can develop the qualities, especially the qualities of the spiritual masters. And then, thirdly, you get a feeling that you are completely taken care of by your spiritual masters.

So you have these three things: the light coming and purifying, inspiring, and giving you the feeling that you are completely under their guidance and care.

You might do this in an extended version, like you

might say twenty-one times, “I take refuge in the Gurus” and then twenty-one times, “I take refuge in the Buddhas” and then twenty-one times, “I take refuge in the Dharma”, and then twenty-one times “I take refuge in the Sangha”.

The way we usually do it is to say each one, one time but we do the whole set three times. There are different ways of doing it. You can say each one three times; you can say each one a hundred and eight times.

But, with each one that you are doing, for example, when you say, “I take refuge in the Buddhas”, then from all the Buddhas in the refuge visualization, you imagine light coming into you and all the sentient beings around you. It is purifying your negative karma, especially negative karma created in regard to the Buddhas. It is inspiring you with their qualities, so you feel you can gain their wisdom and compassion. And you feel that you’re completely under the care of all the Buddhas.

Then you go on to the Dharma. You take refuge in the Dharma. Here, you concentrate on the light coming from all the texts, from the scriptures that you’ve imagined. And the light purifies and inspires. And you are taken care of under their guidance.

And then with the Sangha, you concentrate on the bodhisattvas, the arhats, the dakas and dakinis and the Dharma protectors, and the light is coming in purifying, inspiring and making you feel that you are completely under their care.

And then, after that, you generate the bodhicitta. I won’t go into the bodhicitta very much now. I’ll save that for the end of the series. Otherwise, I am teaching

the end of the path at the beginning.

Here, you really meditate very much on loving-kindness and on altruism. You can see how these two things are very important at the beginning of your meditation session. You take refuge so that you have a very clear idea of what you believe in and whose guidance you are following. That is really important before you meditate—whose guidance are you following? What path are you following? What do you believe in?

And we generate bodhicitta so that we know why we are following the path. And what we are going to do with it. It is not just for our own rebirth. It is not just for our own liberation. But we are really doing it so that we can attain enlightenment and lead others to the state of full enlightenment.

The Four Immeasurables

In our prayer sheet, when we do our prayers before teachings, we have the refuge formula ‘Namo Gurubhya, Namo Buddhaya, Namo Dharmaya, Namo Sanghaya’ then we have refuge and bodhicitta together in that one prayer. And, then, we have the Four Immeasurables.

The Four Immeasurables are to reinforce our good motivation.

“May all sentient beings have happiness and its causes”—that is immeasurable love, because love means wanting all sentient beings to be happy and have the causes of happiness.

“May all sentient beings be free of suffering and its causes”—that is compassion.

“May all sentient beings not be separated from sorrowless bliss”—that is immeasurable joy.

“May all sentient beings abide in equanimity, free of bias, attachment and anger”—that is immeasurable equanimity. It is “immeasurable” because the number of sentient beings to which you are applying this is immeasurable. And also because your love, compassion, joy and equanimity are immeasurable.

All these prayers are designed to help us in the correct direction and to know why we are taking that direction. So these prayers may not be worded in this exact way, but the basic refuge and bodhicitta and the four immeasurable prayers come at the beginning of almost any kind of sadhana or Dharma practice that we do. They are such an intrinsic part of our meditation.

Simple visualization

If this whole complicated visualization with the big throne and the five thrones and the concentric circles and all that is too much for you to visualize ... then you can just simply imagine the Buddha. Imagine that the Buddha is the essence of all the spiritual masters, the essence of all the Buddhas, the essence of the Dharma and the essence of the Sangha.

So you can concentrate completely just on the image of the Buddha as the embodiment, the essence of all three jewels of refuge.

Questions and answers

[Audience: inaudible]

Vajradhara is a tantric manifestation of the Buddha. They say when the Buddha taught the tantric teachings he appeared not in the form of a monk but in the form of a tantric deity. Vajradhara is made of light, blue in color and adorned with jewel ornaments. Sometimes he is shown singly and sometimes he is shown in union with Vajradhatu Ishvari—a female Buddha. And together in union, they represent the combination of wisdom and method; the female being wisdom and the male being method, showing that we need both of these put together in one mind.

[Audience: inaudible]

There is one big Buddha in the center. That's Shakyamuni Buddha in the form of a monk, the essence being your spiritual master. Shakyamuni is wearing the robes of a monk. He has long ear lobes because when he was a prince, all the earrings stretched out his ears. He has what is called the thirty-two signs and the eighty marks of a fully enlightened being. These are physical marks and signs that show someone's attainment but we can't always see those on ordinary people, when they appear in ordinary ways. But we imagine the Buddha in that form. He is sitting and holding a begging bowl in the left hand and his right hand is in the earth touching position.

[Audience: inaudible]

You say you feel uncomfortable imagining your parents, leading your parents in taking refuge because you feel that maybe you are pushing your religion on

them. I don't think you need to think you're pushing your religion on them. Try and think of them as having a very clear mind and their having the ability to really have confidence from their own side in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. In other words, you are not pushing them or forcing them, but from their own side imagining them being much clearer about their own beliefs, imagine them having a much stronger spiritual aspiration than they presently have, because they have that capability.

[Audience: inaudible]

I am trying to rephrase it just to see if I know what you mean. That it made you feel uncomfortable when we speak of moving away from the objects of the senses.

What does it mean to move away from the objects of the senses? It doesn't mean that you isolate yourself and live in a cave. It doesn't mean being physically isolated. Of course, if there is something that you are very, very attached to, you might have to stay away from it a little bit. If you are on a diet, you don't go to an ice-cream parlor.

But what we are talking here about moving away is a mental movement. In other words, rather than grasping after physical pleasure all day, from the moment we wake up to the moment we go to bed, always thinking, 'I want beautiful things; I want beautiful smells; I want good food; I want good touches; I want this; I want that.' Always having our mind completely wrapped up in wanting exterior things.

It means that we see those things and we contact them. There is nothing wrong with them but they are not going to give us ultimate, lasting happiness. So we have a more balanced attitude towards them. We experience them but we don't have the attitude of, 'I've got to have this to be happy!' And we don't make the purpose of our life to have all these things. Rather, we have them and use them. But the real thing that is going to make us happy is our own internal spiritual development.

[Audience: inaudible]

We have to approach this with a really gentle attitude. Buddhist practice isn't about your having to do this or do that. I think a lot of that is really a left-over from our Christian upbringing.

[Audience: inaudible]

We don't deny our feelings. We don't say, 'I don't feel sad'. We don't suppress things. We recognize what we are feeling and then we ask ourselves, 'Is this a feeling that reflects the reality of the situation or is this feeling generated by my misconceptions?'

In other words, we wake up today and we are so depressed because we can't be with our best friend. We just miss our friend so much that we feel we can't get through the day, because we can't be with them. And we feel sad. But then we ask ourselves, 'Is this a feeling that actually represents reality?' Everybody else in the world lives without our friend. How come we are so overwhelmed because we can't be with

them? And is our friend really this incredible, wonderful, fantastic person that is always going to make us happy? Well, no, because sometimes they are grouchy.

[Audience: inaudible]

No. All Buddhists aren't Buddhas.

[Audience: inaudible]

You can't say about a person who is involved in Buddhism that he or she would feel this or don't. Because everybody who comes to Buddhism, comes in at different levels of practice. Everybody is capable of practicing different things. So everybody who is a practitioner of Buddhism doesn't all feel the same thing.

We come where we are at right now. Then, we can try and transform ourselves. We can come and we experience something. We start to practice Dharma and our feelings change. But you can't say "I am a Buddhist, therefore I should feel this". I am a Buddhist and I feel what I am feeling. But then, I have the choice of: "Do I want to continue feeling this?" Or, if my feeling is based on unreality and inaccuracy, I can change my feeling.

[Audience: inaudible]

For example, you come and you are grieving. Your mother just died. You really love your mother a lot. You really miss her. So you are unhappy. And you are

grieving. And you let your grief out. But, then, you can also start to ask yourself, ‘Well, am I grieving because I care so much about my mother or am I more involved in my own loss at this point?’ In other words, is my attention on what is my mother experiencing right now or is my attention on what I am experiencing because I miss her?

If we see that we are grieving because we are focused on our mother—we know that our mother committed a lot of negative karma and we are worried about her; then we’ll do a lot of prayers and make offerings and dedicate the merit for her benefit. If we are concerned that I can’t be with my mother and I miss her, we are not concerned at all about her and what her experience is. We are just concerned about “me” because I lost somebody I like. That is a very selfish attitude, and that’s not based on the reality of the situation. The reality is that it’s more important to be concerned about her and her experience because her making the transition from one lifetime to the next is the important thing at this juncture.

[Audience: inaudible]

We try to develop a realistic way of looking at things. We have to accept what our feelings are but we can’t get stuck in them. We can’t have the notion that, ‘I feel this, therefore it’s right.’ Or, ‘I feel this, therefore it’s good’. It is just: ‘I feel this’. We shouldn’t say, ‘I feel this, therefore, I should continue to feel this’. It is just ‘I feel this’.

Now, let’s check if this feeling is productive. If this feeling is harming me and leading me to negative

states of mind, and it's keeping me spiraled up in my own depression and limiting my potential, then, what is the use of this feeling? We can't be attached to our feelings.

If we are attached to somebody, we miss that person and long for that person. So, our mind is completely distracted. We can't relate to all the people we are with because we are daydreaming about the person we aren't with. Then, we are being very unrealistic. So we can't cling on to that feeling, 'Oh my dear friend whom I miss so much'. We have to let go at some point.

[Audience: inaudible]

If you are doing a simple visualization, you could do that. As your visualization expands, if you can imagine all of the lineage lamas, then that is very good. Then, you get more of a feeling of something being passed down from one person to the next. I remember during the time when I was studying some of Chandrakirti's things, somehow, when I thought of the profound lineage, I imagined the whole group of lamas there, but I especially thought of Chandrakirti. This was because I was studying his things and I really appreciate what he was doing.

[Audience: inaudible]

What do the people look like? You can see some of the paintings. We can bring in one of the thangkas next time. But I think you can imagine them like ordinary human beings too. Sometimes you will see

different paintings of them. Sometimes, they are wearing hats or they're debating or something like that. As you learn more about the different lamas and their life stories and you see pictures of them and you study their texts, then you get more of a feeling for them.

[Audience: inaudible]

That is one of the thirty-two signs of a fully enlightened being and it's one of the really top-most signs. In other words, to get enough positive potential to accumulate that sign, you really have to be top. I can't remember exactly, but basically it represents in a general way all the realizations of fully enlightened beings. It is called the usnisha and they say it is a physical lump; it's not just a tuft of hair.

Advice on visualization

Here, we are doing the visualization and trying to generate the feelings relatively quickly. But when at home, try and go over it slowly to develop our practice. The more you do it on your own and develop it, then when you come to a situation like this where we do it quickly, the more your mind can click into it. Because your mind is already trained, you don't need to think as much. It's like when you first learn to drive a car, you have to first get your bearings and figure out where all the gears are. But after you have done it for a while, you will be able to get into it very quickly. The practice becomes automatic. We can take our time and do it slowly to get the feeling. Then at other

times we can do it more quickly and try and click in.

Try to get as clear a visualization as you can. But don't get too hung up on it. The most important thing is that you get a sense of the presence of the holy beings, and the sense that you are leading all sentient beings and turning to those who have the power, skill and wisdom to guide us. That's more important than trying to see every single detail of their appearance.

Constructing a meditation session

We are at the point in the lamrim where we are learning how to construct a meditation session because all of the other topics, starting from 'How to relate to a spiritual master' through altruism, emptiness and beyond that, are topics to be meditated upon in a meditation session. We are now learning the basic structure of a meditation session. After this, we will start going into the basic topics that we will be meditating on.

It is important to do meditation daily, putting aside a reasonable amount of time for us to do that. At the beginning of the meditation session, we do the six preliminaries or the six preparatory practices:

First we clean the room and set up the shrine.

Then we procure offerings in a legitimate fashion without any of the five wrong livelihoods or without creating negative karma. Also, we offer the offerings with a pure motivation, not for reputation or to impress anybody.

And then we sit in the sevenfold position and try to put our mind into a neutral state. We do this by doing the breathing meditation to get rid of the scattered

mind or attached mind, by meditating on patience to get rid of anger, and by meditating on inhaling light if our mind is dull. Having done that, we visualize the objects of refuge. Then we take refuge. Taking refuge is determining for ourselves what we believe in and whose guidance we are going to follow. After that we reflect on why we are following the guidance of the Triple Gem, that is, we set our motivation. We cultivate love, compassion and altruism. When we recite the prayer, “I take refuge until I am enlightened ...”, we are taking refuge and generating bodhicitta, the altruistic intention.

Generating oneself as a Buddha

Imagine that a replica of Shakyamuni Buddha comes out of him—you know like in cartoons how you have one thing coming out of another one? We have all seen that in the movies. [Laughter.] The replica comes to the top of our head, dissolves into light, and melts into us. (Remember Shakyamuni Buddha is your root spiritual master in that form, and that they are all made of light.) At that point, we meditate briefly on emptiness. We are merging our body, speech and mind with the Buddha’s body, speech and mind. It is not like I become the Buddha or the Buddha becomes me and we are both inherently existent. Rather, we are exactly the same because we are both non-inherently existent. That is how we merge. We are looking into the deeper way that things exist.

It is very interesting at this point. The Buddha has melted into light and dissolved into you. You contemplate that there is no ‘I’ that is separate from

your body and mind. There is no 'I' that is separate from your aggregates. You may recall that at times when we are really angry: "I'm angry!" it feels like there is an 'I' in there, doesn't it? Some separate little guy that is sitting in there. But in actual fact, there is nothing in there that is separate from the body and mind. If we take away the body and we take away the mind, are you going to find anybody else in there who is running the show? Is there somebody else in there who is the master of the body and mind, who is pulling the switches? Nobody else is there.

And similarly, with the Buddha or with our spiritual master, apart from their body and mind, there is no other guru. There is no other Buddha. Inside the Buddha, there is not a personality, there is not a self that is pulling the strings and running the show. The Buddha exists by being merely labeled 'Buddha' on the basis of the body and mind. There is the body. There is the mind. On top of that, there is the conception that gives the label 'Buddha'. There is no other Buddha besides that. If you look in the body, you are not going to find something that is the Buddha. If you look in the mind, you can't find one thing that is the Buddha. And yet when you are not looking, when you are not searching, when you are not analyzing, there is the appearance of a Buddha on top of the combination of body and mind. This appearance has arisen due to our conceptual mind labeling 'Buddha' on the basis of the body and mind.

Similarly with ourselves. There is no little guy in there who is running the show, making the decisions, who is *me*. Without the body and mind, there is no other person to be found anywhere. You look all

through your body. There is no person that is *you*. Your little toe is not you, your heart is not you, your brain is not you. Similarly, we look through all the different parts of our mind. Can we find one mental characteristic that we can say: “That one is me and all the rest aren’t!”? Let’s say we take our anger and say: “I am my anger!” Then you can never be generous, because you are only anger. We can’t isolate any particular characteristic and say: “That one is me and none of the others are me.” There is nothing that we can isolate in the body or in the mind and say “That one is me.” So the body and mind are empty of some little guy in there that’s running the show. We are empty of having some self that is separate from our body and mind.

And yet, when we are not analyzing, when we are not searching, there is the appearance of ‘I’ on top of the combination of the body and the mind, which is the basis. We have our concept that labels: “Oh, I”. Or we label John, we label Sally. This is a label that is given on top of the basis, but there is nothing in there that is that person.

On that level of existence, we and the Buddha are exactly the same. There is no independent personality. No separate personality. In the deeper way of existence, we are both exactly the same. We are both empty of having some self that is running the show. In this way, our mind merges with the Buddha’s mind.

And then, because you have gotten rid of all your wrong conceptions about who you are, you are no longer clinging: “Here am I. I’m five feet five inches tall. I am this color skin. I am this age. I am this nationality. I am this profession, and so on.” You are

no longer having all these rigid solid concepts about who you are. You realize there is no guy running the show in there. This frees our mind from all these prisons we put ourselves in by who we think we are. From within that empty space of not having a separate self that is running the show, then we can imagine ourselves appearing as the Buddha. We have purified the wrong conception of ourselves, and this leaves the empty nature or pure nature of the mind, the Buddha nature. Out of this, we can generate ourselves in the appearance of the Buddha.

To summarize, we have the refuge objects in front of us. A replica of the Buddha comes out, comes on top of our head, dissolves into light, and enters us. We meditate on the emptiness of ourselves and the emptiness of inherent existence of the guru and the Buddha. Out of that emptiness, or within that emptiness, we generate ourselves in the physical form of the Buddha. It is not your old body transforming into the Buddha. Having gotten rid of all these wrong conceptions of yourself, you are letting your own Buddha nature, you are letting your own wisdom, appear in that pure form.

You are the Buddha now. Imagine light in your heart. The light emanates from your heart and goes out and touches all the other sentient beings. It goes to the people you know, the people you don't know, all the living creatures in all the different realms, all the different life forms. As this light touches them, it pacifies all their suffering and problems. You have become a miracle worker. [Laughter.] You pat all the people who are in pain. You imagine the light comes and touches them and it relieves their pain, whether it

is hunger or thirst or mental confusion or despair. Whatever pain it is, it is removed.

And then the light continues and it gives them all the realizations of the path: all the qualities that they need to become Buddhas themselves, all the qualities they need to develop to have happy minds. You purify them, you give them all the qualities of the realizations of the path, and then you imagine that they too become Buddhas.

Now, you are in the form of the Buddha, surrounded by other Buddhas. You are completely transforming your ordinary conception of who you are and who others are and how you relate to them. You are imagining the perfect world that you want to see come about. You are imagining it here and now. When you are in medical school, you imagine going out working with patients, giving them medicine, curing them, and how happy they are going to be when they are cured. The medical students imagine the doctor they are going to be and doing all the doctor actions and getting the results. Because they are able to imagine all these, they have the courage and make the effort to go through medical school. Similarly, by imagining the future Buddha that we want to become and being able to have that incredibly good effect and influence on others, it helps us to see what we can become, what others can become, and this gives us the courage and the determination to practice the path to make that happen.

This is a very special kind of visualization. I think you will probably find it only in the Tibetan tradition. It is actually quite profound when you start to do it. It is interesting too, because as you imagine the light

going out from your heart and purifying sentient beings, giving them realizations and qualities, transforming them into Buddhas, then you have to completely let go of all your conceptions of who they are. All the people whom you are mad at, whom you think are such idiots and jerks: you transform them into the Buddha. They aren't idiots and jerks anymore!

All the people you are afraid of and all the situations you shake in your shoes when you go into: you imagine them and you radiate light into them. Instead of relating out of fear with people, you are relating to them with you as the Buddha and them as suffering sentient beings. You purify them. You give them realizations. You transform them into the Buddha. You develop a whole new way of relating to others. You completely let go of that very concrete, fearful boxed-in conception that you have of others which conditions so much how you interact with them. When you transform all beings into Buddhas, you have transformed the whole environment into a pure land, even purifying the Puget Sound area here around us. You purify the rainforest. It is no longer a rainforest with worms and birds; you've transformed all of them into Buddhas. There is a Buddha sitting in the trees, and the trees are all made of light ...

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

The Four Immeasurables

Loving-kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity—the Four Immeasurables comes next. By cultivating

these Four Immeasurables, we are freeing ourselves from the obstacles of becoming a Buddha and also help others to be free from those same obstacles. There is a short version of the prayer and there is also a longer version. It is worthwhile to read the longer one because it goes into a little bit of depth that makes us think in a different way.

Equanimity

In the longer version, it starts out with equanimity. In the shorter version, equanimity is the last one. Don't expect things to be the same. [Laughter.] The first verse is:

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings
were to abide in equanimity, free of bias,
attachment and anger.

May they abide in this way.

I shall cause them to abide in this way.

Guru-deity, please inspire me to be able to do so.

In the first line, you are saying how wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were to abide in equanimity, free of bias (which holds some people close and others distant), attachment (which clings to the ones close to us) and anger (which discards the ones we don't like). How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were free of that. But we can't leave it at 'how wonderful it would be'. We generate a little bit more energy, so the second sentence is: 'May they abide in that way.' How wonderful it would be if they abide in equanimity, may they do it! More energy,

more force.

Then taking responsibility: ‘I shall cause them to abide in this way’. We are not just saying how wonderful it would be and may they be that way, but “I am going to engage, I am going to make this happen!” But since we are limited beings, we need some inspiration, we need some guidance, we need some help ourselves. So in the last line, we request the Guru deity—the Guru, the deity, the Buddha, all of whom have the same essence—to inspire us, to bring this about, to make this thing that we are saying ‘how wonderful it would be’ actually happen. Do you see the progression of how we are going here?

Love

The second verse is love, the wish for others to have happiness and its causes:

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings
had happiness and its causes.

May they have these.

I shall cause them to have these.

Guru-deity, please inspire me to be able to do so.

It is incredible just to think about that. ‘How wonderful that would be!’ Isn’t it incredible? And then ‘May that happen!’ Energy comes. ‘I am going to cause that to happen. I am going to get involved. I am not going to sit around and twiddle my thumbs and daydream. I am going to do something. I am going to ask for help from those who are more capable than me.’ We say: ‘Guru deity, please inspire me to bring

this about.’

Compassion

The third verse is compassion, the wish that others be freed from their difficulties and suffering and their causes:

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings
were free from suffering and its causes.

May they be free.

I shall cause them to be free.

Guru-deity, please inspire me to be able to do so.

Here, we shouldn't see difficulties and suffering as only a headache, toothache, hunger and similar things. Of course these are sufferings and difficulties, but we should think beyond giving just simple remedy, beyond giving an aspirin and some food. We should ask what is the root cause of all these difficulties? It's the ignorance, attachment and anger that bind us to cyclic existence. When we want to free others from their suffering and its causes, it means we want to remove them from their anger, attachment and ignorance that make them get born, get old, get sick and die, over and over again. We are getting at a deeper root of the suffering, a deeper layer of suffering. We are not just giving food. We want to give Dharma teachings. We want to give guidance on the path so that other beings can actually transform their minds and free themselves.

We want to free beings not just from hunger, but from the mind that makes us take the body that gets

hungry. ‘How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were free from suffering and its causes.’ Think about how wonderful it would be. And then ‘May they be free. I shall cause them to be free. Guru-deity, please inspire me to be able to do so.’ The mind develops with each line in the verse.

Joy

The fourth one is joy:

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings
were never parted from upper rebirth and
liberation’s excellent bliss.

May they never be parted.

I shall cause them never to be parted.

Guru-deity, please inspire me to be able to do so.

‘How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were never parted from upper rebirth and liberation’s excellent bliss.’ It would be wonderful if they were never separated from upper rebirth. In other words, may they always have good rebirths, not born as animals or other lower realm beings. Not only that, but it would be wonderful if they were never separated from the excellent bliss of liberation, to never be separated from the state of being free of anger, attachment and ignorance and all the sufferings that are their effect. And then ‘May they never be parted from this excellent bliss. I shall cause them never to be parted. Guru Deity, please inspire me to be able to do so.’

It is good sometimes to just sit and meditate. You

can spend a long time thinking about these Four Immeasurables, and cultivating them in your mind. You don't have to do it only on your meditation seat. You can also do it in the middle of a traffic jam. In the middle of the expressway, when it is all blocked up, and everybody is upset and angry, "How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were to abide in equanimity, free of bias, attachment and anger." Sit there in the middle of the traffic jam and think this! You can feel the effect then.

Some people make tapes of the prayers and put them in the car. Instead of listening to other things that we usually listen to, we can listen to some of the prayers or teachings. It is very good that way.

Preparatory Practice 4: Visualization of the Merit Field

Next we visualize what they call the merit field, or the field of positive potential. You can visualize the merit field in exactly the same way as you visualized the objects of refuge. Sometimes, the visualization is changed slightly. When we visualize the refuge objects, we have one large throne and five smaller thrones on it [for the Buddha, teachers, lineage lamas], and then the circles of deities, Buddhas, bodhisattvas and other holy beings. Here, with the merit field, you have a tree with layers of petals on it. Your root teacher is in front of the Buddha at the top of the tree. The different groups of spiritual masters are in the four directions. On the petals going down the tree, you have the rings of deities, Buddhas,

bodhisattvas and other holy beings. You can do it either way. It might be easier for you to keep the same visualization.

As I said before, some people find it very difficult to do this complex visualization with many figures. It is possible, if you want to, to just imagine the sole figure of the Buddha instead of all the lamas, Buddhas and deities. Imagine that the Buddha encompasses the essence of the Buddha, all the spiritual masters, all the Buddhas, the Dharma and all the Sangha. You think of the Buddha's mind as the Buddhas, the Buddha's speech as the Dharma, and the Buddha's body as the Sangha. The body, speech and mind of the Buddha represent the three refuges. This is if you want to visualize simply a single figure of Shakyamuni Buddha instead of the whole big assembly.

Preparatory Practice 5: Offering the Seven Limb Prayer

Reverently I prostrate with my body, speech and
mind,
And present clouds of every type of offering,
actual and mentally transformed.
I confess all my negative actions accumulated
since beginningless time,
And rejoice in the virtues of all holy and ordinary
beings.
Please remain until cyclic existence ends,
And turn the wheel of Dharma for sentient beings.
I dedicate all the virtues of myself and others to
the great enlightenment.

Having visualized the merit field in front of us, what we want to do is to offer the Seven Limb Prayer. You are probably wondering why the assembly is called the field of positive potential, or the merit field. Just as we can plant things in an ordinary field and get results, so too, we can generate different attitudes towards the field of holy beings and get the results of realizations. We are going to try and generate seven different attitudes in respect to this field of positive potential, and what we grow is the positive potential and the realizations as we are generating these attitudes in the presence of holy beings.

The seven attitudes that we want to generate in respect to the merit field: prostration, offering, confession or revealing, rejoicing, asking them to remain or to live long, asking them to turn the Dharma wheel, and then dedication. With the fifth and sixth we ask them to remain and to turn the Dharma wheel. Sometimes they are reversed in other versions of the prayer. So don't be surprised. There are different ways of presenting things.

The reason why we want to generate these seven attitudes is because we want to gain the realizations of the path for the benefit of others. Gaining realizations depends on creating the causes for those realizations. Realizations don't fall out of the sky. The Buddha doesn't wave a magic wand and give them out. We have to create the causes! We have to transform our own mind by creating the causes of the realizations. That's what this prayer is about.

To give another analogy, when you have your garden, the first thing you have to do in your garden is pull out the weeds. You can't plant anything if

there're weeds all over the place. You've got to get rid of the weeds. Then you have to put in fertilizer. You have to water it. You have to have some sunshine. Then you plant the seeds in the ground. After this you can sit and relax because you have created all the causes for the seeds to grow. You don't have to sit there and make them grow. You have created all the causes. The seeds will do it by themselves.

What is this analogy relating to? Our mind is like a field. We have to pull out the weeds, in other words, get rid of negative karma. We have to put in the fertilizer, water and sunshine, in other words, imbue our mind with positive potential or merit. Then we plant the seeds, which is like listening to teachings. We let the seeds germinate as we contemplate and meditate on the teachings. Then the flowers grow—we gain the realizations. Pulling out the weeds and adding the fertilizer is a very important part of the process. If you are really impatient to plant the seeds and you skip all the preparation you have to do, you're not going to get any flowers! You didn't prepare the ground right.

Similarly, in our meditation, we need to take the time to purify and accumulate positive potential. In this way, the seeds of listening to teachings can grow in our mind. Doing these practices is very helpful for transforming your attitude. I remember when I first went to Kopan, Lama Yeshe had us do a Vajrasattva practice. This is one particular manifestation of the Buddha whose specialty is purification. I went into the three-month retreat on Vajrasattva, and all through the retreat I was asking: "What does it mean to purify? How do I know I am purifying?" My mind was

just completely bananas! All I am thinking about is myself for three months, re-running movies of my whole life. “I am not purifying anything!” [Laughter.]

After the retreat, I went back to Kopan, and I was listening to teachings again, and all of a sudden it was like: “Oh wow, is this what Lama Zopa Rinpoche has been saying this whole time?” I understood something that I didn’t understand before. Somehow the mind got it. Something clicked. To me that showed that there was some purification. Some mental obstacles had been removed due to having done this retreat. It was made very obvious to me as I was at this course and beginning to understand the Dharma more.

At times in your practice, you may find your mind getting stuck. We all feel this way sometimes. When this happens, it is symptomatic of our having a lot of obscurations and negative karma. It is good at this time to spend more time on these seven practices. Sometimes you feel a lack of energy. Or you are having very strange thoughts and your mind is quite rambunctious. Then it is very helpful to do these seven practices to try to cut that energy out. But like I said (I told you about my experience in the retreat), while I was doing it, I was thinking: “This isn’t doing anything! All I am doing is thinking about me!” Don’t expect some great experience when you are doing these practices. You just have to do them as best as you can. Believe me, when you are purifying, all your garbage comes up. [Laughter.] It is like, if you have a really dirty cloth, when you put it in the water, what comes out? All the junk! The water was clean and the cloth didn’t look too dirty, but when you put the cloth in the water, yucko! [Laughter.] It is very often like

that when you start to do purification practices. There is so much mental garbage coming up.

Sometimes even physical garbage comes up. You get sick. Things like that happen. You have to be able to put these into perspective and not get overwhelmed. Just remember when you are washing the cloth that the more dirt you see in the water, the cleaner the cloth is going to be. When you are purifying, the more disturbed and the more berserk your mind becomes ... [laughter]. Just keep it in perspective. Don't cling on to: "Oh my mind has gone berserk!" but just think, "This is coming up because I am cleaning the 'cloth'." Let go of it.

Prostration

The first limb is prostration: 'Reverently, I prostrate with my body, speech and mind.' This one, I think, is particularly to shake us Americans, up. [Laughter.] Of all the countries in the world, it is America that doesn't like to show respect to others. In America, nothing is sacred. You criticize the political leaders. You criticize religious leaders. We tear down everything we can. Part of our national humor is humiliating and making fun of the people in power, isn't it? We love it! [Laughter.] The idea of showing respect, in this land of 'equality', is almost like an anathema to us. We are so 'equal' that we feel the right to disparage each other. It doesn't seem like we are being equal; we are really going to the other extreme. This limb is helping us to develop some respect for others by recognizing their qualities instead of always picking faults and criticizing.

Instead of putting ourselves up above others as their judge when we judge the government and when we judge everybody else, we are now going to put ourselves a little bit lower, look at others' good qualities and pay respect to those qualities.

Now why do we need to pay respect? Here in this case we are paying respect to holy beings. The holy beings don't need our respect. It doesn't help the Buddha at all to have our respect. The Buddha doesn't get off on our making prostrations to them. [Laughter.] He doesn't go back to the Pure Land saying: "Hey, you know, I got all these guys really trained well." [Laughter.] The Buddha doesn't get anything from our showing respect. The one who benefits from the whole thing is us! Why? Because when we can look at others' good qualities and show respect to them, what we are doing is developing an aspiration and an openness in ourselves to develop those same qualities. We are recognizing the qualities that we admire. We are seeing, "Thank Heaven, there are other beings who have those, even though we don't." We are opening ourselves up to be influenced in a positive way by those beings so that we can develop those same qualities. That is the purpose of showing respect.

That goes not only for holy beings, but for anybody we meet on the street. We can learn something from everybody. If we get into a critical, negative mental state, we prevent ourselves from benefiting from others. As long as we pick at people's faults and put ourselves above, we can't learn anything from anybody else. We completely block ourselves by our critical mind. But as soon as we can look at other

people's good qualities, even if somebody has ten bad qualities and one good one, if we look at their one good quality, we are benefiting because we are opening ourselves up to developing that same good quality ourselves by acknowledging it in others and trying to learn from them. This is what prostration is all about.

Prostrations can be done with the body, speech and mind. We often think prostration is just physical, just an action of the body. It is not. In fact, physical prostration becomes mere gymnastics if you don't have the mental prostration accompanying it. If you are doing physical prostration but your mind is all over the place, you are not meditating and trying to be aware, then you might as well go to the gym and work out. Except that it is cheaper to do prostrations. [Laughter.] Physical prostrations is what we do with our body, which I will show you in a minute.

Verbal prostration is saying either the mantra out loud: *Om namo manjushriye namo sushriye namo uttama shriye soha*, or it is saying this line: "I prostrate with my body, speech and mind." The verbal expression is verbal prostration.

Mental prostration is imagining the merit field, the field of positive potential and developing an attitude of respect and admiration towards them. This is the most important one. If you don't have that feeling of respect towards them, even if you are doing the verbal and the physical prostration, nothing is going to change much in the mind. Mental prostration is your attitude of confidence and faith and the visualization, feeling like you are in the presence of the holy beings. Verbal prostration is saying the mantra or saying the

line of prostration, or whatever verse of prostration there is. There are different versions of the seven limb prayer.

There are different ways to do the physical prostrations. The simplest way is just to go like this. [Hands together at the heart, thumbs tucked inside.] When you are sitting on the upper bunk of an Indian train and you need to do your prayers but you don't want to arouse anybody's attention, you just go like this. The right hand symbolizes the method aspect of the path: Compassion, generosity, ethics and so on.

The left hand symbolizes the wisdom aspect of the path. You are putting the hands together, which symbolizes that you need to conjoin method and wisdom to have full Enlightenment. In other Buddhist traditions—the Thais, Sri Lankans, the Chinese—the hands are flat with all thumbs and fingers extended. In the Tibetan tradition, the thumbs are tucked inside. This is to symbolize that we are not coming to the Buddha empty-handed; we are holding a jewel and offering it to the Buddha.

Now, if you are more ambitious than that, then there is a short prostration, or what they call the five-point prostration. Five points of your body are in contact with the ground: your two knees, your two hands and your head. Your feet are already in contact with the ground. They don't count towards the five.

To do the short prostration, first with your hands together, you touch your crown. That symbolizes gaining the realizations of full Enlightenment, the crown protrusion of the Buddha. Then you touch your forehead, and you think this is purifying the negative actions of your body; you are purifying the negative

actions of killing, stealing and unwise sexual behavior. You are also gaining the inspiration of the Buddha's body.

Then we touch our throat, and we are purifying lying, slander, harsh words, idle talk. We also imagine gaining the inspiration of the Buddha's speech: all the good qualities of speech, saying the right thing at the right time in the right way to affect people in a beneficial way.

Then we touch our heart. It purifies the mental actions of coveting, maliciousness and wrong views. We imagine gaining the inspiration of the Buddha's mind: the Buddha's wisdom, compassion, patience and so on.

Then we put our hands flat on the ground. Do not spread your fingers or clench your fists. You put your hands down on the ground first, then your knees, and then you touch your head to the ground, and then you push yourself up. You come up quickly, symbolizing that you come out of samsara quickly. And while you are prostrating, you imagine much light coming from the merit field, purifying you and inspiring you.

This is the short prostration. This is what we usually do before teachings. Now, sometimes people want to do the practice of a hundred thousand prostrations, which is a very intense purification practice. In such cases, it is very good to do the long prostrations, if you are able to do it.

When you feel completely blocked up, stuck, frustrated, guilty and down on yourself, it is very effective to do many prostrations. It is very helpful. Prostration is especially good against pride. It is an antidote to pride, so it is very important.

Offering

The second limb is offering: ‘I present clouds of every type of offering, actual and mentally transformed’. This is the antidote to attachment and miserliness. The actual offerings are the ones that we’ve put on our altar. The mentally transformed ones are imagining the whole sky being filled with all sorts of beautiful objects of offering. You can imagine mountains, lakes, ponds, trees, space and clouds, or Porsches or BMWs, [laughter] VCRs—whatever you consider beautiful. You imagine these completely filling the whole sky, all sorts of beautiful things made of light, and you offer them all to the field of positive potential, to the Buddhas and all the holy beings. Making offerings like this accumulates a lot of positive potential.

Confession

The third branch is confession: ‘I confess all my negative actions accumulated since beginningless time’. Some people don’t like the word ‘confession’ because it reminds them too much of the Catholic Church. An alternative, and probably a better translation, is ‘to reveal’. The Tibetan word is ‘shag’, which means to split open, to reveal. It refers to being honest with ourselves. Instead of hiding all of our garbage and mistaken actions, we acknowledge them and do something to remedy them.

Feeling guilty is useless

This is the complete opposite of feeling guilty. When

we feel guilty, we have a very hard time being honest about our mistakes. We want to hide them. When we feel guilty, we often blame ourselves for things that aren't our fault. We exaggerate things. When we feel guilty, we are completely immobilized. We aren't doing anything to remedy the situation. We are only making it worse by spiraling around in our own mire of confused guilt. Confessing or revealing our negativities is a completely different ball game from feeling guilty.

Four parts to confession

When we are confessing, there are four parts to it.

The first one is **having regret**. Recognizing we made a mistake and feeling regret for it. Not guilt, but just regret. They say it is like somebody who drank poison. After you drank poison, you don't feel guilty. But you certainly regret it. You don't want the result to come. Regret is like that.

The second one is called the power of the basis. I prefer to describe it as **reconciling our relationships**. When we do negative actions, it is usually against either the holy beings or other sentient beings. Against holy beings like Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, we might have misappropriated temple funds, stolen Buddha statues, taken things from the temples or from the Sangha that aren't ours. Or we have lied to our spiritual masters, we have stolen their things. We slandered them. We criticized the Buddha. Things like that. We have also committed negative actions towards other sentient beings, other people or animals.

We have damaged our relationships with the holy beings or the sentient beings when we acted in destructive ways like the above. The second power is the one of restoring relationships. What we are trying to do is to restore the relationships, to improve the relationships. How do we improve our relationship with holy beings? Well, instead of being critical of them, defaming them or stealing their things, we take refuge in them. We turn to them for guidance with a mind of confidence or faith, trust and conviction. In this way we restore the relationship with them. We generate a constructive attitude towards them.

When we acted negatively towards other sentient beings, it is often done out of jealousy or attachment or anger, some kind of disturbed mind. What we do to reconcile the relationship is to generate love and compassion towards them. We generate the intention of becoming a Buddha in order to benefit them.

This is the best way to restore the relationship that we have harmed previously by acting negatively. Therefore the second power is taking refuge and generating the altruistic intention.

The third power is to **make a determination not to do it again**. For a period of time that you feel comfortable with, you make a determination not to do it. You make a New Year resolution and you try and keep it. This is very important because the stronger our intention to not do it again, the more courage we will have to not do it again.

The forth power is to do some **remedial actions**. Making charity, doing community service, helping those in need, making prostrations or offerings, doing meditation, reading Dharma books, printing Dharma

books, making Buddha statues, reciting mantra, meditating on emptiness—any kind of spiritual practice or virtuous actions.

When we purify, the most important thing to have is the regret. Without regret, the other ones are worthless. If we can't acknowledge our mistakes and actions to ourselves and to the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, then even if we try and do the other three, we are lacking the basic thing, which is regretting the actions. It is good to spend some time to generate regret. Remember, it is not guilt, but it does require being honest with oneself and it can bring about a tremendous sense of relief. We might have done things in the past that we wish we hadn't done and we are so ashamed that we can't even bear to think about it. But even if we don't think about them, they are still there. It is like hiding all your dirty laundry under your bed. It is still there even if you don't look at it. But if you take all the dirty laundry out from under the bed and put it in the washing machine, the dirt will be gone! It becomes clean.

Similarly, we have to take out all our dirty mental laundry [laughter] and do something about it. Initially, we might feel: "Oh, I won't be able to look at all these!" But actually, it is a tremendous sense of relief when you can actually admit it to yourself, admit it to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and then start to clean it!

'I confess all my negative actions accumulated since beginningless time.' We are not just confessing things that happened in this life, but things that we could very well have done in previous lives also. Who knows who we have been born as and what we have

done in previous lives. It is good to also purify those things. Even though we don't know specifically what they are, we can make some guesses—we know the variety of negative actions that people do in the world and we can assume we've probably done all of them before. You can never confess too much, so don't worry about: "Oh I confess killing a human being but I didn't kill any this life. I won't confess anything I didn't do." Well, having had countless previous lives, we've probably killed some human beings. It is good to bring this up and generate regret for it.

Rejoicing

The fourth limb: 'And rejoice in the virtues of all holy and ordinary beings.' Rejoicing is the way to increase our merit. It's called the lazy person's way to create positive potential. When you rejoice, you do not even need to exert the energy to do the virtuous actions. All you are doing is being happy that other people did them. And yet this is a very important practice. A big problem in our spiritual practice and in our life in general, is jealousy. We get very jealous of people who are better than we are, who have more than we do. The jealousy destroys us internally. The antidote to jealousy is to rejoice at people's good qualities and rejoice at their virtues and happiness. If we were the best in the world, the world would be a sorrowful place. And we just got down to saying in the Four Immeasurables how wonderful ...

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

We rejoice in the virtues of ordinary beings, beings who don't have a direct perception of emptiness. We also rejoice in the virtues of holy beings, beings who have a direct perception of emptiness. We rejoice in the happiness and virtues of all beings. Here they are, having happiness and having good qualities and we didn't even have to do anything to let them have it! Why not rejoice? When we are jealous, we are totally unhappy and miserable. When we rejoice, the other person is happy and we are happy. It's just a matter of changing the attitude.

Requesting the Buddha and spiritual masters to remain

The fifth limb: 'Please remain until cyclic existence ends.' This is requesting the Buddhas and our spiritual masters to please remain until cyclic existence ends. It is asking them to have a long life, asking them to guide us from now until we attain enlightenment. In other words, we need them in all of our future lives. May they not get fed up with us and go back to their meditation on emptiness and say: "Who needs these guys?" [Laughter.]

Requesting them to turn the wheel of Dharma

The sixth limb: 'And turn the wheel of Dharma for sentient beings.' We request the Buddhas and our spiritual masters to turn the wheel of Dharma for sentient beings. This is very important. We are asking for teachings. Turning the Dharma wheel means to give us teachings. This is very important. We are not

shy to ask for things that we like: “Can I have another piece of chocolate cake?” The things we value, we go for them. Here, what we are doing is having that same attitude, but it is based on a profound respect for the teachings, seeing their value and their benefit in our life. Therefore we ask for them.

This is important because if we take our teachers and the teachings for granted, then we lose out. In other words, teachings aren’t given because our teachers like to teach or because they need to teach. It is all done for our benefit. As much as we appreciate it, then that much we benefit from it. As much as we appreciate it, that much more we ask for it. It is important to ask for teachings to help us remember that teachings are something to appreciate. It also creates the karmic cause to be able to receive teachings. If we don’t do this, we could be born in a land where there is no religious freedom, where there is no opportunity to have teachings. We definitely need to create the cause to have Dharma teachings and not take this situation for granted.

In 1975 when I first met the Dharma, it was extremely difficult in America to get teachings. There were very few teachers and hardly any Dharma centers. There was virtually nothing in English except the stuff that you could barely understand—full of Sanskrit and Pali and written in very weird English. It was very difficult at that time. Since then, a lot of progress has been made. There are Buddhist publishing companies. There is a wealth of information. There are many teachers. These arise because of our karma! Our karma created in previous lives when we had requested for teachings,

appreciated the teachings and made prayers to be able to meet teachers and have teachings. If we like this situation we are experiencing now, it is important to continue to create the cause to have it happen again in the future.

Dedication

The seventh limb: ‘I dedicate all the virtues of myself and others to the great enlightenment.’ All the positive potential that we have created by doing the above six, instead of hoarding it all for ourselves, we are now dedicating it for the enlightenment of all beings. We are sharing it.

These preliminary practices—purifying, accumulating positive potential—are very, very important, and I’ve presented them in a very general way here.

Review

Let’s review a little bit. We visualize the refuge objects. We take refuge. We generate a positive intention. Then a replica of the Buddha who is the same entity as our spiritual master comes on top of our head, dissolves into light and dissolves into us. Our body, speech and mind become the same as the body, speech and mind of the Buddha. We remember that on the deepest level of existence, the ultimate mode of existence, the Buddha, our teacher, us, and everything else lack any kind of inherent, independent existence. There is no little guy inside of us running the show, separate from our body and mind. There is

no Buddha inside the Buddha's body and mind that is running the show separate from his body and mind or aggregates. On this deeper level of existence, we are all empty of a solid personality.

We abide in that, and having removed the wrong conceptions of ourselves, we imagine ourselves appearing in the form of the future Buddha that we are going to become. We imagine ourselves as Shakyamuni Buddha with a body made of light. We have a ball of light in our heart and we radiate light out to all the sentient beings in all the different directions. We purify their negative karma. We purify all their suffering and problems. We give them realizations and we transform them into Buddhas. We transform the whole environment into a pure land. We sit and imagine all of the above.

After spending some time visualizing it, rejoicing and feeling happy, we say: "Well, this is only a visualization. What is it that is the real obstacle preventing me from becoming a Buddha? What is the obstacle preventing other sentient beings from becoming Buddhas?" It is this partial mind, this biased mind of attachment and anger.

From there we go into the Four Immeasurables. 'May sentient beings abide in equanimity.' I went through the longer version of the Four Immeasurables: 'How wonderful it would be if they abide in equanimity. May they abide in that way. I will cause them to abide in that way.' And then requesting inspiration and guidance from our spiritual masters and the Buddhas: 'Please inspire me to bring this about.' We contemplate the Four Immeasurables: Equanimity, love, compassion and joy. Having done

that and having reinforced our altruism, we return to visualize the field of positive potential, either keeping the same visualization as that of the objects of refuge or transforming it into the visualization of the tree.

We visualize the field of positive potential that we can plant our virtuous seeds in, holy beings with whom we can generate the seven very good attitudes. We then offer the Seven Limb Prayer to this field of positive potential, generating the seven attitudes. We do prostrations to develop respect and diminish our pride, and that opens ourselves up to learning from the merit field. We make offerings to them to decrease our attachment and our miserliness, as well as to help ourselves to be happy at being generous and giving pleasure. We imagine the actual offerings we have made on our shrine and the mentally transformed ones that we have imagined in the sky, offering all of them. Then we confess and reveal all our negative actions instead of hiding them away and covering them up. First we regret them. Then we restore the relationships by taking refuge in the holy beings and generating altruism. We make a determination not to do them again and we do a remedial action. All these four fit into the third branch of confession.

The fourth limb is to rejoice at the virtues of holy beings who have direct perception of emptiness. We also rejoice at the virtues of ordinary beings who do not have direct perception of emptiness. This counteracts jealousy. Then we ask the holy beings and our teachers to remain until cyclic existence ends, thus creating the cause for us to meet teachers constantly. We want to not just meet them, but also to receive teachings from them. Knowing that teachings

are essential for our spiritual development, we request all the holy beings to give teachings.

We have created a lot of positive potential through these six limbs, and we dedicate it all to the enlightenment of all sentient beings. We don't keep the good karma for ourselves; we dedicate it for the welfare of others. In that way we protect it, and we steer it towards the goal we want. If we create virtue and we don't dedicate it, then when we get angry, it can get destroyed. If we don't dedicate it, then it might just ripen (let's say, in a happy rebirth) but it won't lead to ultimate enlightenment. It is important that we dedicate it for the highest goals.

Questions and answers

[Audience:] What does 'Om namo manjushriye namo sushriye namo uttama shriye soha' mean?

I don't know what all of it means. I have asked several of my teachers and I haven't found anybody who knows what all of it means. 'Namo' means to pay homage or to prostrate. '*Om namo manjushriye namo sushriye namo uttama shriye soha*' in general means homage to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

'Manjushriye' is referring to Manjushri, the Buddha of wisdom. I don't know the rest of the terms. I have been trying to get a translation but I haven't been able to.

[Audience: inaudible]

Oh no, you are not imagining a field. When you say

‘field of positive potential’, it doesn’t mean a field like Earth. It is a field in the sense that you can cultivate your virtue in the field of the holy beings. In other words, by generating these seven attitudes, you cultivate virtue and the field is the assembly of holy beings. If you choose to visualize the tree, actually what happens is, you have a lake made of milk, out of which this tree grows. I don’t know what brand of milk. Maybe it is non-fat milk these days. [Laughter.]

[Audience: inaudible]

There’re different ways of dealing with the mental distortions that are coming up. One way that is commonly used in the Theravada tradition, is to just stand back and observe it. Label it ‘thinking’, ‘thinking’, ‘anger’, ‘anger’. Just label it (not doing it in an angry way), detach yourself from it and observe it. That’s one way because that way you are not giving it any energy. It is arising and it is going to discharge by itself.

Another way of dealing with it that is more prevalent in the Tibetan tradition, is that you do some of the thought training practices. For example, when anger is arising, you notice it is a distortion and you use one of the techniques in the thought training practices. Somebody stepped on your shoes, you look back at it and say: “This is my negative karma ripening.” Or you say: “This is pushing my buttons. What button is it pushing?” You use some active method to deal with it. Buddha taught different ways because people are different, and also because at different times we need to do different things.

Let's sit quietly and digest.

What Is to Be Done in between Sessions

The time between meditation sessions is also very important—it is as important as what you do during the sessions. If you concentrate well during the session but after the session your mind goes completely bananas and you lose all your energy, then the next time you sit down, you have to start all over again. Keeping your energy together in the periods between sessions is essential.

During the periods between sessions, the most important thing to do is to refrain from committing negative actions. This is one reason for taking precepts and for avoiding the ten destructive actions. Also, between sessions, do as many positive actions as you can, like making offerings, being kind to other people, helping an old lady cross the street and so on.

In the morning when you wake up, make your first thought a virtuous one by thinking, “Today, I don't want to harm anybody. I want to help others as much as possible, and I want to do all my actions today for the enlightenment of myself and others.” Be aware of this motivation throughout the day. Let that motivation permeate your whole day. Then, even if you are not in your meditation session, still, by the force of that motivation, whatever you do becomes virtuous and you are able to keep your energy together and going in a positive direction.

In the evening, before you go to sleep, do some reflection on the day and do some purification

practice. When you go to sleep, you can imagine the Buddha on your pillow and put your head in his lap. They say we should lie down in the lion posture—the posture that the Buddha was in when he left his body. You lie on your right side, your right hand under your cheek. If you can block the [right] nostril, this is good. Your left hand is on your left thigh. Your legs are extended. Basically, it's going to sleep on your right side with your right hand under your cheek. They say that sleeping in this posture helps the energy to flow better. It stops bad dreams and confusion in your sleep.

Also, try and generate a good motivation before you go to sleep. In other words, not going to sleep with just the thought, "I'm exhausted!" but rather, think, "I have to rest my body so that tomorrow I can be healthy and alert. Then I can practice more and benefit more sentient beings from my practice. This is the reason why I am going to sleep." If you cultivate a good motivation before you go to sleep, it helps the act of sleeping to become a positive action.

Similarly, before you eat, you offer your food. Instead of just shuffling the food into the mouth, we want to be mindful of what we're doing. Sit down and mentally offer your food. Even if you're in a crowded place, you can close your eyes for a minute, or you can keep your eyes open while offering the food. What is important is you are aware of what you are doing. You're making an effort to transform these daily actions.

When you shower, you think you are washing away the suffering and defilements of sentient beings. These are all good to do during the time between

meditation sessions.

CHAPTER 5

How to Rely on a Spiritual Mentor

Introduction

So far we've been setting the stage for the specific topics of the main meditations that we are going to do the analytical meditation on. So, let's start the big section here, which is the teaching on properly relying on a spiritual master. This is the first step on the whole path. I have to say here that Lama Tsongkhapa set up the Lamrim with the idea that people who are following it will eventually enter into the Vajrayana practice. So from the very beginning of the first meditation on how to cultivate a good relationship with the spiritual teacher, you get the Vajrayana influence and emphasis and the way of thinking, so it comes up very much in this meditation.

Difficulties with relying on a teacher

When the Tibetans teach the Lamrim, they don't begin with teaching the subject of how to rely on a spiritual teacher, because Westerners often have difficulty with it. It is very easy to misunderstand, so often they just skip over it. When we get into the thick of this subject about seeing our teacher as the Buddha, it's really difficult to understand, in fact even more difficult to understand than realizing emptiness.

So, very often they skip over it or, if they do teach it, they do so in a very traditional way where you hear all these stories of the ways that past practitioners relied on their teachers. Again, I feel that we often misunderstand those stories and develop wrong conceptions about them.

So this is a real sticky subject and I am kind of jumping in with both feet with the idea that we will have a lot of discussion and will try and work through some of these things together because this is a very important subject and I've found, as I traveled and taught, that people have a lot of confusion about what it means to have a spiritual teacher and how to have a good relationship with him or her. People often get extremely confused.

When people don't understand properly how to rely on a spiritual teacher and get quite confused about it, it can become the cause for a lot of unfortunate things to happen. You can see what happened at some centers. So this is a subject that I think is worth our while to look at closely.

Reasons for relying on a teacher

The basis or reason for wanting to cultivate a proper reliance on our spiritual teacher is that it's only through learning the teachings that we are going to be able to practice. And it is through practice that we get realizations. If having a teacher is indispensable for learning worldly subjects such as typing and carpentry, it follows that we need a teacher for things that are even more important, such as our spiritual path. For this we definitely need a teacher.

Progressing spiritually is not something we can do on our own, making up our own path along the way. It's true that eventually we have to become our own guides and do our own practice—nobody else can do it for us. But, we definitely need the guidance, example and counsel of people who know more than we do. If you want to fly a jet you have to take lessons—so also in spiritual training.

Having a teacher is often translated as “guru devotion”. This translation, next to the word “sin,” is one of the translations that makes my skin crawl because in English, the word “devotion” gives us the connotation that you are just a worm and completely subservient, with blind faith and devotion to the guru who is on his throne next to God. This is a very wrong conception.

In the Tibetan language, *lama tenpa* describes the teacher: *lama* is guru or spiritual master, and *tenpa* means to depend and rely upon, and to associate with. This has a very different English connotation than devotion. So what we want to learn is how to have a good relationship with our teacher so that we will benefit. This relationship is an important one in our life and that's why this subject is taught here: so that we can benefit.

Choosing a qualified teacher

There are eight advantages of properly relying on a teacher. Before we go into the section on advantages remember what I said about the qualifications of a teacher, and how to teach and how to listen to teachings? I am assuming that you have meditated on

those qualifications and that you have checked up on different people and selected teachers who you consider as having those qualifications. The eight advantages involve how to rely on a spiritual teacher that you have selected as your own teacher. It doesn't mean how to rely on any teacher that you see advertised in the new-age publications. Are we communicating about this? The advantages refer specifically to people whom you have checked up. You've checked their qualifications, you've checked to ensure you have a good feeling toward them, you've checked your ability to maintain a good relationship, and then you've deliberately made the decision that this person is going to be your spiritual teacher.

So we are talking about how to cultivate a good relationship with that person, not just anybody with a mouth who is giving some teaching that you happened to hear. This is very important and many people don't realize it. Rather, they think, "OK, well, Joe Schmoe just came in and he's giving Dharma teachings, he must be a Buddha!" Jim Jones' disciples probably thought, "This guy is omniscient," and look what they did to themselves because of it. So we have to be very clear here who we are talking about and what's going on.

The Eight Advantages of Relying on a Teacher

1. WE BECOME CLOSER TO ENLIGHTENMENT

The first advantage is that we become closer to enlightenment. Why is this? Because if we rely on a teacher, we will practice what they teach. And secondly, by making offerings and offering service to our teacher, we also accumulate a lot of positive potential.

2. WE PLEASE ALL THE BUDDHAS

The second benefit we receive when we rely on our teacher is that we please all the Buddhas. I know it sounds a little funny to our western ears because we don't think so much in terms of pleasing the Buddhas, but what this is referring to is that our spiritual teacher is like a representative of the Buddhas.

The teacher as a representative of the Buddhas

In other words, the Buddhas have omniscient mind and we can't connect to them directly because we don't have clairvoyant power to connect with their omniscient mind. So they manifest in our world and they send representatives in physical forms whom we can communicate with. Our teachers are like the representatives of the Buddha who provide that link with us to the Buddha's wisdom. It's just as if there is an ambassador of a country who is sent somewhere and if the people treat the ambassador well, then the whole country is happy. Similarly, if we have a good relationship with our teacher, then all the Buddhas who are represented by our teacher are pleased. Is this making some sense?

I know I personally have difficulty with the idea of

pleasing the Buddhas, because it sounds to me like pleasing God—it sounds very Christian. The conclusion I came to—I'm speaking personally here—is that we have to understand this within its particular context and not bring our Christian projections on to it. For instance, we need to understand that, for people who have a lot of deep faith in the Buddhas, pleasing the Buddha is very important to them because those people really believe that Buddhas exist. Part of our problem, to start with, is that maybe we are not completely certain Buddhas exist, so we are not so sure about pleasing them. But for somebody who really believes that Buddhas exist, then having a good relationship with the Buddhas is important to them.

Also, one thing that might clarify this is to understand a little bit about how the Buddhas work. Shakyamuni Buddha, for example, lived 2,500 years ago, and he left his physical body when he died. But he didn't go out of existence altogether. The Buddha's consciousness still exists, but his body as seen 2,500 years ago doesn't exist on this Earth, so we don't have a means of direct communication with the Buddha. But, the whole reason he became enlightened was to be able to help us so just because he left his body doesn't mean that he ceases to help us. The Buddhas are still trying to help us and one way they make that bridge between the purity of their mind—which, due to our obscurations, we can't contact directly—with ours, is by sending out emanations. Or, another way is by having representatives who help us make that jump, because we can't just sit here and get direct communication

with the Buddha. We need someone in physical form whose voice we can hear and whom we can ask questions to and relate to directly.

It's not as if the Buddha is pulling strings and things like that. Rather, part of a Buddha's realization is the ability to make many different emanation bodies for the benefit of others. So a Buddha can appear in any form. They say Buddhas can appear as beggars, they can appear as our boss at work, or they can appear as our child. Buddhas can appear in whatever form is beneficial for guiding sentient beings to enlightenment.

So one way to look at it is that the Buddha appears in the form of a spiritual teacher because this is something that is within the capacity of a fully enlightened being to do. And the idea is that if we see our spiritual teacher in that way, it is beneficial for our mind, because by thinking of our teacher as an emanation of the Buddha then, when we hear the teachings, we think, "I am hearing the teachings just like the Buddha would teach them." So then, because we really respect the teachers and see their good qualities, we listen more closely to what they say, and we practice more carefully what they say.

Revering our teacher but not putting him/her on a pedestal

It is said that the whole purpose of understanding spiritual teachers as having this kind of relationship with the Buddha is so that we can benefit from it. And we benefit from it because it makes us listen more closely and it also makes us put into practice better

the teachings we hear. Whereas if we just think the spiritual teacher is exactly like us—Joe Schmoe—who doesn't know very much, then we listen to the teaching and think, "Oh, what does this guy know?" And we don't take the time to really think deeply about what is being said.

It's the same as when you are in school. If you have a professor whom you have a tremendous respect for, then you really think about whatever that person says and, even though you might not initially agree with it, you're going to think about it and weigh it. Whereas if you think the professor is just an idiot, even when he says something correct, because you think he is an idiot, you don't listen at all. So what we are getting at here, is that the purpose of this meditation is to help us receive benefit from having a relationship with a teacher.

Now this is a very difficult subject to teach because it sounds like the teacher is saying, "OK, people, you're supposed to see me as the Buddha. I am an emanation of ..." That's not what is being said here at all. No personal glorification is going on at all. The reason this is taught is that it gives us a way to think that might actually help us in our practice. And there are difficulties. I have gone through some similar things and I am still questioning a lot of it. So I'm just trying to share with you some of the things my teachers have told me and some of my conclusions about these as well.

[Audience: inaudible]

Exactly. [Laughter.] The way the prayers are written,

it is so easy for us to put our whole Judeo-Christian thing up there, thinking there is a Buddha up there like God, ten million miles away who we have to please; otherwise who knows what is going to happen to us. Whenever my mind gets into that, then I have to come back to, “OK, the words are talking like that, but I have to remember that it is coming from a completely different philosophical background so it is not talking about the Christian way.”

Not believing in our perceptions

[Audience: inaudible]

We have a lot of karma obscurations and preconceptions and our own way of viewing things, so the big thing is to try and observe all of that and then let go of them. The other big thing is to realize that our perceptions aren't always correct. See, the big thing that comes up over and over and over again in the practice, is that we think we are perceiving reality. Every time we are angry, we think we are perceiving the situation realistically. But when you learn something about anger, you realize that every time you're angry, you are hallucinating. And similarly, when we see people, we think we know exactly where they are at and we know who everybody is and what is going on. And maybe that is not the case and maybe we just need to do some purification.

The story of Asanga meeting Maitreya Buddha

I'll just tell a story along this line to help us get over

the idea that what we are perceiving is always right. Asanga was a great Indian scholar and practitioner who went to do meditation on Maitreya Buddha. He wanted to have a vision of Maitreya, so he went up to this cave on a mountain and meditated for three years. Maitreya didn't appear, and Asanga got really fed up and left the cave. As he marched down to town he came across some guy who was wiping a metal pole with a silk scarf. He asked, "What are you doing?" And the guy said, "I am making a needle." Asanga thought that if this guy has the perseverance to make a needle by rubbing it with a silk scarf, he'll go back up to the mountain and try some more.

So he went back up to the mountain and he meditated for another three years to get the vision of Maitreya. Again there was no vision and he got fed up, so down he came once more. This time, he saw a guy with a little container carrying dirt from one side of the valley to the other and he asked him, "What are you doing?" The guy said, "I am moving this mountain." So again, Asanga thought, "Well, I'd better go up the mountain and try some more." And he went up and he meditated another three years—still no Maitreya—and he came back down.

I forgot what he saw this time. [Audience speaks] ... a bird. What was the bird doing? Yeah, right. So Asanga thought, "I'm going up the mountain." After twelve years, again, still no Maitreya. He was completely fed up, so he marched down to the town and said, "I've had it!" On his way going down to town, he saw this dog that was completely filled with maggots.

Something in his heart just couldn't bear the

anguish the dog was going through. So he said, “I’ve got to take the maggots out of this dog.” This was tremendous compassion. But he realized that if he pulled the maggots up and out, he would squash them with his hands, and if he left them on the ground, they would die. So he cut off a piece of this own thigh and then he closed his eyes and was going to lift the maggots out with his tongue (so he wouldn’t hurt them) and put them on his thigh.

So he closed his eyes and was sticking out his tongue to pull the maggots out. But he couldn’t get to the maggots, so he opened his eyes. And there was Maitreya! He asked Maitreya, “Where have you been this whole time? How come you show up now? I have been meditating for twelve years and you haven’t shown up!” Maitreya said, “Actually I was there the whole time. It is just because of your karmic obscurations that you couldn’t see me. And Maitreya showed him his clothes which Asanga had unknowingly spat on when they had been in the cave. Of course, Asanga didn’t know this at the time.

And so, you see, by the power of Asanga’s very strong compassion, it purified so much of his negative karma and his obscurations that he was able to have this direct perception of Maitreya. Of course, Maitreya had been there the whole time beforehand. Asanga was so happy he finally saw Maitreya, that he put him on his shoulders and ran through the streets saying, “Here’s Maitreya, here’s Maitreya!” All the people in the village thought he was completely nuts because they didn’t see anything, except for an old lady who saw a dog because her karma was a little bit better.

This story clearly illustrates how what we perceive is related to our karma.

Our perceptions are tainted: we'd mistake the Buddha for a donkey

It is said that even if Shakyamuni Buddha appeared in front of us with his radiating body made of golden light and the thirty-two signs and the eighty marks of an enlightened being, we would probably see him as a donkey, because of our negative karma and obscuration in our minds. Knowing this gets us to question if we really see things as they are, and acknowledge that maybe we don't completely have a hand on what reality is. This is an important thing to think about when we are on the path: to have the space in our mind that maybe we aren't perceiving everything correctly, because if we are so entrenched in our own perceptions, and think we know everything already, how can we ever improve? How can we ever see anything differently if we are convinced that what we see now is true? So, we have to loosen some of these things in our mind.

Progressing on the path

[Audience: inaudible]

Yeah. In other words, what you are saying is that we all have the Buddha potential. In this way, we are all equal. The only difference between those beings who are enlightened and us is that they have developed their potential and removed the obstacles and we just

kind of keep doing our same old trip. So it is not as if the Buddha is out there like God on a throne. Rather, for us to become an enlightened being, it's just a matter of progressing along the path, there is this continuity. And the spiritual teacher, who has developed more qualities than we have, is further along on the way towards becoming a fully enlightened being.

It's not that we are already Buddhas. The Zen tradition says we are, but that is a little bit sticky in the sense that you would then have an ignorant Buddha. So we usually say that we have the Buddha potential; we have that thing that can become the Buddha's mind. Sometimes we feel we can't even get in touch with that potential in ourselves because we think we are hopeless and helpless and catastrophic. So the whole purpose of forming a good, constructive relationship with the spiritual teacher is so that the teacher can help us get in touch with what is inside us and help us remove the garbage so that we can become a Buddha.

3. HARMFUL FORCES AND MISLEADING FRIENDS CANNOT AFFECT US

Another advantage of having a good relationship with our teacher is that harmful forces and misleading friends can't affect us. Harmful forces could be external beings, i.e., any kind of spirit interference or misleading friends. This term, "misleading friends" is a tricky one. A misleading friend isn't somebody who tries to steal your things or cheat you. A misleading friend is one who says, "You have been practicing the

Dharma so long, why don't you relax, let's go out and watch a movie." Or, a misleading friend might say, "Why are you going on that meditation retreat anyway? Let's go for a vacation," or, "You're not spending enough money on clothes. Why don't you buy more, you'd look better." So a misleading friend is somebody who very often appears as a regular friend but, because they don't understand the Dharma, the effect of their good intention actually pulls us away from the path.

If we have a good relationship with a teacher, we won't be affected so much by these misleading friends or by any kind of harmful energy. Why? Because if we have a good relationship with a teacher, then we practice what our teacher says, and we purify the karma that causes us to have obstacles plus we create a lot of positive potential so that we don't run into these kinds of difficulties. So you see, it comes down to the point where the whole purpose of having a good relationship with the teacher is to help us to practice; and if we practice, then we get all these different benefits. So it keeps getting down to that point, over and over again.

4. OUR AFFLICTIONS AND FAULTY BEHAVIOR DECREASE

Another benefit that comes from having a good relationship with our teacher is that our afflictions and faulty behavior decrease. And this is clear. Again, if you have a good teacher, he or she will teach you properly what to practice and what to abandon; so, bad behavior is going to decrease and good behavior

will increase—it follows automatically. Also, if we follow the example that our teacher sets for us, we will watch how the teacher reacts in different situations with different people. From doing this, we will get a good idea of how to practice the Dharma ourselves and, in following this model by example, our own afflictions and bad behavior will decrease.

I remember one time being with Lama Yeshe and we were trying to get some work done. Many people came into the room, disturbing Lama with this, that or the other thing. And Lama just remained completely calm through the whole thing. All of these disturbances, all of this *yack ... yack ... yack ...* and different people complaining—Lama just dealt with each person and then he came back when they left and we continued our work. He was showing me by example that we don't need to get involved in a crisis every time something happens. It's possible just to deal with situations and let them go. So if you have that kind of example from your teacher, then it gives you an idea of what behavior to cultivate in yourself and that's a really positive influence.

5. WE GAIN MEDITATIVE EXPERIENCES AND STABLE REALIZATIONS

The fifth benefit is that we gain meditative experiences and stable realizations. This is something that we definitely want. The teacher shows us the steps on the path and the teacher gets us to follow those steps. Again, I remember my own teachers doing that, especially Lama Zopa who gives you a teaching and then you meditate on it, right there. As I

was telling you before, you might be in the middle of a prayer, and he'll stop, and for fifteen minutes you will meditate. So, a teacher can lead us very explicitly in the meditation practice which gives us a way to have some experience of the path right then and there. Otherwise, we listen and we go home and don't do it. But when a teacher meditates with us or encourages us to meditate and keeps tabs on what's going on, we gain experience in that way.

6. WE WON'T LACK SPIRITUAL TEACHERS IN FUTURE LIVES

Another benefit is that we won't lack spiritual teachers in future lives. This is actually quite an important point, because once you begin to understand how important it is to have good teachers, then you become really concerned with wanting to have good teachers in future lives. To speak once again from my own experience, one thing that helped me to see how important it is to have a good teacher is to think that if I hadn't met my teachers, what would I be doing now? What kind of life would I be leading? What kind of person would I be and what kind of karma would I be accumulating? When I think of where I was before I met my teachers and the direction I was going in, I hate to think of what I would be doing right now if I hadn't met them.

In thinking this way, I see very clearly the benefits that the teacher gives, because everything has completely changed in my life. I didn't know anything about karma before and I thought the more I could get for my own personal self, the better. So if I could lie

and get away with it, it was OK. If I could do this or that and get away with it, it was OK. Meeting a teacher who straightened me out on a lot of these things, gave me the possibility not only to progress along the path to enlightenment, but to avoid a horrendous rebirth in the next life, and also to avoid hurting many people in this lifetime. Because, again, looking at the direction I was going in, if I hadn't met the Dharma I would have really hurt a lot of people in my life. I am sure of it.

Seeing how much it has transformed my life and knowing that having a good teacher has opened doors for me, causes me to really want to make prayers to always meet very good teachers in the future. Because if we don't meet a teacher, we've really had it. Or, if we meet a bad teacher, again, we've really had it.

We have such a spiritual supermarket here; maybe you have friends who have started following some weird path or weird teacher and look where they wind up. Look where Jim Jones' disciples wound up. So you can see how important it is to meet good teachers. Also, having a good relationship with a good teacher this lifetime and really cultivating it, creates the karma to continually meet good teachers in future lifetimes. This is such an essential thing to do, because our teacher is the one who awakens so many things in us. We might have some spiritual interest beforehand but we don't know what to do or where to go, and the teacher is the one who says, 'OK, here is how to do it.'

7. WE WON'T TAKE A LOWER REBIRTH

Another advantage of properly relying on a teacher is so that we won't take a lower rebirth. Again, because the teacher shows us how to purify our negative karma, and teaches us what is good karma and what is bad karma and by us putting that knowledge into action, then we won't take a lower rebirth. And, also, it is said that at the time of death, when we are in the transition time of leaving this body, if you think of your teacher or the Buddha, the power of that good connection, and the confidence and virtue that thinking about them inspires in your mind, it makes it impossible for negative karma to ripen. The time of death is the crucial moment when you want to make certain that negative karma does not ripen, so thinking of your teacher at that time is extremely important.

8. ALL OUR TEMPORARY AND ULTIMATE GOALS WILL BE REALIZED

The last advantage of relying on a teacher is that all of our temporary and ultimate goals will be realized. Actually, this last one is a summary of the preceding seven. In other words, if you have a good relationship with your teacher which means that you practice the Dharma well, then, in the least, you will reap all of the temporary advantages, i.e., advantages gained while we're still in cyclic existence. These include a good rebirth, enough comfort to practice the Dharma, and having the ultimate aim for liberation and enlightenment. So let me just stop here for now and open it up for questions.

Questions and answers

[Audience:] How do we appreciate the necessity of having a teacher without getting attached to the idea of having one, or without getting attached to the teacher?

The key here, first of all, is to always be very aware of our own mind and be honest with ourselves. Secondly, we need to be very clear about the purpose of having a teacher. The purpose of having a teacher is for that person to show us how to practice the path so that by practicing it, we can gain the result. The purpose of having a teacher is not to pat us on the back and give us chocolate cake and tell us how wonderful we are. Sometimes our teacher puts us in very difficult situations where you're sitting there thinking, "Why am I doing this? Why did my teacher tell me to do this?" And you finally come to realize, "Well, it's because I am supposed to learn something, so what in the world am I supposed to learn here?!" And you come face to face with your own garbage and your own projections. So sometimes, the process of relying on a teacher can be incredibly painful, because we are trying to cultivate the relationship in a good way. So we need to keep it very clear in the mind that the purpose of a teacher is to guide us on the path, not give us all the love we never had and tell us how great we are.

[Audience:] Could you say more about being honest with ourselves in our relationship with the teacher?

I mean that our mind can make a trick out of everything: "My teacher gave me something so

difficult. Look how I am growing from it!” Our mind can do anything. So, it’s important to be really honest with ourselves continuously and watch our emotions, feelings and thoughts: am I on-line, or am I going off-line? And sometimes we will go off-line. We will check up sometimes and say, “I am completely attached to my teacher.”

Here is a very good story. In Singapore there was a young woman whom I’ve had a very good connection with for some years. Right before I was leaving last time to come to America, during a festival for Lama Tsongkhapa Day, we were all lighting candles. The young woman wanted to take a picture of me and other people lighting the candles and I said, “Let’s put the camera down and think of Lama Tsongkhapa instead. And let’s just offer the candles to Lama Tsongkhapa.” So we did that. Some months later, I got a letter from her saying, “I feel like you were very unhappy with me because I wanted to take a picture and after I put the camera down, you didn’t look at me.” I didn’t do that deliberately, I was concentrating on saying the prayers! But her mind had gone on this whole big trip because I hadn’t looked at her.

Very often, our minds do this. We go on big trips over things that have absolutely no relevance to reality. And you’ll see this comes out a lot in relationship to your teacher: “My teacher didn’t look at me, so I must be doing something wrong, I must be worthless!” Or, you just begin to see all of your hallucinations. So it’s always a matter of being very mindful and very aware.

I remember another personal story—I’ll be telling you all of them! The great masters tell all the stories

of how Naropa relied on Tilopa, so you get all the stories of how the great gurus do it, and I am just telling you all my painful experiences and mental distortions. [Laughter.] I remember another time when Lama Zopa was doing retreat in his room and he asked (we were all at Tushita) a couple of monks and nuns to come and do retreat with him. So they were doing retreat. The rest of us were burning with jealousy, because it's so wonderful to meditate in the room with Rinpoche. "How come he asked them to go and do retreat? Why didn't he ask me? How come he's always choosing them? He never chooses me. Why does he favor them? They are the creepiest disciples he has anyway. Why doesn't he like me because I try harder than anybody else!" Everybody else at that time was going through this contortion too.

So we have to look at all this stuff. And I remember at that time going in (I had to ask Rinpoche a question about some thing or another) and he said, "Are other people upset because I asked these people to do retreat with me?" I said, "Yes, Rinpoche." "Oh, That's interesting." [Laughter.] So we really need to keep looking. Whenever I get into this thing about, how come everybody else gets so much attention and I don't, I think about one line that Lama Yeshe said. I cling on to this line: Lama said that sometimes the people who are the most catastrophic are the ones the teacher keeps closer to them, because those people need more help. So I always cling on to that, thinking, "Maybe I am not that bad. That's why he doesn't pay so much attention to me." [Laughter.] But it is always a matter of being aware of what's going on, and questioning if there is a basis for reality in your

thoughts and feelings.

Remember, the teacher is someone you have checked up and have confidence in, and you really trust this person. So, you see, once you have a close relationship with your teacher you get bumped up against all of your projections and then you have to start checking up what's true and what's not true.

So this is like a training ground for us to practice on, because we are doing the same thing with other sentient beings, but we don't notice it. But with your teacher, sometimes it becomes even more apparent. For some people, maybe their mind is doing just as much garbage but they don't become aware of it, and that's when they go into all sorts of weird trips such as competition trips around the teacher: "I am going to cook his dinner." "No, I am!" "I am going to drive him here." "No, I am! You got to be near him last time." And everybody is tip-toeing around, trying to act like perfect little angels to please the teacher. But if people are really aware, then they look at their own minds and see very clearly what's going on. If they are not aware, then they just get into a big competition trip.

More questions? Am I scaring you, telling you all of these stories? [Laughter.]

[Audience:] What's the difference between Vajrayana and Tantra?

Actually they are synonymous. This is the whole set of teachings that involve what is known as deity yoga: imagining different Buddha figures, and imagining you can transform yourself into the Buddha you are going

to become. The set of texts in which these are taught are called the Tantras so this whole system is sometimes called Tantrayana or Vajrayana.

So, let's just sit and digest for a few minutes. Try and think about the different things you've heard, especially the advantages of relying on a teacher and some of the things about how to stretch your conceptual boundary, and let it all sink in.

Review

Since everything we learn and our progress on the path is going to depend on how we relate to the teacher, it's very important to cultivate a good relationship. The reason I say this is because whatever we learn, it comes through studying with somebody. Of course we can read books. We love to read but I think you've all probably had the experience that reading a book and listening to an oral teaching are very different experiences. When you read a book, the book can't answer your questions, the book doesn't set an example for you, the book doesn't look you straight in the eye. Whereas when we have an actual relationship with a teacher, it becomes completely different. You get a sense of what an oral transmission means. Things become much more powerful when you're actually getting them directly from a person. And so, in that way, what we learn comes from the teacher and if we want to gain realizations, we have to learn. So having a teacher is quite important.

We started last week talking about the advantages of properly relying on a teacher. I will just review

those and then continue on. The advantages are:

1. We become closer to enlightenment, firstly because we practice what the teacher teaches and secondly, by making offerings to the teacher, we accumulate a lot of positive potential. And this is like summarizing the whole point to the whole thing; the reason we rely on and cultivate a good relationship with the teacher is that if we have a lot of respect for the teacher, we are going to put what they teach into practice. If we don't have respect and we're just like Joe Blow, then, like with anything else, we won't value it and we won't put it into practice. So the whole point is for us to gain benefit from the relationship by putting the teachings into practice.

2. We please all the Buddhas, because the teacher is like a representative of the Buddhas to us.

3. All harmful forces and misleading friends can't affect us, because we're practicing well.

4. Our afflictions and faulty behavior decrease because we are learning from our teacher what to practice and what to abandon. We are also seeing a good example of how to act from our teacher so our own bad behavior decreases.

5. We gain meditative experiences and stable realizations, again from putting the teachings into practice.

6. We won't lack spiritual teachers in future lifetimes. This is a very important one—making preparation for future lifetimes—because if we do a lot of work now but then in future lifetimes, we meet a guru like Jim Jones, we are in big trouble. Then it's like everything we spent our time doing now is going out of the window. If we meet a bad teacher, we've

had it. We can't say, "Oh, I would never follow a teacher that's off the wall," because look, there are many intelligent people following teachers that are off the wall. How can we say we wouldn't do that? If we have that kind of karma and our mind is thinking in that way, we could do it. So that's why it's very important to have a good relationship with a teacher whom we've selected as being a qualified teacher so that we make that karmic link now and in the future, so that in future lives we can continue practicing.

7. We won't take a lower rebirth, again, because we practice.

8. And then to sum it all up, all our temporary and ultimate goals will be realized.

Now if we don't cultivate a good relationship with a teacher, in other words, if we just don't have a teacher or if we don't put energy into developing a good way to rely on them, we don't get those eight benefits. It's interesting to think, 'Well, if I have those eight benefits, is that something desirable? And if I don't have those eight benefits, then what would my life be like?' That gives you some way to see how important it is.

Disadvantages of Improper reliance or Abandoning the Teacher

Now we go on to the second section here, the disadvantages of improper reliance or abandoning the teacher. I said previously that if we don't have a good relationship with a spiritual teacher, we don't get those eight benefits. This section is saying on top of

that, if we have a bad relationship with our teacher, we will experience the eight disadvantages. By bad relationship, I mean people who have contempt for their teacher, who defame their teacher, who get angry and stomp away, who yell and scream and renounce their teacher. You see this very often. Somebody may fall madly in love with the teacher, but as soon as the teacher tells them something they don't want to hear, that their ego does not want to hear, they get angry at the teacher and stomp away.

I have seen this happen in many instances. People study with somebody, take them as their teacher, learn from them and then in the end discard them like we discard our garbage—with an attitude of contempt and disrespect. Then they go around and tell bad stories, criticize and everything like that. So these are eight disadvantages that come if we do that kind of thing:

1. IT IS LIKE SHOWING CONTEMPT FOR ALL THE BUDDHAS

First of all it's like showing contempt for all the Buddhas because, as we've discussed before, the teacher is like a representative of the Buddha to us, allowing us to contact the teachings. So if we throw the teacher away, it's like we're throwing the Buddha away.

2. WE WILL BE REBORN IN LOWER REALMS FOR THE SAME NUMBER OF EONS AS THE NUMBER OF MOMENTS WE WERE ANGRY

WITH OUR TEACHER

This is one of these ‘lovely’ ones that we ‘love’ to hear. There are times when we get angry with our teacher anyway although we still respect them very much. So I asked my teacher about that, and he said that this point isn’t talking about those kinds of situations. This point is referring to situations where you are really fed up and you’re throwing away the relationship. “I’ve had it with this teacher. This person is full of garbage! Enough!” And you just leave in a lot of disgust. This point doesn’t apply to cases when you get angry, but you still have the basis of a good relationship with your teacher.

These are very heavy undesirable consequences. It’s not very pleasant to listen to, and I’ve been thinking about it and trying to make sense of this myself. Like I was telling you last time, I wonder what I would be doing if I had not met my teachers. I think of how I would have just continually created a lot of negative karma and hurt myself and other people this lifetime. I would wind up in the lower realms for sure in future lifetimes and be completely far away from any kind of spiritual path. It was only by meeting my teachers—they gave me teachings, showed me how to make sense of my life, what to do and what to look out for—that somehow I was able to make something out of this life. At least I’m able to make some preparation for future lives and eventually, hopefully, get somewhere along the path. And so if I think of the kindness of my teachers in benefiting me, in that way they are kinder than any other person in the whole wide world. They are kinder than my parents, than my

best friends—because nobody else in the world has been able to benefit me in the same way as my teachers have. So if, given all that benefit I've received, I then say, "You're full of garbage!", then it's like you're throwing the person who's kindest to you in the whole world into the junk pot.

You can see what that's going to do to your mind. In our own ignorance, we just turn our back and walk away with disgust and contempt from the person who benefited us more than any other being possibly could. What is that saying about our state of mind, and what are we doing to our own mind when we think like that? We are turning our back on the person who teaches us the path to enlightenment. We are turning our back on enlightenment. So seen in that view, then you can understand these consequences that come. It begins to make some sense.

Is that making sense to you, somehow? If not, what's the difficulty?

Questions and answers

[Audience: inaudible]

We are all capable of appreciating things to some extent. But none of us are capable of fully appreciating everything, so we receive benefit according to what we appreciate. But it's not that if you don't appreciate them fully, then you're screwed. It's not that. It's referring to situations where you appreciate someone whom you saw as good, but subsequently, you just let your anger completely take hold of you and completely turn your back on them.

[Audience: inaudible]

Rather than saying as much as you appreciate, you get that much benefit; and as much as you don't appreciate, you go downwards, how about if we say as much as you don't appreciate, you just don't get that benefit; and as much as you depreciate, criticize, and have contempt, you go down. That's slightly different. You can see a difference in attitude if you are ignorant or if you are actively, with a very hostile mind, doing something. OK?

I know this is a real hard subject, so we need to discuss.

[Audience:] What do we do when our teacher engages in what seems to us to be unethical conduct?

Now this kind of thing has come up many times, and His Holiness has commented on it because it's an important thing. First he said it's very important to select our teachers well, to take our time in selecting our teachers before making the decision that 'This person is my teacher.'

Then, second of all, he says that if a teacher does something that to you seems very unethical, then you have to look at it. You have to say, "This doesn't correspond with Buddhist ethics." And if you feel that continuing to be in this person's presence is going to lead you in the wrong direction because somehow they're not setting such a good example, they are acting in a way that doesn't seem to be in accordance with the teachings, then His Holiness says, instead of criticizing that person, just keep your distance.

I think this is good training for us, because usually when people do things we don't approve of, we get very judgmental and critical. So this is a call for us to not get judgmental and critical when we don't approve of somebody's behavior, but rather, just keep our distance. His Holiness also says to still try and keep your respect for that person for the kindness they have shown you and for how much they have helped you. And for the rest of it, just keep your distance. You don't need to criticize and renounce and gossip and get hostile and belligerent.

I had one friend who had a lot of regard for his teacher whom he took initiations from. It wound up that his teacher was an alcoholic. My friend was shocked because this just didn't fit in to his idea of how a spiritual master should act and his teacher had seemed completely together. It put him into a lot of crisis for a while. So we talked about it. We talked about being able to recognize that this person was kind to him. He did introduce him to the Dharma, and if he hadn't met this person, he would have been doing who—knows-what right now. It's through the kindness of this person that at least he met the Dharma. That kindness will never go away. He can always have respect and regard for that kindness that he did receive. The part of his teacher that became an alcoholic, he could just put that on the back burner. So he just keeps his distance, since being with the teacher doesn't seem so beneficial for him. But he does it without a feeling of hostility and contempt.

[Audience:] Rather than ignore the person or get hostile, couldn't we actually confront them and speak

to them about it?

That's very possible. His Holiness has said that if the teacher is acting improperly, the student can go to the teacher and with respect say, "We don't understand what you're doing. Please explain this to us. This is not helping our mind." The key there is first you have to make sure your own mind isn't angry. Going to the teacher with respect and confronting them about it is very different than getting angry and belligerent and gossiping and yelling and screaming. So I think that it's definitely possible to go to the teacher and ask. I think we do need to do this especially in the West because Asian teachers, especially, aren't really aware of our cultural boundaries. Sometimes we just say, "Oh well this is Vajrayana, and they're Buddha," so we completely abdicate all of our own cultural boundaries and our own sense of ethics. That's not wise. I think we need to communicate with the teachers and let them know what our boundaries are—what's acceptable and what doesn't fit. But to do that with respect for them, not with a harmful, critical mind.

[Audience:] Maybe that teacher meets up with students who don't have many ethical boundaries, so that gives that teacher the feeling that they can do whatever they want, as long as it's not counter-culture?

If somebody's coming on like that, that's that person's problem. But it's also the teacher's responsibility to keep their own ethical vows. It's a two—way thing. In

all these things, especially when they talk of sexual abuse or power abuse in different religious groups, there are two things there—the behavior of both people. So it's the teacher's responsibility to keep their ethics, and it's the student's responsibility to keep theirs.

Even if the teacher is meeting up with a bunch of people who don't have a lot of ethical values, still the teacher has to evaluate for themselves, is this for the benefit of that student? Even if it's acceptable within that culture, is it beneficial for that person to do that? Because when you're the teacher of somebody, you're responsible for that person's spiritual growth, so everything you do in relationship to that person should be for their benefit, not for your own. When you're not the teacher, then it's a completely different thing. But when you're relating as a teacher and student, you have obligations to that person as their teacher.

[Audience: inaudible]

We can't say that every time the teacher is doing that, that that teacher is wrong, because different teachers are at different levels. Some may be Buddhas. Some may be bodhisattvas. They may be doing things that are completely beyond our concept, but we can say if a teacher is acting that way, if it's not our own personal teacher, and they're doing something out of sight with maybe their disciple, we say "Well, I don't know what level of mind that person has—they might be a Buddha, they might be a bodhisattva. But I know for me, this is not the external example of a teacher

that I need to follow. I need to follow a teacher who acts externally like so and so.” So in that way, you’re not criticizing that person and blaming them—because who knows, maybe they are a Buddha—but you are saying, “I need a teacher that acts in a different way.”

[Audience: inaudible]

Yes, that’s an example of “Because my own mind is so berserky, I need a teacher who acts in a certain way. If I follow a teacher like that, that external behavior doesn’t set a good example for me. Now maybe it does for somebody else. Maybe for somebody else, the fact that that teacher is so relaxed opens the student up to listening to them, opens them up to the Dharma somehow. Who knows? People have different karma. But we can say for us, that behavior just doesn’t fit.

[Audience:] Is it fine to have multiple teachers?

It’s fine to have multiple teachers. You have one teacher who is what we call the root teacher, or the root guru. That’s like your principal teacher. And then you have other teachers whom you study with, and it’s not contradictory at all. In other words, if you move to San Francisco and meet another teacher, you do not have to abandon your teachers who live in any other parts of the world. It’s just that you add on to your relationships. With myself, for example, my root teacher has sent me to study with other teachers. So you add on your teachers. And with some of my teachers, I haven’t seen them for years and years, but

they're still my teachers. It's not like "Well, you're only my teacher when I'm near you and as soon as I'm far away, you're no longer my teacher." It's like when you marry somebody, even if you're physically separated and you don't see them, you're still married.

This is a difficult subject, and that's why I'm being quite daring jumping into this. [Laughter.] But I think it's good that we talk about it, because as I travel around in America, this is one of the subjects I find people most confused about. Tremendous confusion about this.

[Audience:] When the teacher is teaching, it's easier to see them as a Buddha, but when they're living their daily life, that's quite difficult. And so is it really required that we do that?

I'm not sure that it is a matter of requirement, but maybe what we can do is ask ourselves, "Would it be beneficial to see the teacher as a Buddha, even in the times they're not teaching?" Now first ...

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

If your teacher behaves in a way that doesn't correspond with what you would like to see in a teacher, try and transform that situation to see it in another way so that you can still have regard for the teacher. For example, what do we do if we see our teacher speaking quite harshly and insultingly to somebody? We could get into our negative mind of "Why are they doing that?" and get all critical like we

usually do. But rather than that, we could just say, “They’re showing me what I look like when I act like that.” In that way, what you’re doing is, you’re taking that situation and you’re using it as something that you can learn from. In that way it helps you. That’s a lot more productive than getting into our usual judgmental attitude. This is actually something that we can do with everybody. It doesn’t have to be just with our teacher. When you see anybody doing something that you think is bad behavior, think, “This is what I look like when I do it.”

[Audience: inaudible]

Definitely. Definitely. It’s realizing that there might be a lot going on there that we can’t see. They might be doing what they’re doing for some very specific reason that we’re totally unaware of. So like you said, stay open to the situation. What usually happens, and what we do with most people, is somebody does something, and we project onto them the motivation we would have if we were doing that, and then we get critical. But we don’t know what their motivation is, do we? So like you said, at least stay open, or go and ask them.

[Audience: inaudible]

Exactly. I see this in my own personal reflection. When I can think about somebody’s good qualities, especially my teacher’s, or anybody’s good qualities, that makes me so much more receptive to learning from them. When I focus on their good qualities, then

I appreciate what they do, and I'm open to learning from them. But the minute I let my mind get into even one negative quality, then it becomes difficult to be open to them. Because our minds are so judgmental—so that we might see ten good qualities, yet we fixate on the one negative one—we just criticize and criticize. By doing that, we completely block ourselves off from being open to all the benefit we could receive from the ten good qualities (of a qualified Mahayana spiritual teacher). This goes with everybody, but you can see it very clearly in relationship to your teacher. When your teacher does something that upsets you, the next time your teacher comes and sits down to teach, you can't even listen, because you're sitting there saying, "Well, he was partial. He had these people in his room to do retreat. He didn't ask me. He's partial with his disciples." He's sitting there giving this incredible, beautiful teaching, but you can't see it, because you're so stuck on "This person is partial". What we're trying to say is "I'm really ego-sensitive, and I want to be big chief." And maybe the whole reason that we're left out is so that we notice how grasping we are, so that we confront our own jealousy and possessiveness! That's one example.

One of my teachers, he'd often do certain things, and I just don't understand why he's doing these things. It's not that he's doing something harmful, it's just that I can't make sense of his whole way of approaching something. I would have approached it in another way. And it was really giving me a lot of difficulty for a while, and then I just had to say, "Hold on. Different people have different ways of

approaching things. I might not understand what he's doing. Trying to mimic him might not be the best thing for me, with my own present level of understanding, but I can't expect everybody to act the way I want them to act and approach problems the way I would approach problems." And so, somehow, by very painfully working with this, it made me open my mind to the fact that other people do things differently from the way I do. And that they can actually be good ways of doing things! [Laughter.] Even if I don't understand the benefits of doing things the way they're doing, I just have to let go. So I found personally that in always trying to keep a positive attitude towards my teachers, what it does is it constantly makes me bang my head against the wall of my own preconceptions.

Devotion and Glorification

[Audience: inaudible]

Well, that's the difficult thing because you want to have this kind of confidence in and open-heartedness towards your teacher, but not blindly. The word 'devotion' is a tricky one, because sometimes in devotion, we just get too ooey-dooey sentimental. And I see this sometimes. People get so devoted to the personality of their teacher—this teacher is the Buddha, this teacher is so kind—that they ignore the teachings that the teacher is giving. They're so busy being enamored with this fantastic charismatic personality that they disregard what the teacher is actually teaching. So it's a very fine line. The whole

purpose of having this incredible feeling of confidence and faith is so that we put into practice what they're teaching—that's the whole purpose! It's not just to glorify somebody because we like to glorify them.

This is the trick in the West: some people just glorify their teachers because it makes them feel good. And that's when you get into all these possessive and jealous trips about the teacher. "This person's so holy, so I'm going to wash his dishes. Don't ask me to wash anybody else's dishes; I don't want to do it for these creepy other people! But the guru's dishes—they're holy, they're blessed!" And so they get into that because they're more into having this devotion because it makes them feel good. But that's not what relying on a teacher is about. It's about recognizing the teacher's qualities so that we try and follow their example and we try and put into practice what they're saying. So if you have devotion for your teacher, then it's OK to wash your teacher's dishes, but you also go wash somebody else's dishes, because what are the teachings about? What's the Buddha-Dharma about? It's about being humble. So this is a very fine line.

[Audience:] Should the root teacher be the person who first got us into the Dharma, or can it be a teacher we meet later on the path?

It could be either. It could be the person who got you into the Dharma, because very often that person is the one you feel a very strong connection with, since they got you into it. Or you could feel a stronger connection with somebody you met later, and that

person can be your root teacher. But even when you have many teachers, the idea is to see them all as some way being manifestations of the Buddha. In other words, they're not contradicting in their effort to guide you. They're all cooperating in their effort to guide you.

[Audience:] Do all religions lead to the same result?

Here, I'm just going to throw up some questions. I'm not going to give any exact answer. But this is the question that I think we need to check up. Definitely all religions are for the benefit of sentient beings. That's for sure. Definitely all religions talk about ethical conduct. They all talk about love and compassion. So in that respect they all have elements that we definitely need to practice. It doesn't matter whether Jesus said, "Be kind" or whether Buddha said, "Be kind". It's not a question of who said it, it's what was said and if it's something that is important, it doesn't matter which religious tradition it came out of; it's something we need to practice.

Now, as to the question of whether every religious tradition has all the different elements necessary to guide a particular person to a fully enlightened state, we need to look at that at a much deeper level. That every religion has a lot of beneficial things, that's for sure. Whether they have every single element that's necessary to attain enlightenment—that needs further examination.

Generally we would say that for enlightenment, we need two essential things. One is the altruistic intention, in other words, the wish to become

enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings. In correlation with that altruistic intention, we need all the method side of the path, in other words, all the teachings on exactly how to accumulate positive potential, all the teachings on generosity, patience, and so on.

Secondly, we also need the wisdom side of the path. We not only need the method side with the altruistic intention, we need second of all, the wisdom side of the path. This is the teachings on the emptiness of inherent existence. Why do we need both the method side and the wisdom side? When we become a Buddha, we attain a Buddha's body and a Buddha's mind. The method side of the path enables us principally to actualize the Buddha's body. The wisdom side of the path is the cause for us to attain the Buddha's mind.

In that regard, we also talk about two collections—the collection of positive potential and the collection of wisdom. The method side of the path refers to the altruistic intention. We collect positive potential when we do actions with an altruistic intention, and with that, we create the cause to attain the body of a Buddha. Then we have the wisdom side of the path, the wisdom that realizes the emptiness of inherent existence. By meditating on that, we complete the collection of wisdom, and we attain a Buddha's mind.

Now what we have to check up on, is whether other traditions have these two elements. It doesn't matter if they use the same language or not—it's not a thing of language, but the meaning—do they have these two meanings? Do they teach the altruistic intention to become a Buddha for the benefit of

others, and do they have the teachings on the emptiness of inherent existence? So we need to check up any particular religion to see if they have those two elements. If they have both, then that enables us, by following that, to create the cause for the Buddha's body and mind. If they have some of the teachings on both but not the complete teaching, then the teachings they have so far, that's good and we should practice, but maybe it doesn't have everything that's needed to become enlightened.

So this is what we need to investigate, not look at the words of the other teachings, but to see what their real underlying meanings are.

You're shaking your head. What's giving you difficulty?

[Audience: inaudible]

This is the difference between the words and the meaning of the words. You're quite correct. Mother Theresa would probably frame the path in a completely different vocabulary than we would. What we need to do is look beyond the words that either Mother Theresa uses or the Buddha used, and ask what the meanings of those words are. What really are the meanings of the words? What really are the words getting at? And if the meanings the words are getting at are the same, the paths are the same. If the meaning the words are getting at is different, the paths are different. This requires a lot of investigation on our part. It's obvious that different religions have different words, but what do they really mean by those words? So, for example, there's a Buddhist who

takes refuge in the Buddha, but they look at the Buddha as a creator out there who's giving them blessings. That person, though they say they're taking refuge in the Buddha, they're not even having a correct understanding of who the Buddha is.

Another example. You use the word 'God' and you meant by 'God' a creator. But someone could also use the word 'God' and have a completely different meaning for it. Every Christian you talk to has a different meaning for the word 'God.' It depends very much what that person's individual meaning for the word 'God' is. And what that person's individual meaning for the word 'grace' is. So again it's not the words, but what does the person mean by the word? What are they trying to realize?

[Audience:] So you're saying that some religions will not get you to Buddhahood?

Did I say that? That some religions can't get you there? I thought I posed a question—that we have to analyze whether all religions have those qualities. I was posing that question and saying we need to investigate that. I wasn't making a conclusion. I'm posing it as a question because I don't understand the deep philosophies of other religions. I'm in no position to make a judgment whether they have all those steps or don't. I don't even understand Buddhism completely, let alone pretend to understand the deep philosophies of other religions! So I have to pose it as a question, because I don't know. But it's a question that I think we have to look at. Because it's too easy to either say, "They're teaching different teachings.

This one's the best and that one's wrong." And it's also too easy to say, "Well, they're all one and they're all going to the same thing." We can reach either conclusion, without understanding anything about any religion. So I think this is a call for us to try and understand what's really going on at deeper levels. So I'm posing questions. I'm not making conclusions.

[Audience:] How does each particular person approach this whole huge field of so many religions in order to glean from all of them some direction to take in their life?

It's double-sided, because it seems like in order to choose a path, we have to have a full understanding of it, but we don't. And the other alternative seems to be to just accept what somebody else says and follow that.

I think at some level, what happens is maybe a combination of the two things. You investigate the different systems, and you may find with one system, that its framework, its way of approach jives with you better, it makes more sense to you, even though you don't understand it clearly and completely. And similarly, there seems to be people who are practicing it, who, when you look at them, you think "Gee, I would like to go where they're going. They seem to be somewhere." And so you kind of jump in, even though you don't completely understand everything. That's the situation. We have to try it out, see where it's going, and all the time, I think, being very aware and trying to increase our own wisdom. Because it's true, we don't have full understanding of every

system. It's not on that grounds that we decide. It's like we have some understanding, and whatever it is we understand, it did something to us that makes us want to keep going along that direction.

Personally speaking, if I just look at my own evolution, I had difficulty with a lot of the language and approaches of other religions. Then somehow when I met Buddhism, the fact that the Buddha pointed out so clearly that greed, hatred and selfishness were the core of the problem, I couldn't get away once I looked at that. There was no possible way that I could deny that my selfishness was the core of the problem. I couldn't wiggle my way out of that one. And so somehow, I thought Buddha has something here. Because he really pinpointed it in a way that nailed me. With all the other religions, I can wiggle out of, and I could say, "But, but, but ..." But not this one! So I kept going, learning and learning and learning. But while I'm doing that, I'm also trying to understand what it is that Buddhism is getting at. And what is this emptiness that we're supposed to realize?

[Audience: inaudible]

See, this is the tricky thing about a lot of the stories. For example there's the story of this person who was told by the Buddha to sweep the courtyard—he sweeps one side, then he sweeps the other side, then sweeps this side again, etc. At the end he became an arhat. If we hear this story and we start thinking that all we have to do is keep sweeping the courtyard and we'll become arhats, that's a wrong conclusion. It's

what that person's mind is doing when they were sweeping the courtyard. People can sweep courtyards with many different things going on in their mind.

[Audience: inaudible]

It also depends on a person's previous life, what they've been doing in their previous life, what they've been meditating on in their previous life. We may have one person who had been in the lower realms for the last fifty million eons, and another who had been an incredible meditator for the last fifty lifetimes. They may both be sweeping the courtyard, but their understanding of what's going on could be completely different.

[Audience:] So what you're saying is, the words are irrelevant, the context is irrelevant, everything is irrelevant except what's in the mind which are much deeper, the altruistic intention and the comprehension of emptiness.

Yes. No matter what words you're using, no matter what you're doing physically, these elements, these internal realizations, these are mental states that can't be seen by the eye. These things have to be present.

[Audience:] On the one hand, we have to mould ourselves to fit into the system of this religion according to its rules and regulations and ways of doing that, and that seems to be coming top-down. On the other, we are an individual, going along the path experiencing and growing. It seems like two different

ways. How does one reconcile these two?

I think again it has to be a combination of the two. If it is just top-down, and we're trying to mould ourselves to conform to an image of what we think we're going to become, then there's not going to be any deep personal change inside. On the other hand, if we remove from our view an idea of where we're going, and we're just open to love and light, then we're going to swim around like this. So I think it's two things. First, we have an idea of where we're going based on the fact that other people who seem pretty together to us seem to have gotten somewhere going that way. The next thing is we have to develop that in ourselves. It has to be an unfolding of that in ourselves. So to summarize the two things: the guidance from those more advanced than us, and us gaining our own experience of it so it becomes inside of us.

Appreciating other religions

Personally speaking, I've found that I've come to appreciate other religious traditions much more since I become a Buddhist. Before I was a Buddhist, I look at Christianity and I could not make head or tail out of worshipping some bleeding guy on a cross. I looked at that and I thought, "This is morbid!" Now, from a Buddhist point of view, looking at Jesus' life, I understand a lot more what was going on, and I could very well look at his life and describe it from a bodhisattva point of view. I don't know, but some Christians would probably agree with the way I

describe it. Some Christians might tell me that I was wrong. That's really irrelevant. The important thing is that from my point of view, it makes a lot more sense to me. Because the thing is with any one thing, you can impute so many different meanings to it. And it's interesting.

One lady I had met in Dharamsala sent me a book on how to run a traditional Jewish household. I've been reading it. In the Jewish law, there are, I think, 613 commandments that God said, and she's going through and describing how you live these in your daily life. In reading this, it's making me think so much about the Vinaya that we have in Buddhism. Reading these laws about doing this and not doing that, I find myself faced with the same questions in terms of Vinaya and in terms of Judaism. I always want to know why. I don't care what system it is. If they just tell me, "Do this," my mind will have real problems with that. Just as before when I was a kid growing up Jewish, I had always asked "Why?", now as a Buddhist, I go to my teacher, "Why do I have to do this?" I'm trying to understand what is the purpose of laws, given any religion. Reading her perspective on why she keeps her commandments, what value it does for her, I see myself checking up, "Well, does my keeping the Vinaya have that same value for me, or do I have a different reason for keeping Vinaya?" But it's the same thing of different religions having laws or rules and how do I relate to that?

[Audience: inaudible]

Buddha also spoke in a cultural context. Just as I, as a

bhikshuni, am trying to practice Vinaya in the 20th century and having to deal with cultural differences, in the same way this woman, as a Jew, is trying to deal with things that were spoken 4,000 years ago and trying to practice those.

Respecting other traditions while being aware of the differences

Like His Holiness always says, that really, if you practice your own ...

[Teachings lost due to change of tape]

... then, you will appreciate any teaching that in any way helps any being approach enlightenment. And in that way we come to respect the teachings in other religions. That doesn't necessarily mean we respect every teaching in another religion. But the things that definitely lead the practitioners on a good path are things to respect.

Just to make one example of this. When I was in France, we made friends with a group of clerics, Sisters of St. Claire. We used to visit them quite often. It really helped me develop my respect for Christianity. And then one incident happened that made me think, and really respect where Buddhism was at. We were eating dinner one day. One of the nuns went out to get another plate of food, and there was an insect there. She said, "Oh, there's this bug." I got up with my napkin to go scoop the bug up and take it outside. But before I could get up, the other nun had come and whacked it. Then I thought, "Ah,

that's a difference. That's a difference." Christianity went so far as not to kill human beings. Definitely that's good. I respect that. But they didn't make the jump to insects ...

[Recording stopped.]

Review of the advantages of relying on a teacher

We were talking about how to cultivate a good relationship with our spiritual masters, and this involves recognizing the qualities of our teachers and appreciating the good effect that they have upon us. We talked about the advantages of cultivating a good relationship with the teacher. I'll just read through them to remind you, before I get to the disadvantages, so you don't freak out. [Laughter.]

1. We get closer to enlightenment.
2. We please all the Buddhas. Remember all of these advantages come because having a good relationship with our teacher means we put into practice what we learn, and our Dharma practice in turn benefits our mind.
3. All the harmful forces and misleading friends don't bother us because our mind is clean-clear. We know where we're going and why.
4. Our afflictions and our gross behavior diminish. Won't that be nice?
5. We gain meditative experiences and stable realizations.
6. We will not lack spiritual teachers in our future lives. Again, a very important thing.
7. We will not take a lower rebirth especially if we

remember our teacher at the time of death and if we practice the teachings well when we're alive. These will eliminate the cause for lower rebirths.

8. To summarize, all of our temporary and ultimate goals are fulfilled by properly relying on a spiritual teacher. By temporary goals, we mean all the advantages that we seek while we're still caught in cyclic existence. "Ultimate goals" means the lasting goals of liberation and enlightenment. By relying on a spiritual master, we can actualize these aspirations. Again, this is predicated on checking up people before accepting them as your teacher.

You shouldn't think that your teacher has to be somebody who sits on a high throne, wears fancy brocade and big hats, beats drums and plays cymbals and has ten thousand people around them. His Holiness always says that there are many high lamas around. If you have a good connection with them, that's fine. But even if a teacher has a lot of qualities, if you don't have that karmic connection, then nothing is going to ignite. He also says that it's actually quite lost to us if we think, "The high lamas—these are Buddhas, these I respect", but we neglect the teachers who help us day by day. His Holiness encourages people to select their teachers well, according to the teachers' qualifications and according to your feeling of closeness and being able to keep a good relationship with that person. Also, we should practice this with the individual teachers who guide us day by day, not necessarily the ones that buzz in on a jet on Friday and leave on Saturday.

I really saw this very much through my own experience. We were living at the monastery and

Geshe-la (the resident Geshe at the monastery) would be teaching us day by day, putting up with us. He tried to teach, but we were always interrupting with questions, especially me. [Laughter.] He put up with all the things that went wrong in the monastery—this person fighting with that person, financial problems, etc. Sometimes I feel we really took Geshe-la for granted. When a high lama visited, we were all bright and shiny, nice new dancing disciples! But it was actually Geshe-la who took care of us day by day on all the nitty-gritty things and helped us along. I remember what His Holiness had said very much, just from my own personal experience.

Disadvantages of improper reliance or abandoning the teacher

Then we began talking about the disadvantages of improperly relying on or abandoning the teacher. This means getting angry with the teacher, renouncing the teacher, like saying, “I’m fed up! I’ve had it! I can’t stand you! I’m breaking off this relationship!” and then going around bad-mouthing and being really quite hostile. As I explained before, when we reflect on the benefits that our teacher gives us in terms of showing us the Dharma and giving us the possibility of making our life meaningful, then if we turn our back and completely throw away that person who gave us the greatest gift to practice, it’s like we’re denying the gift of the Dharma. It’s like we’re throwing the gift away as well. We’re completely giving up everything beneficial that we learn from that person by dismissing that person.

All these disadvantages are not listed by the lamas to get us to be nice, good disciples through threatening us with all these horrible results. Rather, it's information to help us to be aware of the results of our own actions. We can use this knowledge to check up our own attitudes and see if we're thinking in a way that's going to benefit us or bring us harm. That's why these things are said.

1. It's like showing contempt for all the Buddhas, in the sense that our teachers are representatives of the Buddhas. They teach the same things that the Buddhas teach, they teach the same practice. If we have contempt for our teacher, it's really like having contempt for the Buddha. Our teacher is doing exactly what Shakyamuni Buddha would do for us.

2. We will be reborn in the lower realms for the same number of eons as the number of moments we were angry with our teacher. Again, as I've explained (in the previous teaching), it doesn't refer to situations where you get angry with your teacher while still having the basis of a stable relationship with them. It refers to real anger, really throwing away the relationship.

3. ALTHOUGH WE TRY TO PRACTICE TANTRA, WE WON'T ATTAIN ENLIGHTENMENT

Again, this is because in the practice of tantra, it's important that we try and see everyone, everything, as a Buddha, and the whole environment as a pure land. If we're trying to see every being as a Buddha, then surely we must try and see our spiritual master as a

Buddha, since they are the ones who gave us the empowerments into the tantra and opened the doorway to the tantra. If we see that person as a rotten apple, then it's completely opposite to the pure view that we're trying to cultivate in tantra. This applies actually to any being in tantric practice. We're supposed to try and imagine everybody as a Buddha. Although we may not all be great tantric practitioners, I'm giving you this information because some time in the future, you might take initiation. The whole idea of overcoming ordinary appearance and grasping at ordinary appearance and seeing things as pure will be explained more in-depth at that time.

4. ALTHOUGH WE MAY PUT GREAT EFFORT INTO TANTRIC PRACTICE, IT WILL AMOUNT TO ACTUALIZING A HELLISH REBIRTH

If we can't see the kindness of the person who was kind to us, how can we see the kindness of anybody else? If we can't see the kindness of anybody, where are we going to wind up in, in our next life? Also, if we don't practice the teachings as our teacher taught us, we can't actualize the result. We'll only actualize a bad rebirth.

5. WE WON'T DEVELOP ANY NEW QUALITIES OR SIDDHIS AND WHAT WE HAVE DEVELOPED WILL DECLINE

We won't develop any new qualities or siddhi. "Siddhi" means the realizations or the attainments of

the path. The qualities and realizations we do have will also decline. This comes because we aren't properly following our teacher's instructions. The whole point is, the higher regard we hold somebody in, the more we're going to follow their instructions. The more we disparage somebody, the less we're going to follow what they say. If our teacher is teaching us the Dharma, and we disparage the teacher, we're going to stop practicing whatever they taught. This is what happens when we stop practicing. It's not a punishment. It's just the cause and effect. Nobody is punishing us. The Buddhas are compassionate. They certainly don't want us to have harmful results. It's just the way our own mind works. When we have a negative state of mind, there's no way we're going to experience a happy result from it. When you're hostile and angry, there's no way you can have a good rebirth.

6. MANY UNWISHED FOR THINGS, LIKE SICKNESS AND CALAMITIES, WILL BEFALL US IN THIS LIFE

This is because the karma we create with our spiritual teachers is very strong. If you have a good relationship, you create a lot of very good karma. If you have a bad relationship, you create a lot of bad karma. And both the good karma and the bad karma can ripen fairly quickly because it's created with a powerful object in our life—our spiritual master. That's one of the characteristics of karma. Karma created with very strong objects in our life can ripen quickly.

7. IN FUTURE LIVES WE WILL ROAM ENDLESSLY IN LOWER REALMS

Again, this is because we haven't created the cause to meet the Dharma. When we've had the Dharma, we've thrown it away.

8. WE WILL LACK SPIRITUAL TEACHERS IN FUTURE LIVES

I think that's a very frightening thing, to think of future lives without having a proper spiritual teacher. Even if you have all the conducive circumstances to practice, but you don't have a good teacher, what can you do? It's like having the best computer system but there's nobody to teach you how to use it.

These are the disadvantages of breaking the relationship with our teacher.

How to Rely on Our Teachers with Our Thoughts

Now we come to the subject of how to cultivate a good relationship with our teacher. One way is to do this through our thoughts. In other words, what we do mentally, the kinds of attitudes we develop. The second way is through our actions, our external verbal and physical behavior.

First, we'll talk about how to rely on our teacher by means of our thoughts. The whole thing we're trying to get at here, is how to see our teacher's qualities and how to recognize the beneficial effect that they have on our lives. Seeing our teacher's good

qualities will inspire us to practice. This is talking about how to do that so that we receive the benefits.

DEVELOPING CONFIDENCE THAT OUR TEACHERS ARE BUDDHAS

The first point under this is developing the confidence that our teachers are Buddhas. Again this is talked about mostly from a tantric aspect. In the Theravada tradition or when you take refuge and precepts, you talk about your teacher as a representative of the Buddha. In Mahayana, you try and see your teacher as a manifestation of the Buddha. And then in Vajrayana, you try and see your teacher as a Buddha. These are different gradations of how you try and view your teacher. Here, we're talking from the tantric viewpoint. Lama Tsongkhapa wrote the Lamrim with the presumption that everybody who studies it is going to go into Vajrayana.

There is some difficult material here. Lama Tsongkhapa is talking from the point of view of his audience being somebody who already knows a little bit about Vajrayana, has faith in the Dharma, and has some faith in the teachers. These kinds of teachings are much easier for Tibetan ears. But for us (Westerners), it's quite difficult sometimes. It's talking about a high level of practice that we aren't familiar with. However, somehow, maybe something will go in. At least it can make us start to think: are our perceptions of people correct? This section is a real challenge to our perceptions of people. Are our perceptions correct? Are there advantages to be gained from changing our perceptions? Try to listen

through those ears even though you might not know much about the tantric practice right now. Feel free to ask questions. Please ask because this is a very hard subject. I know. My mind has battled this subject for years. I'm not going to pretend that it's all easy.

WHY IT IS NECESSARY TO REGARD OUR TEACHERS AS BUDDHA

Here, when we talk about having confidence in somebody, we're talking about a positive attitude towards somebody who is constructive and who is worthy of our respect. It's trying to have faith or confidence by recognizing somebody's qualities.

First, why is it necessary to regard our teacher as Buddha? Or another way of putting it is, "Why is it necessary to see our teacher's positive qualities?", since regarding him as a Buddha comes down to the point of seeing their good qualities.

Well, as I have been saying, if we see somebody's positive qualities, they'll have a much greater influence on us. And especially in the case of a qualified teacher, if we see their qualities and as a result they have a greater influence on us, we will follow their teachings with more energy. We will also follow the example that they show us in how they live their life and how they handle situations. You see how, by having a good view of them, it benefits us.

Also, without the confidence or faith in our teachers, the inspiration of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas can't come. We can see that if we have a lot of doubt and a lot of nagging, a pestering mind, it's very difficult for the inspiration of the holy beings to

enter us because our mind is so caught up in defilements. We can see it very clearly in our life, can't we? If we have this doubting mind, even if our friends are nice to us, we can't appreciate them. The same definitely happens with our teacher. Again, if we don't have the regard, we won't be inspired by their example, we won't follow their instructions. If we have the regard, the teachings will have a lot more effect on our mind because we'll take them seriously.

Just look, even in our general life, we often pay more attention to who says something than what they say, don't we? We can see that very clearly. If somebody is a professor, we listen to what they say. If they're Joe Blow off the street, we completely ignore them though they may say the exact same words. This is because we hold the professor in very high regard, while we think Joe Blow off the street is an idiot, though they're saying the same thing. What I'm getting at is that if you have a positive attitude towards your teacher, then you're going to take to heart what they say, because you're going to really regard it.

WHY IT IS POSSIBLE TO REGARD OUR TEACHERS AS BUDDHA

Why is it possible to regard our teachers as Buddhas? Or why is it possible to see their good qualities?

First of all, we don't have the karma to perceive the Buddha directly. Remember the story I told about Asanga and Maitreya? Maitreya was always around but Asanga didn't see him because Asanga didn't have the karma; his mind was too confused, too

obscured by all of his own garbage. Even when he saw Maitreya the first time, he saw Maitreya as a dog, remember? It's the same with us. Even if Shakyamuni walked into this room, we wouldn't see him. Some of my teachers say, if Shakyamuni walks in here, we'd probably see a donkey! This is more a reflection of our mind than anything else. Because our minds are obscured, we can't see the Buddha in a body of light with the 32 signs and the 80 marks. So the Buddha appears instead in an ordinary aspect as our teacher, somebody whom we can actually communicate with. It's very fortunate that at least we see our teacher as an ordinary being whom we can relate to and communicate with. Also they have this great reasoning in the teachings. When we're very attached to somebody, even if that person doesn't have any good quality, we see good qualities in them. We see them as completely pure. Now we have here, before us a qualified teacher who does have good qualities. Of course it's possible to see their good qualities. It's definitely possible for us to recognize these qualities in them.

WHAT TO THINK TO REGARD OUR TEACHERS AS BUDDHA

What to think in order to be aware of our teachers' good qualities, and to think of them as Buddhas.

1. Vajradhara asserted that our teacher is a Buddha.

This point is difficult for Westerners.

Vajradhara is the form Shakyamuni Buddha appeared in when he taught the tantric teachings. In the Hevajra root tantra, the Sutra of the White Lotus of the Dharma, and other sutras, Vajradhara said that in the time of degenerations (which our time is), the Buddhas will appear in the form of ordinary beings (as spiritual masters) in order to guide us. In other words, because the times are so degenerate, if the Buddhas appeared in their glorious aspects, we couldn't perceive them. Instead, they appear in ordinary aspects as human beings, as our teachers.

What is difficult about this, is that we Westerners will say, "Who in the world is Vajradhara?" "Why should I believe Vajradhara anyway? Who is this guy? He is blue?!" [Laughter.] This point is more difficult for us, because we don't have this kind of spontaneous faith in Vajradhara. This point is citing scriptural reference to prove that the Buddha did give some indication at the time he was alive that he and other Buddhas would appear in ordinary aspects as our teachers. That's all that this is coming down to. The Buddha actually spoke about it and it was recorded in the scriptures. We have to determine for ourselves how much faith we place in what's written in the scriptures. Each of us is going to vary in that. Also, as we practice, our belief in the scriptures is going to change. If this point hits you hard, that the Buddha gave some indications while he was alive that he would come back in this way, that's great. If it doesn't, don't worry, because there're a few other reasons. [Laughter.]

2. Our teachers are the media for conveying the

Buddhas' enlightening influence to us

The Buddha's enlightening influence is his ability to generate realizations within us. In other words, the ability to connect and to spark something in our mind. The point this is trying to make, is saying our teachers are the media for conveying the Buddha's enlightening influence.

The Buddha's great realizations (or the Dharmakaya mind of the Buddha or the mind of wisdom and compassion of the Buddha) is something intangible. We can't see it. We can't touch it. We can't talk to it. There is a need for a media of communication between the Buddha's great realizations and we ordinary beings who are so stuck in materiality. Our teachers are that media of communication.

The scriptures use the example of a magnifying glass, that we could use to focus the rays of the sun to actually start a fire. The sun's rays are like the Buddha's enlightening influence. To start the fire, which is like the realizations in our mind, we need the magnifying glass, which are our teachers. The teacher is the vehicle that transports the Buddha's enlightening influence to ignite the realizations in our mind. The teachers perform the work of the Buddha. How can we respect the Three Jewels and the Buddha, but not respect the people who perform the work for them? Our teachers inspire us to have a receptive state of mind. They inspire us through their actions, through the good influence they have on us, through the teachings, through the example they set, and so on. It would not be logical to respect the

Buddhas but disregard the qualities of this person who's bringing it all to us.

3. In this degenerate age, the Buddhas and bodhisattvas still work for the benefit of beings

When I heard the first two points, I said, “Yeah, well, OK, that makes some sense.” But I remember when Serkong Rinpoche explained this third point, I went “OK. OK. I'm convinced.” It was, personally speaking, the point that convinced me.

The Buddhas were once ordinary, regular, confused people like us. The whole reason they practiced the path to become Buddhas was so that they could benefit the rest of us. Now, when they finally become a Buddha for this sole purpose of benefiting others, but don't benefit anybody, don't communicate with ordinary beings, then what's the purpose of what they did? If somebody becomes a Buddha, it is only for the purpose of communicating with and helping other beings. There's no other reason. The Buddhas are fully committed to helping other beings. How are they going to do it? What's the most effective way? The most effective way is to appear in the aspect of spiritual masters to teach us and guide us. The Buddhas can appear in whatever form is beneficial to us, according to our karma. They can even appear as physical objects or as cats and dogs if we have the karma to be benefited in such ways. So surely they can appear as spiritual masters because it's so clear the good influence that spiritual masters can have on us. If people become Buddhas, but did not help sentient beings by teaching them,

then they're contradicting themselves.

4. Our opinions aren't always reliable

We like to think our own opinions are supremely reliable. However, just looking in an ordinary way, we hold people in high regard if they agree with us. If they don't agree with our opinions, then we don't have much regard for them. Look back at your life and see how much you've changed your opinions, and how much you've changed the people you hold in regard. Each time you hold somebody in high regard, you think, "This is it! This person is fantastic!" Then you change your mind, "Well, maybe my opinions aren't so reliable." [Laughter.]

In the teachings, they particularly highlight this example of how we like people who agree with us. If the student likes to go to bed early, and the teacher likes to go to bed late, then the student doesn't like the teacher and criticizes "Oh, this teacher is so bad ...". But what's really going on is "This guy is keeping me up and I want to go off to bed!" We tend to criticize anything that doesn't agree with what we're attached to. When our teacher does things in a different way from us, we criticize them. When they say things to us that we don't understand, instead of checking up what they're saying and trying to understand it, we criticize.

Projecting our motivation on others

This point is all about helping us realize how judgmental and how fickle our own minds are, how

unreliable they are. When we're able to see this, we'll begin to understand how much we project onto other people. When we see things that appear negative in our eyes, when we see actions our teacher does that appears negative to us, instead of believing that appearance, we remember the fact that our own opinions aren't always reliable. In general, we project a lot onto other people. Somebody is acting a certain way, we have no idea why they act this way, but we project onto them the motivation we would have if we were acting like that. And we usually project a negative motivation onto them, don't we? "Oh look, that person's showing off because they blah blah blah." Well, maybe their motivation isn't to show off at all. If we acted like that, we would be showing off. We project our garbage onto other people. If we do this to ordinary people in our lives, we also do it to our spiritual teachers.

If you are aware, then whenever you see something in your teacher that appears negative, instead of doing our usual trip of judging and condemning, we start to say "What is this saying about my mind?" In other words, how I'm seeing other people isn't saying so much about what they are. It's saying something about me and my mind. A spiritual teacher is somebody whom I've incredible confidence in, whose qualities I have seen, whom I've chosen because I've had confidence that they can guide me to enlightenment. But if I look at them now and all I see is garbage. What's this saying about my mind and where I'm at? I think this is a very good technique to use when we start to see negative qualities. Try to see it as a way to explore what's

going on inside of us.

Teacher acting as our mirror

As I also said last week, if we see our own personal teacher doing something that we don't like so much, we say this is what we look like when we're acting like that. Our teacher is showing us that. If our teacher comes up to us and just tells us to our face our negative qualities, "You're always getting angry and you're so disagreeable, and blah, blah, blah", we're likely to get very, very upset. So what does our teacher do? Because we're closed to listening to that feedback about ourselves, our teacher shows us in their own behavior what our actions look like. When they're doing that, we think, "That's what I look like when I'm doing that. This is a way for me to learn something about myself." This way of thinking in relationship to your own personal teacher is very, very valuable.

Different approaches and motivation

I find from my own experience, that I constantly come up against my own preconceptions. Sometimes my teachers act in ways that I disagree with. It's not that they're being unethical, it's just their whole way of doing things is very different from the way I do things. My immediate reaction to this would be, "Well, everybody should do things the way I do! My plan is clearly the most efficient way. Why can't this person see that?" It was so easy to get judgmental.

But if I were to stop and think "Well, maybe

there're other ways to do things besides my way," and begin to stretch my mind and try to see how my teacher is looking at this thing, then I realize maybe efficiency isn't the highest quality to hold in this situation. Maybe being efficient isn't the most important thing when organizing something. Maybe it's the benefit other people receive from the way it's organized, or from working through all the hassles in it that is most important. My mind is so goal-oriented; I want to see the goal. My teacher, on the other hand, is more interested in the process, and so approaches it in a different way. Why should I be so judgmental and discriminatory? So, relax, sit back, observe and watch things unfold and try and learn from this person's example.

What to do if the teacher does something that seems unethical

Now if it happens that your teacher is doing something that contradicts Buddhist precepts, or if your teacher is doing something that appears extremely unethical in your eyes, like the story I told you last time of my friend whose teacher was an alcoholic, you don't need to whitewash this behavior and say this person is a Buddha and everything they're doing is pure.

His Holiness says that if we just try to whitewash everything by saying that this person is a Buddha and all their actions are perfect, this can actually be poison. In these situations where it concerns something that seems definitely unethical to you, you can go and speak to the teacher and say "What's

happening? I don't understand why you're doing this. This is very confusing to me. Can you explain the behavior?" You go and ask for more information, but you do this with a respectful mind, not with a harsh, critical mind. If you're not satisfied with what you're hearing, and it doesn't seem to be a good reason, then you just keep your distance, again, without criticizing, because this person had taught you the Dharma before and you can always have respect and regard for that kindness that you did receive ...

[Teachings lost due to change of tape]

We think, "Well, my teacher told me to jump off a cliff, am I going to jump off a cliff?" [Laughter.] We get really caught, "Well, if I don't jump off this cliff, then I'm this horrible disciple. I'm going to the hell realms forever because I'm not following the guru's instructions like Naropa. I should be like Naropa, so I'm going to jump!"

What we have to understand when we're listening to these stories of the lineage lamas is that they were incredibly highly realized beings. Naropa could jump off a cliff, and it didn't even look like a cliff to him. His mind is in the middle of the realization of emptiness, and he probably has all sorts of psychic powers so that he doesn't kill himself when he jumps off the cliff. He's seeing everything in his pure vision as a mandala. We shouldn't be thinking because Naropa did that, we can do that.

In the same way, some people may have teachers who drink. If a teacher isn't ordained as a monk or a nun, and they don't have the lay precept not to drink,

it's fine that they drink. They're not breaking any precepts. Again, that teacher may be a highly realized being. When they drink, it's one thing. But we shouldn't think "Well my teacher drinks, therefore I can too." What if we can't handle the alcohol?

This is where a lot of people in America get off-balance in trying to have a pure view of the teacher. They think, "My teacher does that, and I'm following my teacher's example. My teacher is sleeping around with a lot of people. Well, I'm going to do too." That's not the point! What your teacher does is your teacher's business. You screen that teacher beforehand and know about this behavior, and if that's acceptable to you, you may accept that person as a teacher. If it's not acceptable, go somewhere else where the teacher acts differently. But if you accept that person as your teacher, don't think that you can necessarily do everything that they do. They might have realizations but we're just like Joe Blow. OK? This is an important point.

Letting oneself be abused is not proper reliance

Here is an extremely interesting point. In Newport Beach a couple of years ago, I went for a conference where His Holiness had a panel discussion with some psychologists, some of whom were Buddhists. One of them brought up a very good point to His Holiness. He said many of the stories told in the scriptures make it sound like to be a good student, you have to let yourself be abused, e.g. Naropa jumping off the cliff because Tilopa told him to, Milarepa building all the towers out of stone and tearing them down because

Marpa told him to. There's also the story of this bodhisattva called the bodhisattva who's always crying. He had a lot of respect for his teacher and an incredible longing to hear the Dharma. He was going to clean the room because his teacher was coming to teach. In ancient India, the floor was made of dirt. To clean a dirt floor you have to throw water on it, so that the dirt doesn't fly all over, and then you gather the dirt away. He couldn't find any water to sprinkle on the floor, so he cut his wrist and used his own blood to sprinkle on the floor to clean the room before his teacher came in to give teachings.

When we hear these stories, we wonder if we have to do all these things. What this person brought up is that these stories seem to indicate that, superficially, to all appearances, you have to be willing to let yourself be abused in order to be a good disciple. This is what the stories look like in our opinion, in our eyes. This man asked His Holiness about it, and His Holiness said that's not the idea. Having a good relationship with your teacher and having confidence in your teacher does *not* mean you let yourself be abused. It does *not* mean that you give up your own responsibility in life to make decisions. It does *not* mean that you give up your own wisdom and just follow blindly.

The whole purpose of having a spiritual teacher is to increase our wisdom, not to diminish it. If these highly realized beings can behave in those ways, that's fine, because their mind is at a completely different level. But if, at our level of mind, it seems to us to be a thing of abuse (whether or not the teacher from their side is trying to abuse us), then as a symbol

of our own dignity, our own exercise of responsibility and wisdom, we have to go to the teacher and say, “I’m sorry. I can’t do this.” And you explain yourself respectfully.

His Holiness also says that in the tantra, you’re supposed to follow your teacher’s instructions. However, if your teacher tells you to go to the East but points to the West, you have no choice but to go and say, “I don’t understand. I can’t follow that.” This is something to remember.

Issues to consider with Dharma coming to the West

His Holiness also made the comment at that conference that he feels that sometimes, we pamper the teachers too much. This is something we have to think about as Westerners, especially with Asian teachers coming. Very often with the lamas, we don’t let them do anything for themselves. We just completely pamper and clutter around them. His Holiness said we shouldn’t pamper them. Of course, that doesn’t mean that you neglect your teacher because obviously, if you don’t help your teacher and if they don’t have what they need to live, you’re not going to benefit much. It’s a thing of mutual benefit. You have to help your teacher as a way of repaying kindness and as a way to keep on receiving that kindness. But it doesn’t mean this kind of over-extended pampering.

In this light (I know I’m digressing a little bit from the Lamrim outline), I want to just bring up something that is my own personal opinion: I wonder sometimes what it really means to please our teachers. An

example would be how we spend money. When His Holiness (or some of the other high teachers) visit, people would sometimes build a house for His Holiness. Or His Holiness would have a special room in the center. Nobody else stays there. His Holiness comes once every four or five years and stays two or three nights each time. They would paint it and redecorate it each time His Holiness comes. In Tibet, this was a way of showing respect to your teacher. The more you can give them materially, the greater the merit. The greater the positive potential you create by making offering, the greater respect you're showing to your teacher. There's also that element in our culture, to be lavish with people we respect.

My doubt is, and this is my personal opinion, whether His Holiness would want the money to be spent this way. When I think of His Holiness, I think if the room were very nice and pleasant, I don't think His Holiness would care how old the paint job was, or if it was the same paint job as five years ago. I think His Holiness would prefer that all that money be used, let's say, to help the monasteries, so that people who aren't Buddhas yet can practice more and release themselves from suffering. My own personal opinion is that very often, in the Tibetan system, there's a lot of pomp and ceremony.

Another example is very often before the monks in the monasteries in the South (i.e. South India) take their Geshe exams, they have to offer huge amounts of money to the monastery and have paintings done and statues built. They have to buy a katag (silk scarf) for every single monk, and make offering to each. It's true that the Geshe candidates would create a lot of

good karma doing this. But His Holiness doesn't think that it's necessary that everybody does that, because monks aren't supposed to have a lot of money, so how do they get all this money to make these offerings? It becomes a huge economic burden on these monks. They have to borrow money from their families, or they have to write to their sponsors in the West or they have to do who-knows-what to get the money, because it's expected of them to give all these lavish offerings. His Holiness doesn't think that it's a good system to perpetuate. I happen to agree with it. [Laughter.]

It seems to me that it's more important, if there's money available, for example, to build toilets in the monasteries, as the sanitation is very bad at the monasteries and many monks get sick. I think they could use a toilet more than a silk scarf. Also, people can still become Geshes even if they don't have money. But somehow, the system is ingrained in this idea of lavish offerings. There's so much social pressure in the monasteries to do so. This is similar to the kind of pressure we feel when the lamas come here, that we have to rent limousines, let them stay in the best place and eat the best food—outlandish amounts of money spent. I think the people who are real Buddhist practitioners would be happy to have something plain and simple, as long as their basic needs are met. If they need a lot of telephones and a fax machine, as His Holiness does when he travels—great, you have to provide that as the host. But I think His Holiness would be much happier if people weren't pressured into making offerings. If there was extra money, it could be given to those who really needed

it, in a way that enabled them to practice the Dharma.

Again, this are just some of my concerns with Dharma coming to the West and how we as Westerners are going to relate to the Tibetan custom of being very lavish in everything we do. His Holiness visited San Francisco last year. He arrived at the hotel and I was with the person who was organizing the visit. The organizer was dropping me off somewhere, and he was in a tizzy because he had arranged for a limousine to take His Holiness to an event in the evening, but His Holiness said, "I don't want to go in a limousine, I want an ordinary car," and this guy didn't have an ordinary car! To me this is saying something about His Holiness. This is also something to keep in mind about how to be with our teachers. But again, these are just some of my personal views. You're free to evaluate and think as you wish. But it's something I do think about with the Dharma coming to the West.

Also, while we're on this subject, I see sometimes with some Dharma centers, in their publicity materials, it's stated that if you become a benefactor for a certain event, then as a token of appreciation, you get to sit in the front row, or have a private lunch with the lama, or something like this. Personally speaking, that doesn't feel quite comfortable. If people want to be benefactors, it's marvelous. If we have the money and we can give it to help people come and teach the Dharma and to help people listen to it, it's good for them and it's also very meritorious. It creates a lot of good karma on our part. But, to hold it out as a prize, that if you do make a special donation, you get this prize. Well, something about

this feels uncomfortable to me. It's like if you have a lot of money, you get to sit in the front row. But if you're poor ... and you see, I'm usually a person who's poor and I'm a nobody. I can't pull status and I can't pull money to get myself into things. So I've experienced this kind of situations myself. If we bring the Dharma over here and it depends on your status and who you know and how much money you have to get you into things, I don't think this is right.

When we organize Buddhist events, it is important to be fair and open to everybody. Now it's true, if somebody is a benefactor, like if somebody all of a sudden gives a house to DFF, people are going to be grateful and we should definitely show our gratitude to people who benefit us. People who help us in our practice are incredibly kind and we should definitely show our gratitude to them. Maybe you could do something special for them. But we should do it out of a feeling of gratitude instead of "If you give us this, we'll give you that." You see what I mean? This is just something to think about.

Review

Maybe I'll just review right now and then open it up for questions.

In recognizing that there's a lot for us to gain personally by having a good relationship with our teacher, that there're many advantages to it, we want to try and train ourselves to see that person's positive qualities. This is the attitude we should have as we practice with our teacher. We also want to avoid projecting, getting nit-picking and negative about

whatever things they do which don't meet our fixed image of how we want them to act. We want to avoid doing this because our opinion could be very unrealistic. We project things onto other people, we like the people who agree with us, and so on. We should use these situations as a mirror to help us open our mind to different ways of doing things. We do receive a lot of benefit from regarding our teachers in a positive way.

It's possible to do this because we see good qualities in the people we're attached to though they don't have them. Definitely, it should be possible for us to see the good qualities of our teachers because they do have them. Also to remember that we don't have the karma to be able to see the Buddha as a body radiating light and so on, but we should try and recognize that they can appear in ordinary forms and to see their good qualities in that way.

We also talked about what to think in order to mentally develop a good attitude towards our teacher:

1. To remember that in the scriptures, there're many quotations by the Buddha saying that he will appear in degenerate times in the form of spiritual masters.
2. To remember that our teachers are the media for conveying the Buddha's inspiration to us. In other words, they channel the inspiration and the teachings to actually spark the understanding in our mind. Our teachers are doing the same work as the Buddha. I remember Geshe Dhargyey said that to me one time, and it really struck me. If the Buddha came here, he wouldn't say anything different from what our

teachers are saying. I think this is something essential to think about. The Buddha already taught the Dharma before; our teachers are teaching us exactly what the Buddha said. If the Buddha came, if he showed up here, he's not going to say anything different from what our teachers are already teaching us. Remember that in this way we should have a feeling of confidence in our teachers and in what they are instructing us to do.

3. To remember that the whole reason people become Buddhas is to help benefit us. They're certainly not going to abandon us and refuse to benefit us. The best way they can benefit is clearly by coming and teaching us the Dharma. It's very possible that our teachers are Buddhas appearing in that form.

4. Our own opinions aren't always so reliable. With minor things our teacher did that we don't understand—I'm not talking about grave unethical behavior—we try and say "Well, this is what I look like when I'm doing this." Or "What other reason could my teacher have for acting like this?"

Examples

Just to give you an example. I remember one time I was at Kopan, a monastery in Nepal. They had just built a brick wall around it. They were in the process of putting glass on top of the brick wall. Lama Yeshe was out there with them putting glass on top of the brick wall. And at first my mind went, "Lama Yeshe—he talks about compassion for all beings—what's he

doing putting glass on top of brick walls?!” My mind was saying, “This is like saying, ‘This is our property. We don’t want anybody in here. If you try and get in, we’re going to cut you into pieces!’” This is how my mind was perceiving what Lama was doing.

And then I thought, “Hold on a minute. Maybe Lama is also recognizing that as abbot, it’s his responsibility to protect the welfare of all the young monks at Kopan, and if thieves did come and steal from the Sangha community, they will create incredible negative karma. If you harm people who are engaged in Dharma practice, you harm yourself much more than you harm them. In putting the glass there, Lama is preventing these people from creating so much negative karma by stealing. Try looking at things in a different way.

Also, it’s important not to develop negative states of mind when your teachers criticize you or when your teachers tell you things that you don’t want to hear. We usually think, “This person is a Buddha and if this person is so highly realized, they should always be kind to me.” I think that if your teacher sees that you have a strong mind, and that you have a strong basis, then the teacher actually has much more freedom to point out your faults to you. With a student who is very wishy-washy in their commitment to the Dharma, who doesn’t have a lot of self-confidence, then the teacher has to be very, very nice to that student. If the teacher says anything that that person doesn’t like to hear, they’re going to run away. But with somebody who in one way is much closer to the teacher because they have a more stable practice and they have the ability to listen to criticism, then the

teacher is going to be able to be harder with them and actually point out their faults to them and say things that they won't like to hear.

I remember one time I went to see Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey. I was about to start a retreat. I went to say "Goodbye" to Geshe-la and to ask him a few questions about the sadhana I was going to do. I asked him a few questions and he looked at me and he said, "You don't understand what you're doing anyway, why are you doing this retreat to start out with? You just don't understand the simplest thing about the sadhana!" And I was like ... because I just wanted him to pat me on the back and tell me how good I was and wish me a good retreat, and here he is telling me I don't understand anything. I left the room feeling completely topsy-turvy. I walked up the hill from the library to Tushita (because I was doing my retreat up the hill at Tushita), and the whole way, I'm thinking about "Well, I don't understand. Why am I doing this retreat? There's certainly some truth to what Geshe-la said ..." When I got to Tushita, Lama Yeshe was in the garden—this seems too much of a coincidence, it's like Lama was there waiting for me—and I started asking him these questions and he started answering them. Later when I thought about it, it was almost like they were setting this up and that somehow, by Geshe-la being really hard on me that way, he made me ask these questions which Lama then answered and enabled me to have a better retreat.

And another time, Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey was teaching at the library and His Holiness was teaching in Manali. I wanted to go to Manali to listen to His Holiness teach. Alex Berzin was going to translate.

When I went to tell Geshe-la that I was going to Manali—he’s so outrageous [laughter]—he said, “Why are you going there?! You want to hear Alex Berzin teach Dharma? You don’t understand His Holiness, you’re always listening to Alex. What are you doing?!” [Laughter.] It was good because initially it made me think, “Hold on ... I got to reassess it ...” but then when I thought about it more in-depth, I really came to think, “Well, I know very well why I’m going. I want these teachings. I feel a very strong connection with His Holiness and I know this will be helpful for my mind,” and so I went. But I think Geshe-la was really making me think very deeply why I was doing this. Lots of times our teachers can do this to us.

Questions and answers

[Audience:] If you regard people as Buddha, does that necessarily mean you think they are realized?

Yes. In other words, if you regard them as the Buddha, then you think “This person has the realizations of what they’re teaching me.”

[Audience: inaudible]

Now they say that from the side of the teacher, the teacher may or may not be a Buddha. Not all teachers are Buddhas. From their side, they may or may not be. But from our side, they say it’s beneficial if we think that our teacher is a Buddha. Why? Because if we think this person has the realization of what

they're explaining to me, then we're going to listen more attentively, we're going to take it more to heart. Our trying to see this person as a Buddha isn't something that benefits the teacher. It's something that benefits us as we listen with a more open mind. From the teacher's side, they may or may not be.

[Audience:] As a student, I find it irrelevant whether or not they are a Buddha as long as they're teaching the same things and they're consistent.

Yes. If we think, well if the Buddha were to manifest in this world, given our ordinary perception, would the Buddha act any differently from how our teacher's acting? Will they say anything differently from what our teacher is saying?

[Audience: inaudible]

Yes, and it helps our mind. Whether they are or not, it doesn't matter. It helps our mind very much to look at them that way. They are practicing what they're preaching.

[Audience:] How do you know that the teacher is not saying anything different from what the Buddha said?

That's why we have to learn the Dharma very well and we have to read the text ourselves. We have to study with a wide variety of teachers so we can learn the Dharma from slightly different perspectives. We also have to think very deeply about the teachings we

hear to see if they're logical. It's not just a question of blindly believing what the teacher says, but you have to learn the scriptures and everything yourself.

Alex told me a very good story. Once Serkong Rinpoche was teaching and he said something that Alex thought, "Wow, this isn't what it says in the teachings." But he was translating what Rinpoche said, so he translated that. Later on, he said to Rinpoche, "I didn't understand why you said that because I've heard otherwise." Rinpoche looked at him and said, "Why did you translate it then? If you knew I was saying something wrong, you should have stopped me!" [Laughter.] Learn the teachings yourself and if the teacher makes a slip of tongue or if they say something off, then come back and say something.

[Audience:] It seems contradictory to say don't whitewash their behavior, on the other hand, don't necessarily criticize it either.

Let's say your teacher is embezzling money from the Dharma center—let's make up something very outrageous—they're taking all sorts of money from the group and they're going on lavish holidays. If you say, "My teacher is the Buddha and he obviously knows what he's doing with the finances and he must have some real deep karmic reason for spending all the money so that we're all broke [laughter]" and make up excuses that let somebody do something that could actually be quite harmful, then we're not discharging our responsibility as mature adults. This is where abusive and codependent behavior come in. You just whitewash everything because this person is

the leader of the organization and it somehow becomes very threatening to challenge the leader of the organization. People just keep quiet. This is the danger of whitewashing.

What you can do is you can say, “OK, he’s taking all this money. The Dharma center’s broke. We can’t pay our water bills. The teacher’s having a 5-star holiday.” (By the way, I haven’t heard of anybody doing this, I’m just making it up.) “I don’t understand why this is happening. However, something doesn’t feel comfortable to me about what they’re doing. They may be a Buddha, but this action is something that I don’t understand (so you’re differentiating between the person and the action). They may be a Buddha, they may be doing it for some incredible reason, but this action is not something that I think is beneficial for the Dharma center, and it’s not something I understand.” And so then, you go and you ask, very politely. You don’t go print an article defaming them in the newspaper, but you go through appropriate channels and you try and understand what’s happening. Is that making more sense?

[Audience: inaudible]

Yes, it’s very, very hard. On one hand, we want very much to respect them. We have to acknowledge we may not see things realistically. On the other hand, we can’t just whitewash and ignore things. We have to find some way of clarifying our doubts.

[Audience: inaudible]

Then you have to maybe ask some of their students. Or ask other people, as you try and come to some understanding about it. Again His Holiness says we should have a spirit of sincere inquiry and try and understand. We can do this without criticizing the other person. And I think this in general is very good advice for us with anybody we deal with. Usually, when somebody does something, we're quick to judge, condemn and criticize. If we can instead just train ourselves to think, "Well they're doing something and I don't understand what in the world they're doing. But I'm not going to judge and condemn, I'm not going to whitewash. I'm going to go and find out what's happening."

Sometimes you just have to be content with your present level of understanding of what's going on. I've seen with myself in some cases, that initially, I can only understand this much. But later, as my mind gets broader or I do more purification, I'm able to understand more. But it is difficult.

[Audience:] We want to avoid whitewashing when it comes to ethical stuff, but in other things like, just behavior things that don't seem to be really harming anybody, then those things we should just have a more open mind towards?

Yes. Again, we don't know why they're doing it. And definitely, it's challenging our preconceptions, isn't it? If it's not an action that is harmful, and you take it in the way of "Wow, look at all my preconceptions", then you're going to benefit no matter why they're doing it because of the way you look at the situation.

[Audience: inaudible]

It seems to me there're two things: there's the religion as a doctrine, and then there's the person who's practicing a religion. There's a difference between a person who's practicing a religion and a doctrine. The doctrine may say "There's a creator God", and all the little people in the religion may say "Yes, there's a creator God, and I've got to be nice otherwise he'll punish me. " But if you ask a person who's practicing that religion "Is there a creator God?", he could say "No, there's no creator God." And if you ask what's ultimate reality, maybe they'll explain the realization of emptiness. In one way their mind is not matching the literal tenets that their own religion is preaching. This is what I mean, that you have to look beyond the words into the conception, to know what that person really means.

[Audience: inaudible]

What we're saying is, if I look at myself, I don't understand anything. For my mind to get from where I am to Buddhahood, I need a religion that is going to be able to communicate to me those realizations in a framework that I can understand. Now if one system (not even religion) describes those realizations in a way that I can communicate with, in a way that enables me to generate these realizations, fine. Great.

Then there's another religion, and the way its teachings appear to me, is that I have to believe in a creator God. If I have to believe in this, that and the other, then I'm going to say it's not teaching me those

realizations that I need. Maybe the great practitioners of this religion believe something different, I don't know. The standard party-line that I'm getting as it's being interpreted to me isn't clicking.

[Audience: inaudible]

A lot of it has to do with karma. This is why Buddhism says we have to think very deeply and use reasoning. Use logic. We are very easily drawn here or there. I think it's not very useful for us to go through life with this little checklist of what is a good religion and what is a bad religion. Which one has my blessing and which ones I am going to condemn. I think that's not a very useful way to approach things. I think it's more useful for our own growth, if we have some idea of the kind of realizations that make sense to us, that we feel we need to gain to become enlightened. Our job is to seek the tradition that explains those things to us so that we understand it. Don't worry about what everybody else is doing and what everybody else is saying. Our purpose as practitioners is not to go around judging other religions. There have been so many religious wars fought because people spend their time judging religions instead of practicing them. That's not our job. Our job is to know the kinds of things we need to develop and then seek the system that teaches us how to develop them. Let everybody else do what they want to do. The most we can say is that this system resonates in me and that system doesn't.

You have to make a distinction between the dogma, or the party-line of a religion, and the

realizations that very deep practitioners of that religion have, because they might be two very different things. You can debate “Is there a creator God?”, but you have to give the word “God” a certain definition—if creator God means somebody sitting up there who waves his magic wand—you both understand you have the same conception of what that word means. Then it’s perfectly legit to debate whether God exists or not. Does that make sense or not?

But, what one person’s particular understanding of God is, may not be what that word is as we’re commonly defining on the debating ground. In order to increase our own intelligence, and our own understanding of the path, we have to give words specific definitions so that we can figure out what we believe in and what we don’t. But that doesn’t mean that everybody who is practicing that religion gives it that same definition. They might have a completely different understanding in such a way that they have very deep spiritual realizations. That’s why I keep saying, don’t look at the words, look at the meaning.

For example, the party-line of one religion—if you look in the theoretical books—might be very literally, “It’s OK to slaughter animals.” But some deep religious meditator of that tradition might say, “It’s OK to slaughter animals. But ‘animals’ here means our animal barbaric instinct, and it’s perfectly alright to slaughter that selfish, animal-like mind that disregards other human beings. That’s the meaning of what this religion is saying when it says ‘It’s OK to slaughter animals.’ ” You see—there’s a difference between what that person as a realized being is

interpreting those words to mean, and what the literal meaning is that's coming through the system in the books. I have to figure out what I'm going to follow. If I follow that high meditator, that's great. But if I follow that statement literally, and I, Joe Blow, then start to go around killing animals, that's not going to be useful.

[Audience: inaudible]

I don't think there's any scientific evidence. You just have to go on what it says in the scriptures as to the kind of qualities and capabilities you'll have when you completely purify your mind and totally develop all your good qualities. We're very, very limited beings and what we're capable of doing is very limited. If you look at our mind, our minds are also very defiled, and our good qualities aren't developed. If we could imagine what it would be like, what kind of qualities of mind would it be possible to have if you get your mind to the state where you never, ever again get angry or annoyed or attached or jealous—your mind is going to have some special qualities and capabilities. In the scriptures, it says that as you develop on the path, you develop some of these ... I guess you could call them magical, or supernormal powers. In other words, these people don't have normal states of mind like us. What they can physically and verbally do isn't limited to what we ordinary beings are capable of doing.

In terms of scientific evidence, that's difficult. But I think if we can try and think of what it must be like to have a pure and developed mind, e.g. if we think of

a person who has some ability in meditation, who is able to meditate at the time of death to guide their rebirth—that's an incredible ability. We can't do that now, but we can see how that could be possible. It's possible to eliminate the craving in our mind so that when we die, we can in some way guide our own rebirth. Then you take it from there to the kinds of qualities that are possible to develop with a pure mind. These qualities are talked about in the scriptures. You can accept it provisionally and think about it the way I've just described, try out the path for yourself and see if you can do it when you gain those realizations.

[Audience:] If you're somehow holding the teacher higher, how do you have equanimity for everybody in the group?

This is a very good question. This again is a point that many people in the West miss. The teacher becomes very special and everybody else is just flaky. I think that here you have to ask: for somebody who has high realizations, what is it they cherish the most? They cherish other beings. Bodhisattvas, Buddhas, they cherish other beings more than they cherish themselves. If we're going to respect Buddhas and bodhisattvas, and if we're going to see our teacher as a realized being, then definitely we should try and value the thing that's most important to them, which is other beings, everybody else. Being all nice and sugary sweet and pleasant and wonderful and courteous and helpful to our teacher, but completely obnoxious and disrespectful and greedy in regards to

other sentient beings is completely contradictory to what we should be trying to develop in our practice.

[Audience: inaudible]

I don't know if it's as serious an error, because still, by keeping a good relationship with your teacher, you're opening your mind to eventually coming around to the point that respecting your teacher means respecting other beings. Whereas if you throw away the relationship with your teacher, you're throwing away a lot of that possibility to eventually come to that conclusion.

Here is another very common mistake. I remember in the scriptures, there's one story that explains how anything related to your teacher is very precious. You should treat your teacher's dog with incredible respect because this is your teacher's dog and your teacher's family; anything related to your teacher you should treat with utmost respect. Many people get into this whole thing of "The guru's dog is just so precious!" and patting it and stroking it and praising the guru's dog. But they forget that all the other people around them are the guru's other disciples, and are nasty and mean and competitive to all their Dharma friends. They forget that these people are also who your spiritual teacher cares about. Again, this comes sometimes from the way the teachings are presented. We're taught that anything related to your spiritual teacher is like so high. Actually, the whole point of that teaching is just to help us see somebody's qualities so that we follow the teachings better, but we misinterpret it to get into this whole devotion trip.

[Laughter.]

[Audience:] In the West we're exposed to such a wide variety of teachers and teachings. It seems easy for us to go from one to the next. Yet here in the teachings it seems to be really emphasizing having a steady relationship with a particular teacher or teachers, something steady and concentrated. But here in the West it's a very different thing. You're with your teacher for four days every other year, and then you're with another teacher for another four days, and another teacher for another four days. What does it mean to have a relationship with a teacher?

We can go to people's teachings, we can learn from them, but accepting that person as our teacher is a different thing. You can go and learn from many traditions and many people. When some tradition really clicks with you, or some person really inspires you, after you've checked things out, you make your decision, "That person is my teacher." You may have made that decision about several people. That's OK. But it doesn't mean that everybody you go to and listen to teachings from becomes your teacher. If you take refuge, if you take precepts, if you take initiation from somebody, then they become your teacher. That's why you should check before you do these things. But otherwise, you're free to go and learn from a wide variety of people. Then when something really hits you on a deeper note, whether that person is around all the time or not, if you feel a real heartfelt connection with them and their way of teaching and

that particular tradition, then try and stay steady in that. It's true that in the West, we're exposed to many, many different traditions. I think it's good that maybe you find one particular approach that suits you well and use that as your mainline thing. You can go to other teachers and other things, and that becomes like ornaments or decorations for your basic practice. It's much better to have a main focus, and have other things added on to it. That's very, very good. Whereas somebody who Monday night does breathing meditation and Tuesday night, does Dzogchen and Wednesday night, does Mahamudra and Thursday night, does Tonglen and Friday night, goes to a medium, they're not going to get anywhere. Whereas if you make some connection with a particular teacher, have a stable practice, that will be very beneficial. And you can always write to that person if they're not around. But it's something you can take your time in forming.

[Audience: inaudible]

That has a lot to do with our own disposition and our karma. We have to select what is appropriate for us. That doesn't mean it's the best thing or the best teacher for everybody. It's like at a buffet dinner. I like rice. You like potatoes. I can't say, "Rice is better because I like it!" If you're nourished by potatoes, fine. But if potatoes don't get along with my digestive system, then I have to eat rice. But that's OK.

[Audience:] What does it really mean to be inspired by the Buddhas? Does it mean something conceptual

or does it mean something non-conceptual? What's really going on?

Whether it's something conceptual or is there something else going on depends very much on our mind, the teacher's ability and our karmic relationship with that person. If you go to a teaching, there might be a thousand people in the teaching, and one person is going to go out and say, "Wow! What an incredible teaching. That completely opened my mind!" And somebody else is going to go out and say, "Oh, it's so boring, I didn't get anything!" Now that is a reflection of people's karma and people's disposition. A lot of it depends on us.

[Audience: inaudible]

They say that receiving the blessings or the inspiration of the Buddha means our mind is getting transformed, and that means somehow that we're at the point—from doing some purification, or from whatever—where our mind is receptive to transformation. It might be the conceptual teachings coming from the Buddha, it might be just the whole energy from that person coming, but somehow our mind is ready and ripe at that time. Something clicks. Our receiving this has a lot to do with how we see that person. If you see that person as an idiot, you're completely closing off all your ability to tune in to whatever it is they're trying to convey, conceptually or non-conceptually. Whereas if you try and have a positive view of that person, seeing them with qualities, then your own mind is going to be more receptive to communication,

verbally and non-verbally.
Let's meditate.

DEVELOPING LOVING RESPECT FOR OUR TEACHERS BY REMEMBERING THEIR KINDNESS

There're four different points in this. The word "kindness" here refers to the benefit that we received from our teachers. In other words, other beings are kind because we have received benefit from them. They say in the scriptures that our teacher, from their side, may or may not be a fully realized being or Buddha. But from the side of their kindness, in other words, from the side of the benefit we receive from them, they definitely are the Buddha. This is because we didn't have the karma to be alive on this planet when Shakyamuni Buddha was teaching. We didn't have that ability to benefit from Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings. Who knows what we were born as when Shakyamuni Buddha was alive; what realm we were in. But now, we're able to contact the teachings through our spiritual teacher. Our teacher is giving us all the benefit that the Buddha gave to his disciples at the time he was alive. We also talked last week about how the Buddha wouldn't say anything different from what our teacher's saying.

1. Their kindness exceeds that of the Buddha

The first point is "Our teacher's kindness exceeds that of all the Buddhas." We didn't have the karma to be alive at the time of Shakyamuni Buddha. It's our

teachers who give us the direct teachings, just as Shakyamuni Buddha did to his disciples, so in that way, our present teachers are kinder than the Buddha. They are the ones who give the teachings to us and enable us to contact the method of thought transformation. Our minds are so obscured that even if Shakyamuni Buddha came here, he wouldn't be able to do much for us because we wouldn't be able to recognize his qualities and recognize him for what he is. So again, just the fact that we have a teacher and we can see good qualities in our teacher, is something that's very beneficial for our own practice. They enable us to learn the teachings and put them into practice.

2. Their kindness in teaching us the Dharma

Our teachers haven't made us go through all sorts of hardship in order to receive the teachings. We just get in our car and drive over here, sit in comfy chairs with soft carpet, listen to the teachings, and that's it. When you hear the stories of some of the past lineage teachers and what they had to go through to get teachings, we would probably run away if we were put through the same. There is Milarepa, this great Tibetan sage, who realized that his mind was overwhelmed by negativities and obscurations. He wanted a method of purification. He went to his teacher Marpa whom he had checked out and recognized as a highly realized being, and asked for teachings. But Marpa just kept kicking him out. Every time Milarepa came in, Marpa would swear at him and kick him out! Now imagine if you went to New

York for Kalachakra and His Holiness swore at you and kicked you out. You wouldn't come back and ask for more because of devotion! You see the difference in the level of the mind?

Our teachers are very kind to us. They don't put us through the ego torture that Marpa put Milarepa through. Milarepa was quite an exceptional student and had the strength of character to know what he was doing and kept coming back. But our teachers are quite kind in making things very easy for us. Nowadays, there are books, there are tapes, there is everything! In the olden days, in Tibet, you made every effort to get to the teachings because if you missed them, there weren't tapes to listen to afterwards. There wasn't a book to read afterwards. You had to make the effort.

You can see this even in Dharamsala, when we go for teachings by His Holiness. The temple is too small for all the visitors. Some people sit inside, but most of the people are sitting outside. The teachings are always held in the Spring, and inevitably, it starts out with three days of good weather, and then it rains, hails and the wind blows. You're sitting outside four hours everyday listening to teachings. Monks and nuns aren't allowed to cover their right arm or head during teachings, so you're sitting there completely frozen and numb. It's crowded and you don't have sofas and armchairs and things—you're sitting on the ground in someone else's lap and someone's sitting in your lap. There's no way you could possibly stretch your legs, because there's no place to put them!

Even in Dharamsala you are having to put up with a lot of difficulties. The water runs out in McLeod

Ganj, and you can't have a hot shower. But people still come and they go through this because they see the value of listening to teachings! The fact that we have it so cushy in America, I think sometimes it makes us spoiled. We take things for granted, because we're just so comfortable all the way around. Our teachers are very kind in the sense of making things comfortable for us.

3. Their kindness in inspiring us

Our teacher instructs us, and by listening to the teachings, it transforms our mind, it inspires us, it activates us and energizes us, so that we will want to improve ourselves, so that we can see our good qualities.

They say that our teacher also inspires us by criticizing us. Again, this depends on our own level of mind. If we are very weak-minded, then our teachers tend to be very, very nice to us. It's only when we have enough internal strength that then our teachers can start to criticize us. If we're weak-minded people—I mean just look at how we usually react to criticisms. We usually run away, don't we? Somebody criticizes us, and we go, "They're wrong! Who's going to listen to them?" We just don't go near them in the future. This is because of our weak mind, because of our own attachment to sweet words and our aversion to hearing anything disagreeable about ourselves, and our own unwillingness to check up on our own thoughts and speech and deeds.

Examples

When we, through the practice, start to develop some character, then our teachers start coming on stronger on us. Lama Yeshe was such a good example. I remember this well. Lama would give teachings to the new students. He would walk into the room, and everybody would just completely beam. He somehow had this incredible compassion that touched people's hearts. He would sit down on the Dharma throne and start to teach. Lama had this way of cracking jokes, jokes relating to the Dharma, which showed us our own states of mind. He would crack these jokes, and all the new students would just crack up. But all the old students would go We knew what Lama was talking about when he cracked the joke, especially when he made fun of some of our actions. It's like "Woh!" That was really pointing the finger at us. He could do that because there was already some trust in the relationship between us.

Once when I was in Taiwan, I had been at an inter-religious conference. At the end of the conference, the master who helped sponsor it, introduced some of his students who had helped with the organization of the conference. There were a few nuns and one monk up there on stage. He was introducing them—this person did this and that person so kindly did this and this person did that. He then came to this one monk, and he said, "But this guy ... I gave him all these responsibility for this conference, and he didn't get it done. He constantly let me down. He would just bungle it!" The master stood there and went on to criticize this monk in front of everybody who attended the conference! I was sitting there thinking, "This monk must really be something, the fact that his

teacher feels he is together enough to be criticized in public. That's saying something for his level, where he's at. The fact that he can bear that, and the fact that they actually have quite a close relationship so the teacher can do this. The monk didn't freak out and start crying and run away. He realized he had a heart connection with his teacher. He had the sense to realize that what his teacher was doing was very good for him.

In talking with some of the Chinese nuns at Kirkland about how we are trained, in the Chinese monasteries, the teacher walks around and supervises what everybody is doing. If you're messing up somehow, if your attitude is incorrect, or your body language is harsh or whatever, the teacher, right there and then, no matter who's around, will correct you. It's showing some strength of character on the part of the students that the teacher is able to do that kind of thing.

We say that our teacher is kind to us by inspiring us through even correcting our mistakes. It's only through correcting our mistakes that we're going to learn. In actual fact, when you have a teacher, our teachers have the responsibility to correct our mistakes. That's why we've chosen teachers. We realize we make mistakes, and we want them corrected. We want to become a Buddha. When our teacher points out our mistakes, we should remember that they are fulfilling their responsibility to us. It's also a token of their kindness to care about us, our spiritual development, and to correct us when we're going sideways.

4. Their kindness in including us in their circle of students and providing for us materially

”Providing for us materially” is generally referring to the students who are ordained. In other words, when someone is ordained, they’ve given up having a livelihood. Their teacher tries to care for them materially in arranging a good situation. It doesn’t mean that your ordained teachers give you money. It’s referring to the people who have taken ordination under certain teachers, then those teachers provide for them materially.

“Their kindness in including us in their circle of students” means taking care of us, welcoming us, letting us participate and helping us along. Contemplating this kind of kindness or the benefit we receive from our teacher is very, very helpful for our mind—it makes our heart very glad. It’s similar to the meditations of developing loving-kindness for others that we will be doing later. These meditations center on remembering the kindness of others towards us. In other words, remembering the benefit we’ve received from others by constantly making an effort to remember everything others have done for us. It makes us much more appreciative of our present circumstances. In this way, we remove the mind that likes to complain and grumble about how everything isn’t going well. It makes us realize how good things are going and it makes us appreciative of that. The meditation here on seeing the kindness of the teacher, is similar to the one that comes later on (seeing the kindness of sentient beings). Both make our minds happy. This helps us realize that we are loved and that

other people do care about us.

How to Rely on Our Teacher through Our Actions

The preceding section talks about how to rely on our teacher mentally through cultivating a good gratitude. And now, this is how to put that attitude into practice through our physical and verbal actions.

OFFERING MATERIAL

The first thing is to offer material. Making offerings to our teachers is something that's actually done for our own benefit. We usually see giving something to somebody else as being for their benefit, and somehow we lose out. It's good to remember that being generous is something that's for our own benefit, too. There're advantages when making offerings to our spiritual teachers.

First of all, our spiritual teachers are very powerful karmic objects for us. According to the kinds of relationships we have with people, they can become more or less powerful karmically for us. Any action we create in terms of them becomes weightier or lighter, correspondingly. Somebody is our spiritual teacher because of the very specific benefit and role that person has in our development. Any action we do with them creates a lot of very strong karma. A little bit of anger creates strong karma. Making some offering towards them creates very strong karma. That's why in our meditation, we visualize the field of positive potential (which includes our teachers) and

then we imagine making offerings and prostrations and offering the universe to them. This is a way of creating a lot of positive karma, by making offerings to our teachers. In our meditation, these offerings are mentally transformed offerings, but when we have the possibility to make actual offerings, it's good to do that too because it creates very strong karma. Making offerings is a way to create a lot of good karma quickly, and in that way, it benefits us.

This doesn't mean you have to make extravagant, lavish offerings. You don't go into debt making offering to your teacher. [Laughter.] You offer according to your own ability. The most important thing when you offer to your teacher is to have a kind and generous heart. Think, "I'm making this offering for the benefit of all sentient beings so that I can attain enlightenment." In other words, don't think "I'm making this offering because if I don't, everybody else is going to give me a dirty look," or "because my teacher is going to wonder why I'm so cheap." Or "because I'm obliged to give something", or "because I'm going to feel guilty if I don't", or any of those kinds of afflicted attitudes. We should have joy in our heart and do it for the benefit of others. Whatever material thing we're capable of giving comfortably, we make that offering.

Also, when we offer material, it enables our teachers to do the things that they need to do to benefit others. If we don't support our teachers, they won't have the wherewithal to benefit others. One of my teachers, Lama Zopa, makes a lot of offerings whenever he has the opportunity. When we went to Tibet, he had a big puja. He offered things to all the

people who attended. He made offerings at the Kalachakra in Bodhgaya. He offered to the monasteries. The only way he has that ability to make offerings is through his students making offerings to him. The only way he has the ability to go around the world and teach others is through his students offering him the airfare. In actual fact, when we make offerings to our teachers, we're giving them the ability to help other people. We're giving them the ability to come and teach us. It works like that.

PAYING RESPECT AND OFFERING OUR SERVICE AND HELP

Paying respect includes prostrating, or the Tibetan custom of circumambulating. These are formal ways of offering respect. It's a Tibetan custom to circumambulate holy objects or very powerful objects. For example in Dharamsala, His Holiness' residence is on top of the hill. There's also Namgyal Monastery, the main temple, and the Dialectic School. Around these, there is a very, very large path. It takes about maybe thirty or forty minutes to make one loop. Maybe twenty minutes. It depends on how fast you want to go. Many, many people circumambulate this, because in the center you have His Holiness' residence, the monastery and the temple. It's a way of physically relating to holy objects in a beneficial way and also getting some exercise. This is something that's done.

We offer our service and help in order to help our teachers carry out their projects. It can be whatever our teacher needs help with, be it very simple things

like cleaning their room or preparing their food, or helping other sentient beings. Very often, our teachers will call us in and say, “Please take care of that person,” as they are busy and can’t take care of everybody. My teachers have done that to me many times. That’s how I learned the Nyung Nay practice. Rinpoche said, “I want you to do the Nyung Nay practice with this woman because she has cancer. She needs to do some purification.”

When our teachers ask us to do things like this and we have the ability to do them, it’s something very good to do. This is the way in which helping others very much relates to helping our teacher. Offering respect to our teacher is done through helping others, because the whole idea is that our teachers care more about sentient beings than about anything else. Whenever we help other sentient beings, even though we don’t get a claim and a recognition (what our ego wants), this is really offering service to our teacher. We’re doing what helps further the Dharma and further the happiness of sentient beings.

We offer our service and our help to our teacher, because our teacher is a powerful object of our karma. We accumulate a lot of positive potential. When we offer service, we enable our teacher to benefit others. We enable our teacher to benefit us! Very often, our teacher will ask us to organize things, or print things, or do who-knows-what. It isn’t always easy. I remember this happening for years at Kopan. A meditation course was starting the next day, and the night before, we would be given a list of things to do that should have been done three weeks ago. We stayed up all night trying to get these things done so

that the meditation course could go ahead. This is offering service.

I remember once in Italy (this is hilarious!), Rinpoche and Lama were arriving the next day and we were pouring concrete on the floor of the meditation room the whole night before! So here, offering service is making the preparations so your teachers can teach. So they can do the work that's very valuable for them.

Your teachers will give you all sorts of things to do. Don't think that you're always going to get all the real nice jobs. People think, "I want to be the one that makes tea for Lama, because then I get to go in the room. I get to hang out and pick up good vibes." [Laughter.] Then your teacher tells you to go clean the dog kennel, or to go help somebody who's just turned up, who needs somebody to sit with them all night because they're flipping out. Or he tells you to go edit something so that you're up all night typing, editing and printing something. We shouldn't have the idea that offering service is something that is very glamorous. But when our own minds are dedicated to practicing Dharma, then our mind offers service in a very happy way no matter how inconvenient it is. But like I said before, if something's beyond our capability, then we have to be quite frank and say "I can't do that."

I remember when most of us first came to Kopan, we all wanted to meditate. You meet the Dharma and it's so marvelous, all you want to do is drop everything and just sit and meditate. You take a few meditation courses, you do a retreat, and you meditate. Then Lama sends you out to work in a

Dharma center. You're thinking, "What's this all about?" All of a sudden you have no time to meditate. You're working with other people and you're getting angry again. Other people are criticizing you. You have too much work and you're not being understood. It's a big hassle. You're sitting there wondering, "All I want to do is meditate. Why is he telling me to do all these?" Then it finally hits you. This is actually a very skillful way of helping us to purify our negative karma, of helping us to get in touch with our own present mental state of mind instead of spacing out in our fantasy world of "I'm going to get enlightened next week!"

It's also a way of offering service, and by offering service, you purify a lot of negative karma and accumulate a lot of positive karma. Through doing it and sticking it out, going through the hardship, and checking up your mind—why you're doing this, what you're doing, and why is your mind rebelling—you get a whole lot of information about your practice. This really helps to purify.

I should tell you the story of this one monk. He went into retreat and said he was going to stay in retreat until he got enlightened. Lama pulled him out of retreat and told him to go do business! [Laughter.] And he did it, and he's still a monk! Really, this was Lama's way of skillfully getting him back on planet Earth so that he could make some progress on the path.

PRACTICING ACCORDING TO OUR TEACHERS' INSTRUCTIONS

Offering material is the easiest way to rely on our teacher. Offering our service, our time and energy is the next step up, which is much more difficult.

The hardest thing is to actually practice according to our teachers' instructions. What this means is to practice the teachings that were given. Many times people misinterpret this point. They think that practicing your teacher's instructions means only the things that the teacher tells them in a one-to-one interview, the things that the teacher tells them directly. If your teacher says, "Please bring me a glass of water," then you think, "That's my instruction!" and you run off to do it. But if you're sitting in the class with maybe a thousand other students, and your teacher says, "Develop a kind heart," then we think, "Well, he's talking to so many people, that doesn't apply to me. He's talking to other people." Or the teacher talks about abandoning the ten negative actions and to stop criticizing others. We think "I'm not at the level where I can stop criticizing others. He must be talking to all these other people. I won't even try to practice that." This is a wrong way of understanding this point. Following the instructions means trying to put into practice whatever teachings we've received from our teacher. No matter how many other people are in the audience together with us.

We shouldn't think that following the instructions is just "Bring me a glass of water." It's all the instructions of all the teachings on the gradual path to enlightenment. That's what we need to practice. It's clear, the whole reason our teacher is here teaching us is for our benefit. The best way to repay their

kindness is to actually put it into practice. Otherwise, what are they doing? They're there teaching, teaching, teaching, and we don't make any effort to change. The best way to show our appreciation for what they're doing for us is to make the effort on our side to try and practice it. This is definitely the way to improve our own mind. We want to improve. That's why we're here to start with, isn't it? We want to improve, and we improve by putting the teachings into practice.

It's really nice when you feel a heartfelt connection with your teacher, then even if your teacher is not around—e.g. I don't see my own teachers so often—still, whenever you're trying to put into practice something that they've told you to do, you feel a connection with them. This is your offering to them.

This is the real way to feel connected with your teachers when they aren't around. Do your best to put their teachings into practice. But like I said last time, if some of the instructions are something that we can't possibly do, or if it's something that contradicts with basic Buddhist ethics, then we should definitely explain that we can't do it, and why, and to seek some clarification.

Doing Analytic Meditation on Lamrim Topics

We've covered this whole subject about how to cultivate a proper reliance on our teacher. This is a meditation subject for doing analytic meditation. In the previous talks, we went through and discussed all

the prayers and visualization that we do at the start of a meditation session. We reached the point where Shakyamuni Buddha was on top of our head and we said the mantra. Now at this point in our meditation session, we do analytic meditation on some topic (e.g. this topic of proper reliance on our teacher or the topics that we're going to go into later on.) After doing your prayers and visualizing the Buddha on your head, what you do is to have your notes or the outline (if you know the points fairly thoroughly and don't need too much explanation) in front of you. Then you do the analytic (thinking or contemplative) meditation.

During the meditation, you're actually thinking about the different points to gain an understanding on the subject and to gain an experience in your heart. The thinking that you do is not necessarily intellectual blah-blah thinking. You're not thinking about the advantages of having a teacher and the disadvantages of not having a teacher and how to rely on a teacher like they're some abstract things up there. Rather, you think about it in terms of your life and your teacher's life. Think about it in a very heartfelt way. This is what you might call "Buddhist therapy." You talk to yourself. You become your own therapist. Your Buddha nature becomes your therapist. These teachings are your therapist. They're giving you something to reflect on. You can sit and reflect in a very orderly manner on the different points that are going to help you understand yourself better.

When you do any kind of introspective work, when you get some clarification, there's definitely an experience in your heart. It's not dry words and

intellect. Similarly, as you think your way through these things, different feelings arise and different experiences come that definitely influence you. When you get a very strong feeling, when you feel like you've understood a certain point, then you stop at that point. You then do the stabilizing meditation or the one-pointed meditation.

You might meditate on the advantages of properly relying on a teacher, and you go through each point step by step. You read one, and then sit and think about it. You read a second one, then sit and think about it. Sometimes, you may think about it for a minute. Sometimes you may hit a point where there's so much to think about you might be there for half an hour. But you stay on each point and go down them. By the time you've gotten to the end of the eight advantages, some kind of feeling is probably arising in you about "Wow! Doing this is very beneficial, and I really want to do it." Something is happening inside. At this point you do the stabilizing or single-pointed meditation. You hold your attention on that point and just experience that feeling. Let it soak into you. And then you go on to the subsequent points.

Or sometimes when you're doing this analytical meditation, you read over your notes, you start thinking about it but you're stuck, "This is like mud! I don't get this at all!" At that point, if you're not getting something, if it's just not appearing clearly to you at all, try and at least formulate your questions. Try and at least understand what isn't clear to you. Then you can go back to your teacher and say "I don't get this point. I was thinking like dah dah dah dah dah, and somehow, it's like civil war inside and

I'm not getting it." You ask for your teacher's aid.

So go through the different points, and think and contemplate on them. It really does change you when you do it. It changes your mind. It clarifies your mind and gives you more energy for your practice.

We've talked about how to cultivate a proper relationship with our teacher. Having done that, we will then go on to the actual way of training our mind. We've cultivated a good relationship with our teacher, now we can then learn the teachings and benefit from that. But before we do that, I want to open it up for questions so that we can discuss what we've covered so far here.

Questions and answers

[Audience:] In one session do you go through all of the points of let's say, this meditation?

That depends on how long your meditation session is, how concentrated you are, and the rate at which you're meditating. In other words, you might do only the eight advantages during a session, or the eight disadvantages, or both the advantages and disadvantages, or you might go through the whole thing. It depends on your own internal rhythm and your own feeling. If you only get as far as the eight advantages one day, then the next day, or the next meditation, review the eight advantages and then go on to the eight disadvantages. Or if you feel like there's still more in the eight advantages that you want to go through, you can go back through them and do that again, too. But what we're trying to do

now is learn all the steps of meditation on the gradual path and gain some familiarity with all of them. It's good to move on from one subject to the next, but always reviewing the previous subject.

One thing I find that's really good: right before you dedicate, summarize your meditation so that you're clear about "This is what I've gotten out of this session." And then in your break time, in other words, after you've dedicated for that meditation session and you've gotten up and are going around doing all of your other things, try and bear that understanding in mind, to keep it alive.

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

You can try and remember what you meditated on in the morning throughout the day, and just bear it in mind as time goes on, so that the understanding remains with you. Eventually, as you become very familiar with all these different meditations and the steps on the path, it becomes a very handy tool kit. As you encounter different circumstances and situations, you're better able to tune into the right meditation very quickly, and it becomes quite powerful.

Also, what does happen sometimes is you might be sitting and thinking about all these things, and you might get stuck at a certain point, and then some time later, something might happen in your life or somebody might say something to you. All of a sudden, (snap of fingers) something clicks! It's like, "Oh, yeah, that's exactly what this meditation is about!"

Or something happens in your life and you

remember one of these points you've meditated. Some very strong feeling comes in your mind because you're capable, at that moment in your daily life, of seeing the connection between the Dharma and your life.

[Audience:] How do you balance meditation practice with service?

This is a vast topic. It's going to vary a lot from individual to individual. Some people are happy to offer service, but when we have a lot of restless energy, then even if we sit down and try to meditate, our knees hurt, our back hurts. Even if they don't hurt, our mind can't concentrate. The mind is like bubbling water. Many people realize that, but they still have a lot of faith and commitment to the teachings. They like to do something that's more active, because that enables them to put their Dharma understanding and their faith and commitment into daily practice. This is very effective for them. They prefer to do things this way. Young people especially have a lot of energy and it's nice to have service-oriented things to put their energy into and to help them mature as a human being.

It also commands some wisdom on our part. Some people go so much into service, that they get completely burnt out. Or you're so busy offering service, you have no time to meditate. You wind up getting angry at the people you're working with in offering service. At this point, I think, you have to set off your own internal burglar alarm. When you're going too much on the side of service that you're

neglecting your meditation, when you're becoming difficult to live with, agitated, angry and dissatisfied, this is really a signal of "Hold on, I need to re-align and take more time and space for myself. Do more solid meditation." At this point you need to either work it out with the other people you're working with to give you more free time, or go to your teacher and say, "Can you replace me with somebody else because my mind is completely bananas right now?" I don't think it's wise to let ourselves get burnt out. Unfortunately, sometimes we do.

I think one of my most important teachings was when I got burnt out. I learned I should not let this happen again. My teacher could have talked all he wanted about balance, balance, balance, but it wasn't until I got myself so exhausted that I couldn't move, that I actually understood that it's OK to say "No". I'm not necessarily selfish when I say "No". I have to keep myself on my feet otherwise I can't help anybody! Sometimes you have to get to that point of burnout to learn from it, and it becomes a very powerful lesson that you couldn't have learned otherwise through lots of words. You have to fall into it yourself first.

If you're the kind of person that is attracted to meditation, and that's what you really want to do and you check with your teacher and your teacher says, "Yes, go for it," then do it! No problem. Now if you want to meditate because you can't stand being around other people, you don't want to work with all these obnoxious people to offer service, then you have to think, "OK, I do need my meditation to get myself together, but I can't run away from things. I

have to put my meditation into practice.” Then you see offering service as an extension of your meditation. It’s a two-way awareness.

Also, some people fall into the extreme of doing a lot of service because they want to avoid meditation. At this point, your teacher might help you balance again. If you realize this yourself, you might ask for a little bit of help from outside to put you into a little bit more disciplined situation where you’re meditating more.

[Audience:] Is the stabilizing meditation necessarily non-conceptual?

No, it can be either. In other words, sometimes you might focus on the feeling aspect of it a lot. Other times the feeling and the conclusion you reach in your meditation are completely together. Like for instance, you’re meditating on the preciousness of human life, and you come to this strong feeling of “I want to make my life meaningful”. The words “I want to make my life meaningful” become completely mixed together with the feeling “I want to make my life meaningful”. You hold on to the whole thing. It doesn’t mean you keep reciting those words to yourself, but you hold on to that whole thing. You’re not sitting there thinking and saying words. Whatever conclusion you have (and a conclusion can be a concept), you hold on to that single-pointedly. If your feeling starts to fade, if the intensity of that conclusion blurs, then you go back to more thinking and analysis to re-invigorate it.

[Audience:] What does it mean to say that we wouldn't recognize Shakyamuni Buddha if we encountered him?

The form of the Buddha's mind appearing as Shakyamuni Buddha, was a very special form. It's called the supreme nirmanakaya, or the supreme emanation body. In order to perceive the Buddha as the emanation body, in other words, to see all the special signs and physical marks on his body, it isn't just a question of having an eye organ and an eye consciousness. We need a lot of good karma to perceive it. The things we see are very much our karmic vision. The purer our karma is, the more we can see. The more obscured our mind is, because of negativities, then the more things appear depressed, uncomfortable, and dull. If our own minds are obscured, then even if Shakyamuni Buddha came in here with a body of golden light with wheels on the palms of his hands and the other 32 signs and 80 marks, we wouldn't see them.

Just to show you how our mind works. We sit and talk about Milarepa, the great Tibetan meditator from the 11th, 12th century. He killed many people, but felt tremendous regret about it. He went and studied with Marpa and put up with all the hardship. Milarepa went on into a cave to meditate and he was so dedicated to his practice that when there was no food around, he just ate nettles. It was freezing cold, but he meditated and he attained enlightenment. We sit and say, "Wow, Milarepa is so wonderful!" But if Milarepa were to walk in this door, we would probably tell him to get out because he was dirty, had

matted hair, didn't have shoes, was green (from eating the nettles) and had bad breath—didn't brush his teeth. People even complained about Jesus, especially all the parents who didn't want their kids to have long hair. If Jesus were their son, they would probably have kicked him out of the house for having long hair! This has a lot to do with our own way of thinking. We don't always perceive other people's qualities, even though they have those qualities.

[Audience:] Must spiritual teachers be ordained people?

Your teachers don't have to be monks and nuns. They can also be lay people. There're many excellent lay teachers.

Learning from every person & situation we encounter

[Audience: inaudible]

This is part of developing a more flexible mind, where we tune in to all the circumstances that life presents us. We can learn something from every person we encounter, from every situation we experience.

I remember when I came back from my first meditation course. I was completely glowing: "The Dharma's so wonderful, and I'm really going to try and practice it!" One day I stopped somewhere in town to get some doughnuts at a bakery. When I was going back to the car, there was one homeless person leaning up against the wall looking spaced out. I

thought, “I’m going to be this incredible bodhisattva and give him a doughnut.” I took one of my prized doughnuts out and I gave it to him thinking, “Look how I’m putting the teachings into practice.” He stood there and held the doughnut. He just crumbled it in his hands, and it fell all over the parking lot. This doughnut that I had just paid good money for was now crumbs on the floor. He didn’t think twice about this! This was an incredible lesson for me—I mean I haven’t forgotten it sixteen years later! This was an incredible thing to learn from this person—about my own expectations, about what does it mean to help somebody. I think many times there’re many situations in life that can be like this for us.

Creating the cause to meet Maitreya Buddha

[Audience: inaudible]

Well, if we were alive at the time of the Buddha, we probably wouldn’t still be hanging around doing what we are doing now. The disciples at the time of the Buddha ... [Audience speaks.] We have our limitations, but we have accomplished something. If you read the sutras, you’ll see that the disciples at the time of the Buddha were gaining realizations right, left and center! They had incredible accumulations of positive karma from previous lives. Take the case of the Buddha’s first five disciples. They swore at him saying they were not going to talk to him when he first came up to teach, but somehow his whole presence magnetized them. He gave this teaching and at the end, they were all well along the path. One of them

even gained realizations. There're all these teachings in the scriptures about people getting very quick realizations. This is because they've done a lot of work beforehand. And so probably, if we were born at the time of the Buddha, we would have been that kind of person and not hanging around now. Maybe at the time of Shakyamuni Buddha, when he was there in India, we were born in some other universe in some other life form. Or we could have been a cow on the road as the Buddha walked by, and our mind stream got blessed by us being a cow and seeing the Buddha. This may have become elaborated on through many lifetimes so here we are now.

They say Maitreya Buddha is going to be the next wheel-turning Buddha. In other words, the next Enlightened Being who is going to give the teachings and turn the wheel of the Dharma after this present age. What we can do now is to create the cause so that we can be born as Maitreya's students and gain quick realizations at that time.

We'll stop here. Let's do a little bit of digestion meditation now. Let everything sink in. Try and remember the points so that you can hold on to them and continue to contemplate them later on.

CHAPTER 6 Precious Human Life

Having properly relied on a spiritual master, the stages for training our mind

So, we've finished the topic of "How to relate to a Spiritual Master." Or should we put it this way—we've just begun the topic [laughter], and we're still contemplating and thinking about it. And we're entering now into the second big headline in this section: '*Having relied on a spiritual master, the stages for training our mind.*' It has two basic subdivisions:

1. Being persuaded to take advantage of our precious human life.
2. How to take advantage of our precious human life.

Being Persuaded to Take Advantage of Our Precious Human Life

In the first one of '*being persuaded to take advantage of our precious human life,*' we have to first of all recognize what a precious human life is, then talk about what its purpose is, what it can be used for, how it can be meaningful, and third of all, to check up whether it's easy or difficult to get it again; in other

words, whether it is a rare opportunity or whether it is easy to come by again.

We'll start from the beginning—trying to recognize what a precious human life is. The standard way of teaching this is to talk about two main things:

- The eight freedoms
- The ten richnesses, or endowments

The eight freedoms are talking about the eight states that we are free from being, and the ten richnesses or endowments are ten qualities that we have to check up if we have. As we're going through this list of eighteen, we should think about it in terms of our own life, and see if we have all eighteen or don't we have all eighteen? How do we get some of them? What can they be used for? And so on.

Now remember a few lessons ago, I told you not to expect symmetry in the categories made in the outline. Well here, we have a perfect example. We have eight freedoms and ten richnesses. We're going to go through the eight freedoms first and you'll be fine. But when we get to the ten richnesses, you'll be asking, "Oh! Why are these here? They're the same as the eight freedoms, except they're just the opposites." Except not all of them are! [Laughter.] So again, don't expect it to be the Western way of making an outline. There are going to be some points that will overlap and there's going to be some repetition. But it's also a matter of looking at things from different perspectives because when we're looking at a freedom, we're seeing that we're free from a bad state. Whereas, when we're looking at a

richness, we're seeing that we have a good state. So it's two different ways of coming to the same thing.

Potential difficulties in studying the eight freedoms and ten richnesses

Now, having taught this before, I know some of the difficulties that people might have with it, and so I think it's important to address them at this point.

The notion of rebirth

One of the difficulties is that it talks about how we're free of being reborn as an animal or as a hell being and things like that, and we go, "Huh? What are you talking about? I thought there was only this life?" This was why I gave that talk about *karma, rebirth and cyclic existence and how the mind goes from life to life*, because this is a topic that is assumed in the Tibetan tradition since everybody grows up believing in rebirth. So we've talked about that already. For the new people, there are some chapters in *Open Heart Clear Mind* that talks about rebirth, karma, and cyclic existence. You might want to read that and begin to think about it.

Sometimes, in discussing the perfect human life, the mind gets a little rebellious and tough because we're not completely sure that we believe in rebirth. We're not even completely sure if human beings can be reborn as other kinds of living beings. So this is often one sticky point for Westerners. It might be a sticky point for some of you; if it is, join the club! But also go back and either listen to the tape of the talk on

rebirth or do the reading in *Open Heart Clear Mind*. Recognize that it is going to take you some time to gather conviction about the existence of past and future lives and to gather some feeling about how our mind can be born in many different kinds of bodies.

One of the big hindrances to thinking that we may have had other lives is we have such a solid view of who we are now; we feel so settled into this body, so attached to this body, that really, if we think about it, it's hard to imagine being a baby! Isn't it? Can you imagine being a baby? Can you imagine being this big and not being able to walk? And peeing in your pants! We can't even imagine that! We're so concretized in this body, can you imagine being an old person, unable to get up and walk around? We can't even imagine that! That's just symptomatic of how concrete we've made our identity right now. We can see that that concretization is really a misrepresentation of who we are, because within the continuum of this human body, it's been quite different going from a baby to an old person.

If you think like this, it begins to get you in a mood to think that you're capable of living in different kinds of bodies with different abilities. So that's one sticky point in this meditation.

Getting proud

The second sticky point is the purpose of this meditation is not to make us proud. We're not sitting here listing all our good qualities and good fortune in order to come to a conclusion that we're the best people in this world, that we're the superior people,

quite magnificent compared to all the other slob. That's not the purpose of this meditation. We have enough pride already. We don't need to study Dharma to become more proud. If you listen with a certain kind of ear, you're going to hear this meditation in the sense of, "Oh, this meditation is really sounding very discriminatory, like we're putting ourselves up and putting others down." That's not the way the Buddha meant this teaching to be; that's the way that mindset is listening to this teaching. So, beware of that, because the whole purpose of this meditation is for us to recognize our good qualities and opportunities and what we have going for us, and by recognizing these things, we feel very joyful and we come up with some determination to use these things wisely.

Now, here's a big difference. We can look at a set of good qualities and our afflicted mind can look at those good qualities and get very proud. And that's why we think this meditation is encouraging us to be proud and condescending towards other people. This is not true, because we can also look at these same qualities and say, "Wow! This is fantastic! I really rejoice at these qualities." So you see, it's two different reactions to the same subject matter. When we're looking at good qualities, we can react with pride, or we can react with a sense of joy combined with a determination to use our opportunity in a wise way. It's this latter way that we're aiming at in listening to these teachings here. Like I said, we have enough pride already and the Buddha is not teaching us to be more proud. Nor is the Buddha teaching us to put other people down. In fact, it's the exact opposite. Criticizing other people, putting other people down is

a very negative state of mind.

Now, I find—I think it's related to our American culture—this is just my guess, maybe you people can give some feedback. We have this notion of equality, that everything's completely equal, but the thing is, we're not completely sure what equality means. We have to make a distinction here. In one way, everybody's equal. Even in terms of the American constitution, everybody's equal and everybody gets the same freedom and the same responsibilities as a citizen. But everybody isn't equal in the sense that Steve cannot do Laura's job and Laura cannot do Steve's job, because they've been trained differently! So, they're unequal in that respect.

So we have to be clear that by pointing out distinctions amongst people or amongst groups or even amongst religions, it doesn't mean we're criticizing one person or group or religion or that we're placing them on different levels! It simply means things are different in relative ways. Things have different characteristics. Chili peppers and apples are the same in being food, but if you carry this thing of equality too far and if you say that chili peppers and apples are exactly the same and it doesn't matter which one you bake the pie with, then I'm not sure I'm going to come to your house to eat chili pepper pie!

We have to be very clear that we can use our wisdom mind to make distinctions amongst things, but that doesn't mean that we're criticizing. This is real important. An animal is different from a human being. They are both equal in being sentient beings, wanting happiness and not wanting to suffer, but an animal

can't drive a car! And a human being can't pull a cart! Not those big, heavy ones anyway. Are we communicating here?

If we don't understand this, then as we go through and I'm pointing out the distinctions between human beings and other forms of life or between human beings with certain qualities and other human beings, you may think we're getting a little bit proud and critical and putting some people up and other people down. But that's not the case. We're just making relative distinctions about relative reality and then trying to develop a constructive way of viewing those distinctions. So as we go through the material, if you have difficulty with it, please let me know. We'll have questions at the end, and then if somehow this still isn't clear, we can go over some of it.

Having prepared you for all the reasons why you're not going to understand the subject [laughter], now we can go on, and you probably will understand it.

Purpose of meditating on precious human life

As I said, the purpose of meditating on our precious human life is to make us aware of the opportunities and good qualities that we have going for us. Most of us spend our lives not recognizing all the things we have going for us, and only looking at what isn't going for us. We might have so many wonderful things going for us but we get in a bad mood because we missed the bus in the morning! And that bad mood just spoils the whole day! We don't bother to think about the fact that we had breakfast, that we have a nice family,

that we have nice colleagues. We let one small thing completely bum us out. Do you find this in your life? Isn't this the way we are? This meditation is to help us rebalance how we're looking at our life. By noticing all the good things, it makes us realize that we may have some difficulties, but compared to what we have going for us, our difficulties really aren't that serious.

THE EIGHT FREEDOMS

So now, we'll talk about the eight freedoms. Four are freedoms from non-human states where there's no chance to practice the Dharma, and four are freedoms from human states where there's no chance to practice Dharma. Here, we're looking at the ability to practice Dharma as a very beneficial thing, a good thing. We are making that discrimination.

A. The four non-human states with no chance for Dharma study

1. Life forms experiencing continual pain and fear

The first is that we are free from life forms experiencing continual pain and fear; this is a polite way to say freedom from being born in the hell realms. Some people (I, for instance) prefer the polite way because for me, the word 'hell' or the word 'sin'—these are words that I just don't like because I have too much overlay from previous time. So don't let your previous overlay filter too much how you're looking at this. All we're talking about here is that it's possible for our mind streams to be born in different

life forms. Why? Because the life form we take, the body we take and the kind of life we live is a conditioned phenomena—it's conditioned by our own actions, it's dependent on causes—our previous actions. The body we receive in the future correlates very much with certain mental attitudes we had in the past, it's almost as if our body, or the realm that we are born into, is a manifestation of different mental states.

Think about a time in your life when you were very depressed, hostile and angry, or very fearful and paranoid. Remember what it was like to be in that mind state? Remember how painful that was? Now imagine that mental state appearing in a physical form, that mental state just getting bigger and bigger until it appears as your environment and your physical form. Now that is a being who has been born into a life form experiencing continual pain and fear. So when we talk about the hell realm, this is what the hell realm is. It's that mental state, so strong, so intense, that it creates your environment. And you can see even in this life, without even changing bodies, when you're in that mental state. Even when someone says, "Hello, how are you?" and smiles at you, you think they're trying to harm you. That's how people go insane, because their projection on the external environment gets so strong that it becomes their whole experience.

So, we're free from having that kind of life form. If it's too difficult for you to think of having a body of a being in the hell realm, then just think of having a human body that's in continuous pain. Imagine having a very severe disease whereby your joints and your

back and everything are aching all the time and you have no respite from that and together with that, you have incredible excruciating mental pain, so that your whole experience from morning to night is pain. Not one single split second of a break! Now, with that kind of physical and mental state, are you going to be able to practice the Dharma? Difficult, huh? I mean, we just get a stomachache and we can't come to teachings, we can't meditate. It is difficult enough to practice with a human body that's in pain, let alone when we're born into a life form, in a whole environment, that's like that.

It's something to rejoice at, that at this moment, we're not born like that. If you think about it, it's incredible fortune. Because as we develop an understanding of the whole Buddhist view of the cosmos and past and future lives, then we will understand that actually, many times in the past, we have been born in that kind of body and that kind of environment. Not once, but many times! We've done everything in cyclic existence! So all those times when we were born in that incredible painful state, there was no opportunity to practice. You're just sitting there screaming and crying all the time, no ability to do anything! So, the fact that we're free from all of that right now is really a cause for rejoicing, it's an incredible blessing!

It's far out, huh? It's something to appreciate because we've been born that way in the past and it's possible to be born that way in the future, but we have a great opportunity now, being free of that kind of pain.

Is this giving anybody difficulty?

[Audience: inaudible]

[Laughter.] I understand and sympathize with your difficulties. If it's too hard to imagine that kind of life form, just imagine a human body and a human mind experiencing that kind of intense suffering. And then pull yourself out of it, and say, "Well, I'm not in that state. Isn't that great?" Because we all know it's only when you get sick that you realize how much you've taken being well for granted. And how we don't even appreciate being well until we get sick and then we can't move? So this is kind of like that. It's saying we don't have to get sick to appreciate we're well. Let's just imagine what it's like and know that we aren't like that now, and to appreciate it.

2. Life forms experiencing continual frustration and clinging

The second life form that we're free of—now again, try to see this life form as a manifestation of the mind—is life forms that experience continual frustration and clinging. So, imagine a time in your life, when you felt tremendously insecure and you just clung on to whatever was around you, whatever person or object or situation in your life, you just clung. Or, imagine when you were really obsessed about something, really greedy about something, where you can't get your mind off something, completely stuck on something and how frustrating that was because you can't get what you want? You never feel secure enough, you never have enough of this, it never works out quite right, so you're clinging, you're obsessed,

you're trying so hard and you can't ever find satisfaction. Can you remember a time in your life when you were in that mental state? No ... not you people! [Laughter.]

Now, imagine that mental state appearing as your body and your environment so that your whole life, not just a period of your life but your whole life, from the time you're born to the time you die, is just clutching and clinging and frustration and running from one thing to the next trying to get something that's going to make you happy ...

[Teachings lost due to change of tape]

3. Animals

... Can they reflect on their positive and negative actions and make choices in their behavior? It's difficult! So if we're born as an animal, the mind is in a very limited state. And this is a reality. We're not criticizing animals. I'm all for animals' rights also. But it's a reality. There is a difference between the physical and mental states of an animal and a human being. As an animal, one does have more limitations. If we're born as an animal, it's very difficult to do any spiritual practice, it's very difficult to observe the law of cause and effect and make preparation for future lives and purify past lives' karma. So it's an incredible fortune we have that we are not born that way right now, in this lifetime. If you try to put yourself in that situation and come back to where you are now, it's like, "Oh wow! Being a human being isn't so bad! We do have quite a bit going for us! We do have quite a

lot of freedom and a lot of capability.” Can you appreciate that?

4. Celestial beings

And the fourth one is that we are free of being a celestial being. Being a celestial being is like being born in Beverly Hills except you don't have to pay taxes and there is no crime. It's better than Beverly Hills actually. It's being born into a realm where there is just complete pleasure all the time. It's like ten-star hotel deluxe! Everything you could possibly want in terms of food, music, sunshine, sports, sex, perfume, art—whatever it is you like, it's there in abundance. You don't even have to look for it—it's there! And you just enjoy it all the time! Maybe that one you want to believe exists! [Laughter.]

Now imagine just even being a human being that is so pampered, completely spoiled! Everything you want, you get. Or imagine a time in your life when you were just so filled with attachment, so filled with sense pleasure delight. When you were in that state, did you practice the Dharma? Too busy eating, drinking and making merry, who wants the Dharma then? This is the disadvantage of being born a celestial being; it's that you just have too much sense pleasure. There're no problems, so you think, “Well, no problems, everything is great! I don't need to take care of karma; I don't need to create good karma. I'm enjoying this!”

And so you go through your whole life enjoying and enjoying and when you die, what happens then? As Serkong Rinpoche said, once you get to the top of

the Eiffel tower, there's only one way to go. Once you get born in the celestial realms, after you've consumed that karma, there's only one way to go! You're born into a life of a lot more misery! And you're born there without having made any preparation whatsoever. Because you spent your whole life just enjoying the fantastic Disney World life!

So it's really something to rejoice about, that we're free from being reborn in that circumstance, because if our mind is really serious about attaining enlightenment, situations of extreme pleasure are just as disadvantageous as situations of extreme pain. In our ordinary state of mind, we can't cope with too much of either. We get totally overwhelmed.

B. The four human situations with no chance for Dharma study

Now, it's getting easier. Now we're going to talk about the four kinds of human situations that we have not been born into. Again, I need to remind you that I'm not criticizing those people who have been born in those situations. The whole purpose is just to make us see our fortune in our specific life.

1. Barbarian among uncivilized savages or in a country where religion was outlawed.

The first is that we have not been born a barbarian in an uncivilized place or in a country where religion is outlawed. Again, when you are meditating on this, put yourself in the situation of somebody who's been born

in a very uncivilized place, let's say a place where they do human sacrifice. Those societies have existed before, and they still exist. Now let's say you're born in a place where there's human sacrifice, or even animal sacrifice. If you're born in such a society, it's going to be difficult to practice the Dharma because there are not going to be any teachers around and also, through the acculturation process, you're going to come to hold those kinds of views. And you're going to engage in animal sacrifice or human sacrifice. It's difficult to put the mind in a virtuous state when you're born into that kind of place.

Or if you're born in a country where religion is outlawed—imagine being born in a communist country. This was what it was like in Tibet until they loosened it up slightly. First of all, they went to the monasteries and completely defrocked everybody. They made monks and nuns have sex in public, they made them go collect feces and bring them back, and if they didn't collect enough feces, then, they would beat them. This is true. I've heard stories from people and these have been their experience. If they were caught even moving their mouths saying prayers, they were beaten. Imagine being born in a place where religion was outlawed like that. Would it be difficult or easy to practice the Dharma? Could you have teachings? Could you do practice? Could you learn? Would you feel safe and secure? Very difficult!

So here, we're making a distinction—we're very fortunate to be born in a country where there is religious freedom. That doesn't mean that everybody who's born in a country where there is no religious freedom is a bad person. It doesn't mean that

everybody who's born in an uncivilized place is a bad person. It just means that in those situations, there is no freedom to do Dharma practice because you don't have the external conditions around for you to do so.

This is very effective to think about. Imagine being born in China during the period of the cultural revolution, or being born in the Soviet Union at the time of Stalin. Could we practice religion then? Could we make our mind virtuous? Could we get teachings? Could we meditate? We'd probably be out in some camp in Siberia digging ditches! It's important to think about this because many human beings are experiencing that. We might have experienced that kind of situation in a previous life. We're very fortunate now not to be experiencing that. We have a lot of freedom, a lot of capability.

2. Where Buddha's teachings are unavailable, where a Buddha hasn't appeared and taught

We're also free from being born in a place where the Buddha's teachings are unavailable and where a Buddha hasn't appeared and taught. There are many places in this universe which have life. In other planets, other societies, the people haven't had the fortune of having a Buddha come and teach the Dharma. If the Buddha hasn't appeared and explained the whole path to enlightenment to us, then there's no opportunity to practice it. Again, this is something to really appreciate, that we're born in a place where the Buddha has appeared and given teachings and done that whole explanation because countless times before, we've been born in places where we haven't

had that opportunity. If the doctrine doesn't exist and there are no teachers there, if the Buddha has not appeared to explain all the methods, to explain how to develop the altruistic intention, or to explain how to decrease your anger, or to explain how to decrease your attachment. If there are no teachings existing in that place, then again, it's difficult to practice. So again, we've been very fortunate in our life to be born in a situation where the Buddha has appeared on this earth and has given teachings, and that those teachings still exist.

3. Mentally retarded, deaf, dumb, blind

We're free from being born mentally retarded, deaf, dumb and blind. Now again I have to repeat that this is not criticizing people who are mentally retarded, deaf, dumb and blind. It's just saying that there is a difference between being able to see and not being able to see. And having full use of your brain and not having full use of your brain. There's a difference. There's a distinction. And, if we have full use of our sense faculties, we have a lot more ability to practice the Dharma than if we don't. If we're born retarded, even if we come to teachings, we are not going to be interested. We can't understand it. If we're born deaf, it's going to be difficult to hear the teachings. If we're born blind, it's going to be difficult to read the scriptures.

I've wondered—and I want to talk about this with some of my teachers—because it seems to me now, in our present century, the people who have these hindrances are actually less hindered than in the past.

We have a lot more things that can enable people who have these disabilities to really live the same kind of life as other people. But still, if we had to choose to be blind or not blind, we would choose to be not blind. So, it's really something to appreciate in our life that we can see and hear, and that we have use of our mental faculties, we aren't retarded. Because so easily we could have been! When we were babies, we were always crawling around near the edge of the bed, or something like that. So easily we could have just fallen off and have a head injury! So easily, when we were born, we could have had the umbilical cord wrapped around our neck and been deprived of oxygen and suffer from retardation as a result of that. So we're free from those disadvantageous states. It's something to feel great happiness about and make a determination to use our abilities in a very constructive way.

4. Having instinctive wrong views

And then lastly, we're free from having instinctive wrong views. An example of somebody who has instinctive wrong views would be somebody who's extremely opinionated and extremely stubborn and who holds very tenaciously to very wrong views. For example, let's say somebody holds the view very tenaciously that it's impossible to become a Buddha. "Absolutely, totally impossible! There's no such thing as enlightenment! Human beings are inherently evil, they're inherently sinful, they're inherently selfish! You can't overcome that human nature so don't even try!" Now, so easily we could have had that kind of

views. When I look back at what I thought, the kind of views I had when I was growing up, I had incredible wrong views! We could have been born as—and maybe even in some earlier lives, we were—somebody with incredibly wrong ethical views, saying that it's OK to kill, it's OK to lie, it's OK to steal, it's OK to sleep around. We could have had incredibly stubborn and opinionated wrong views that completely overwhelm our mind and make it extremely difficult for any thoughts of kindness, compassion, enlightenment, purification. These things can't enter that kind of mind because that person doesn't have the interest.

So we're free from having such stubborn wrong views entrenched in our mind. Again, when you're meditating on all these things, really put yourself in the situation of those beings, and feel what it feels like to have those mental and physical states and ask yourself, "Can I practice the Dharma then? Can I transform my mind? Can I understand teachings? Can I develop altruism in that mental and physical state?" And then, this feeling of joy comes because we see that we're not in those states, we have so much freedom and opportunity with us right now.

Questions and answers

Let me pause here for a minute so that anybody who's feeling incredibly uncomfortable can ask some questions. If there's something that's bothering you so far, please ask.

[Audience:] If the Buddha has infinite wisdom, why

wouldn't he appear in a place where teachings were unavailable?

Because the beings in those places don't have the karma to receive the teachings. For example, the sun shines equally everywhere. But if a pot is turned upside down, no light can go inside. So a Buddha, from his or her side, wants to help other beings equally and radiates out. But if those people don't have the karma, there's no way the Buddha can manifest in those places to give teachings.

[Audience:] Aren't we disadvantaged in our attachment to our senses? So if we didn't have any senses, wouldn't it be an advantage?

The problem is in the attachment to the sense, not in the sense! Our sense of sight, we can use it for Dharma practice, or we can use it to create a cause of pain. So, it's not the sense of sight in itself, it's the attachment to beautiful things that's the difficulty! I don't think we would all go home and blind ourselves tonight so that we don't get attached to beautiful things. Or make ourselves deaf so that we don't get attached to beautiful sounds. Because it's clear that our senses can be used for very constructive things as well. We can use our hearing faculty to listen to teachings and that's very important because we learn so much through hearing. Similarly, we learn so much through seeing and reading. It is a disadvantage if we don't have access to information in those forms.

[Audience:] I have some difficulty in believing in the

different realms. Also, the presentation seems to be suggesting that it's more fortunate to be a Buddhist than to be anybody else.

In terms of the belief in other life forms, that is a difficult thing and more so because we're so entrenched with the concept of who we are. But if you can just start out by sitting with you dog or cat or whatever kind of pet and think, "Is that a living being? Does it have a consciousness? Is it thinking? Is it feeling? Does it have some similarities with me? Would it be possible for me to be born in that body? And for that consciousness to be born in a human body?" Just try and think about it a little bit and get some feeling just even about animals. There are different capabilities of consciousness. There are even some human beings who have less mental capabilities than animals, so if it's hard for you to imagine being born in an animal body, imagine being born as a human being with that kind of mental capability.

I said when I was beginning this whole Lamrim course that I'm teaching according to the traditional outline. I know it's a difficult presentation for Westerners and I'm trying to teach it very much with that in mind and to give you some of the background information and some of the tips on how I handled it. But it's the kind of thing, where for some people, rebirth is not a problem, while for others, for years and decades, it remains a problem. It just depends on the individual. So it's the kind of situations where you have to be a little spacious and gentle with your mind. There're no screws on it, "You *have* to believe in it!" But think about it, try it on. If it explains things so that

it makes sense, then, “Well, maybe yeah, it could be like this!” And if it can be used to explain certain things in your life, then, “Well, yeah, maybe that could be due to previous lives.”

In regards to the impression you have that the presentation is such that it seems so great to be born a Buddhist You see, that’s why I prefaced this with the explanation that we’re not trying to put some people up and other people down. Buddhism is very spacious in the sense that it says that it is very good there are many religions because everybody has different ways of thinking. Everybody has different things that meet their needs. Now, it could be that as you come to understand Buddhism very well, there might be certain things in it that you appreciate very deeply. Maybe you can find those same things in other religions, maybe you can’t—because we don’t know everything about other religions. But at least you can see that these things exist in Buddhism and that these things meet your needs and that feels good, and you feel rejoiceful about that.

And sometimes, you may look at the popular way that some other religions are taught, and see that some of these elements are missing. Now, that’s not to say that these other religions don’t have those elements. It’s just saying that the popularized version If you take any religion that’s fundamentalist—I don’t care what religion it is; even fundamentalist Buddhist—it’s going to lack many of these elements that we tend to treasure so much about these teachings. Now, that is just reflecting on that fundamentalist dogma. It’s not reflecting on the people who believe it, it’s not reflecting on the people who practice it—on the

individuals, on the saints in those religions. It's just saying that if we were born in that environment and we were educated in that way, we would probably think like that. Do we want to be born as a fundamentalist anything? I don't think so!

So it's just saying that there are elements in Buddhism that are really precious and I'm glad I met this religion and I'm glad I have the mental space to appreciate these things. Because with a change in circumstance, I could have been born in a different place and raised in a completely different way and grown up with a mind like this (fundamentalist)! Very possible! I mean, our minds can be so narrow! That's not something that is beyond us. So, it's just rejoicing that we're not like that.

I look at myself and I think of all the different environments I could have been brought up in. I know that I'm very easily influenced by the environment. And if I were brought up in a certain environment, I would probably think like that. And I'm sure glad I wasn't brought up that way.

[Audience:] So, if you're born as a worm, how do you stop being a worm? How do you progress?

Well, this is one of the disadvantages of being a worm! Now, it is possible that as a worm, you can get out. We all as human beings, we've created some positive actions and we've created some negative actions. Let's say at the time of death, one of the negative actions takes foremost precedence and throws us into a worm body. That positive imprint is still there, even though the worm karma is manifesting

right now. The worm karma can finish, the positive karma can ripen and then you can be reborn as human being again. That's possible. A human is seen as the most advantageous state for spiritual development. A worm can be born as a human being by virtue of their past good karma.

Also, animals can create good karma in this lifetime by hearing mantras, by contacting holy objects etc. So you have all the Tibetans who take their sheep on their circumambulations—if you ever take a walk with me, you're always saying mantras to the cats and dogs on the streets—and so like that, they can come into contact with something that can put some good imprints in their mind and that's why you should all say lots of mantras to your animals and your pets and say your prayers out loud so they hear them. And that puts good imprints in them so they can come up, to a higher rebirth.

This is actually one of the reasons why we think about this. It is hard, once you're an animal, to get out of it. You *can* get out of it, either by some good imprint while you're an animal or by some previous good karma but it's definitely very hard. So if we understand this, it makes us appreciate our present circumstance much more so that we use it wisely!

It's like, once you're thrown in some prison in Cambodia, it's hard to get out. So, before you're in the prison in Cambodia, if you think about how wonderful it is to be free, then, you're going to make sure you're not going to do anything dumb that's going to throw you into prison. Because it's going to be hard to get out! So that's the way we're supposed to think. Again, it makes us really appreciate our

present circumstance!

[Audience: inaudible]

It's true that different Buddhist traditions do place more or less emphasis on the six realms of existence. The Tibetans have you think about it as a way of making you appreciate your present circumstance and making preparations so that you don't wind up being somewhere you don't want to be. Other Buddhist traditions don't approach the teaching in the same way.

[Audience:] Does our mind create our environment or does our body create our mental state?

They both happen. Because our mind in the sense of the karma we create, creates the environment in which we're born into. In terms of our own mental projections, our own way of viewing things, it creates our environment. Also, our body that we're born into creates our mental states because when you're born with certain kinds of nervous systems, you have certain perceptual capacities and when you're born with other kinds of nervous systems, you have other kinds of perceptual and intellectual capacities.

[Audience: inaudible]

I'm not going to say what your ego wants to hear! Instead of me giving you an answer, let's check up using logic and let's think about it. The cause of being born as a human being is first of all, keeping ethical

conduct, secondly, practicing the six far reaching attitudes and third of all, making dedication prayers so that the karma ripens in that way. We need these three causes. Do these sound like reasonable causes to be born as a human being? There is continuity between ethics and the six far-reaching attitudes, and making prayers for that good karma to ripen in a human body—you can see the relationship between those causes and having a good life, where you can practice and work on your spiritual path. Now, let's just check up whether it's easy to create those causes or not.

Let's take the first cause: ethics. In this world, is it easy to keep ethical behavior? In the course of one day, do people create more positive actions or more negative actions? So we just examine, we check up. Also look into your own experience, you take one day in your life, did you have more thoughts of anger or did you have more thoughts of patience? In the course of one day, when the opportunity came to lie to one's advantage, do most people lie or do they refrain from lying? What do most people do? When most people are faced with the situation where they could take something and not get caught, do they take it? Or do they not take it? When most people are confronted with harm and insults, do most people yell and scream and blame and get angry and insult and retaliate? Or do most people forgive and have patience?

So we just check up if it's easy to keep ethical conduct or not? We look at our own life or we look at the society around us. How many people keep real serious meticulous ethical conduct? And so in this way, we just examine whether it's easy or difficult to get ourselves a human rebirth.

Do most people purify their negative imprints? When they create negative karma, how many do take the effort to purify? How many of you who've heard teachings on purification do purification every night?

I'm not telling you the answer, I'm just giving you some tools to think about it. I do have a quote from His Holiness. He says, "Even now, when we have the protection of our Dharma practice, the three afflictions still dominate us." You think this is true? So is it easy to be born as a human being?

[Audience: inaudible]

[Laughter.] You see, that's when we come to see that we did do a lot of good in the past, that we did do something quite extraordinary and remarkable in the past to have the opportunity to be here now! It's almost miraculous! Because so many things could have gone wrong along the way.

Also, our Earth is just one small little atom in the universe. So, from the Buddhist perspective, there are lots of other life forms in the universe. I mean, you can see the extent of our self-centeredness. We think Planet Earth is the most important place in the entire realm of existence. But scientifically speaking, you could go by Earth in the solar system and not even notice it. You could miss that turn real easily. [Laughter.] It's a big universe. It's really quite ego-centric to think that we are the only kind of life that exists in the entire sphere of existence. Especially when we don't know what that entire sphere of existence is, we don't know anything! And as hard as it is for us to believe in that, if you grew up in an

Afghani tent your whole life and some Westerner came and said people have landed on the moon, you would have thought they are completely nuts, “What do you know?!”

[Audience: inaudible]

You’ve brought up a very good point. But it’s very interesting. You are having difficulties with the words ‘civilized,’ ‘savage,’ and ‘barbarian.’ But you’re also giving the same standard European value to those words. Here in this context, it isn’t the European value that’s being given to those words. Being civilized in this context doesn’t mean you eat with a spoon and a fork. Those words are not being used in the European, imperialistic, proud way. I’m sorry if I didn’t explain it very well, if this didn’t come through. If we look properly, we will find that our society is actually very barbaric and uncivilized. If you look, much of the way in which this society runs is completely barbaric and uncivilized. Similarly, many people look at the Tibetans and say they’re a very backward people, and yet ... [audience speaks]. Yes, but here, we’re looking at the meaning of those words from a completely different viewpoint. ‘Civilized’ and ‘barbaric’ aren’t measured in terms of your table manners and how much money you have and how much technology you have. They’re measured in terms of human values and human kindness.

[Audience:] Are these realms of existence physical forms? And if they are physical forms, where are they?

Different teachers say different things. My own thinking is ... I mean, an animal is definitely a physical form—you can see many of them. Now I'm just giving you my own personal thought on it. I'm born a human being and I feel quite solid—this is a human body, this is a human realm, I have a human mind, this is reality. This is not a mental state. This is external 3D reality. That is my ignorant perception of my situation. Now, I have a sneaking suspicion that if I had a hellish mind, completely caught up in my own fear and paranoia and suspicion, I would probably perceive the world in a very similar way. Here I am, a hell being, with this body and this horrible stinking environment around me and this is reality.

So I wonder if you can say one realm is more real than any other realm is. Or whether one realm is a mental creation and another realm is not a mental creation. My own personal feeling is it would make more sense to say something equal about all of them. But people may have different views. I mean, the whole point is we think we're perceiving reality, don't we? This is our whole problem! I mean, where is planet Earth? We think, "It's *HERE*, this is *IT!*" Well, if you're born somewhere else, you have that same feeling, "It's *HERE*, this is *IT!*" Let's say there are beings in some other planets. And somebody says "Where's Planet Earth?" "Huh? How do you spell that?" I mean, what do you mean? Where is it? Anywhere we are, we feel it's *HERE!* This is reality. That's why people couldn't imagine the earth being round because people would fall off the bottom. Because we all think that here, where we're standing, is reality. I'm trying to get us to look at how we're

looking at the world.

Making distinctions but not judging

Last week, we started talking about precious human life and the value of having a precious human life, and we're going to continue with this subject. The purpose of contemplating this subject is to recognize the potential we have and the opportunity we have with this rebirth, so that we get inspired and invigorated to make our lives meaningful.

Like I mentioned before, the purpose of this meditation is not to make one proud. It is not to make one critical of other people. It's simply to make one happy about one's good circumstances. In the process of doing this, we had to make distinctions between different groups of sentient beings. We make distinctions between being born as an animal and being born as a human. There's nothing wrong with making distinctions in things. The difficulty that comes with distinction is when you then get prejudiced or when you get biased, or when you get judgmental. That's the difficulty. But just making distinctions between things, there's nothing wrong with that. Like we discussed last time, chili peppers and apples, they are both the same in being food, but, if you bake your pie with chili peppers instead of with apples, it's just not going to work as well. That doesn't mean chili peppers are bad and apples are superior, it just means that if you are going to bake a pie, use apples and don't put in any chili.

Similarly, I have witnessed the turmoil that is going on in the Soviet Union. I don't know about you

people, I can't speak for you, but I feel that, "Wow! I am glad I don't live there." Though this country has many problems, I feel very fortunate to live here and not in the Soviet Union. Now, in saying that, that is not saying that all Americans are good and all Soviets are bad. Do you see the difference between that and saying, "I'm happy I live here and I am glad I don't live there?" There is a difference between saying that, and saying all Americans are good and all Soviets are bad, or Americans are superior and Soviets are inferior. There is a big difference between these statements. You'll have to listen properly when we are making distinctions here. We are not talking about good and bad, and superior and inferior. The way we should be meditating on these things is applying them to our own personal life and our own personal situation. Could we practice the Dharma as well in this situation as we could in that situation? That's all it's talking about. We are not judging good and bad, inferior and superior. We are just trying to look at our own lives and ask, "If I were born in this situation, would I be able to actualize my Buddha potential as well as if I were living in that situation?" I explained this before I started last week's session, but judging by the questions, I realized that people hadn't understood it. So, I'm repeating it again with an attempt to get through, but I still welcome questions.

Also, this meditation is based on the assumption that there are other life forms; that there is reincarnation. Many people may not believe in that. Take your time. This meditation is not saying, "Thou shall believe in reincarnation!" That is not what this is saying. It isn't saying, "If you are going to be a

Buddhist, you have to believe this.” I didn’t find this anywhere in Lama Tsongkhapa’s text. Maybe our ears hear that, but that is not what Lama Tsongkhapa said.

When we listen and sticky points arise, just acknowledge, “OK, there is a sticky point, I need to think some more about this.” Or, “Something isn’t perfectly clear, I need to examine and check up some more,” but that is OK. There is nothing wrong with being confused. The problem is when you think you have it all understood. [Laughter.] When you think it’s all perfectly clear, then probably something is wrong. But, as long as you feel like you still need to grow and check up, then the wheels are churning, you haven’t gotten stagnant.

This meditation is done on the pre-supposition that it’s nice to be a Buddhist. This meditation is definitely given with the presupposition that we can learn something from Buddha’s teachings. If you personally don’t feel that there is anything Buddha’s teachings can offer you, this meditation is going to sound very, very strange to you. But if you feel that there is something that the teachings can offer you—you feel that you are happy you encountered them because it gives you a lot of possibility that you wouldn’t have if you hadn’t encountered the teachings—this meditation will make more sense.

So let’s give it another go.

The eight freedoms & how to meditate on them

Last session we talked about feeling happy because we are free of being born in eight rather inconvenient states. The way to think about this is, imagine yourself

being born in a life form that experiences a great deal of pain and fear. Then imagine being who you are now. Ask yourself which situation gives you a better opportunity to practice? Which situation gives you a better opportunity to develop your love and compassion?

Then, you go on to the next step of imagining yourself being in a life form of constant clinging and frustration and anxiety. Really put your mind into that and feel what that's like, and then come back to who you are now, "Oh, here I am. OK, I have some clinging and frustration but I'm not THAT BAD!" [Laughter.] We will see that we have a lot of potential in the body that we have now.

Similarly, imagine yourself as an animal. I was watching the news the other day and they had an armadillo. Now imagine yourself being an armadillo. What is my mind state like, if I am an armadillo? Can I practice the Dharma? Well, human beings have some advantages. That's not saying armadillos are bad. It's just that it's easier to practice the Dharma if you are a human being and we can feel happy about that.

Similarly, if we were born in the super-duper realm of deluxe sense pleasure—Hollywood without the pitfalls of Hollywood—it would be very difficult to practice the Dharma there because we would be continually distracted by all the pleasure. So being a human being gives us a nice balance and it's easier to practice.

Suppose we are human beings born in a very barbaric society, e.g. where it is believed that killing is good, that making a sacrifice to the gods by killing is good. In that kind of society, it would be difficult for

us to progress spiritually, because we'd be creating a lot of negative karma by killing many lives.

Similarly, it would be very difficult to practice if we were human beings but we were born without our sense faculties. We are fortunate to have all our senses intact. Just think, if you went blind tonight, and you couldn't see when you woke up tomorrow morning, would it be as easy to practice the Dharma as it is today? It is not saying blind people are inferior, that is not what this meditation is about. It is just saying that in my life, if I have this opportunity or that opportunity, which one gives me a better opportunity for practice? That's all it's saying.

And then, if we were born in a place where the Buddha's teachings were unavailable, or where there is no freedom of speech and no freedom of religion, it would be difficult to practice. But we are not born in that situation. So again, we have a lot of fortune.

To summarize, it's really helpful to imagine yourself in those other situations, and then just think, "What would I be thinking? How would I be acting? What would my environment avail me in terms of spiritual practice?" And then come back to where you are now and all of a sudden, it's like, "Wow, I have so much opportunity. I can do so much. I am so fortunate."

THE TEN RICHNESSES

Now we are going to go on to the ten richnesses. These are similar to the eight freedoms but it's viewing them in another way. This meditation is done to get us to see the richness in our life, that we're not

just free from the bad circumstances, but also that we actually have very good conditions.

A. The five personal factors enriching our lives

1. Born as a human

The first five richnesses are personal factors that relate to our lives. The first one is being born as a human being. Why is it good fortune to be born as a human being? Well, because human beings have a balance of happiness and suffering. Our lives aren't completely miserable, our lives aren't completely fantastic either. And that, in terms of Dharma practice, is very good because we can observe our own mind. If we have too much suffering, we forget about the Dharma and we get completely overwhelmed in "MY problems" and "what I am going to do." On the other hand, if we have too much sense pleasure and we are just completely floating along with too much happiness all the time, again, we forget about the Dharma because we forget about our own mortality, we forget about the suffering in the world, we get blinded by our own happiness. As human beings with a human body, we have this balance of happiness and suffering. This is a very good circumstance for Dharma practice—enough happiness so that life isn't too difficult, enough suffering to remind us not to get too lazy.

In addition, as human beings, we have human intelligence. Now, it is very true that sometimes human beings act worse than animals. There's no doubt about that. Animals only kill when they are

threatened, or they kill for food. Human beings kill for pleasure. So sometimes, some human beings act much worse than animals. But in general, having a human intelligence is a very positive thing. That isn't saying that everybody uses their human intelligence in a proper or constructive way. But it is saying that human intelligence has something special that other life forms don't. We can understand things. We can think about things. We can contemplate them. We can meditate.

Lama Zopa, he was so great. He had these little dogs and his dogs, I think, came to more initiations than I did. But, there is a big difference between being in a dog body and being in a human body at a teaching or an initiation. It's very fortunate to be a human being, to have that intelligence that understands what is going on, the ability to think critically and evaluate things and to set a long-reaching goal for our lives. This is something that human intelligence enables us to do, if we use our intelligence in a wise way.

2. Living in central Buddhist region

The second richness is that we live in a central Buddhist region. Now, this can have two meanings. According to the sutras, a central Buddhist region is one in which it is possible to take monastic vows. In other words, there are enough monks and nuns so that you can take monastic vows. According to tantra, a central Buddhist region is one where the Guhyasamaja tantra is taught. This is said to be the king of tantras. It has a lot of materials in it. Those are

the distinguishing factors of a central Buddhist region. It doesn't mean that the country we live in is a Buddhist one, but we do have the possibility here of contacting Sangha communities, of hearing the Guhyasamaja teachings, of hearing teachings and having a supportive community around us. So that's a great fortune. In 1975 when I met the Dharma, I looked at this factor and I said, "Oh, I don't think I have this one."

As you go through these ten richnesses, we each have to check, "Do I have this one or don't I?" We may have some and not have others. Also, see how each one enriches your life and makes it easier for you to practice.

3. Having complete and healthy sense and mental faculties

The third one is that we have complete and healthy sense and mental faculties. We can see. We can hear. Our minds are intelligent. We are not retarded; we're sane. We have all of our faculties. This is something that we so often take for granted. One summer, when I was in college, I worked at a convalescent home. I was working with people who had multiple sclerosis. Those people had a lot of difficulty moving their joints, so I would work a lot with them moving them and exercising and things like that. I used to go home and look at my hand a little and I'd wonder "How come mine moves and theirs doesn't?" It seemed to me like a complete miracle that I could move my hand.

So often in our life, we just take things like this

completely for granted. The fact that we can get out of bed every morning ... there are many people who can't get up from the bed every morning. Their bodies can't move; it's too painful to move. We take for granted the fact that we can see things and hear things. Not everybody has that opportunity. It would have been so easy for us to either be blind, or dead, or retarded, or whatever. It's so easy. So just the fact that we have all our senses intact is a very great blessing, you could say. It's a very great opportunity and this enables us to not only live our life in a more functional way but, especially in terms of the Dharma, it enables us to practice better.

If we didn't have all our senses, we'd have to use so much more time just for maintaining our life. We wouldn't have as much time for practice. We wouldn't be able to read books, or listen to teachings or think about them. We have a lot going for us, just by the fact that our body and our sense faculties are functioning well. When we remember this and stop taking these things for granted, then this incredible feeling of joy and appreciation comes in our heart.

So often, we don't notice the things that we have going for us. We just pick out the one or two small things that make us unhappy and blow them up. We spend the whole day complaining, "I stubbed my toe", and we completely forget the fact that the rest of our body is healthy. We don't use the great capability of having a healthy body to do anything positive. We just use our energy to complain that our toe hurts. This is a silly example, but we can see in each of our lives, how our mind works. We pick out the one thing, "MY STRESS, MY this and that," and then we waste all of

our human life, all of our intelligence complaining about things that are really the least important. We waste our life that way. In addition, we make ourselves and others very unhappy. But, when we do this meditation and we have a feeling for the richness we have in our life and for the things that are already going well for us, then there is this feeling of buoyancy and joy in our life. Then even if you stub your toe or you miss your bus, it doesn't really matter, because you've concentrated on all the good fortune you have.

4. Not having committed any of the five heinous actions

The fourth one is that we haven't committed any of the five heinous actions. These five heinous actions are so negative that if one does them and one doesn't purify, then at the time when one dies, one gets a direct train to the lower realms. One doesn't have to wait in line! [Laughter.] There is no delay and the train functions perfectly. This is because these karmas, these actions are so heavy. The five heinous actions are:

1. Killing an arhat
2. Killing your mother
3. Killing your father

You can see how heavy these are, why you get this immediate horrible retribution or effect from them.

4. Causing schism in the Sangha community, in

other words, dividing the community of the Buddhist followers to make people argue and fight

5. Drawing blood from the Buddha's body.

This last heinous action reminds us of the Buddha's cousin, Devadatta. If you think your relatives are bad, remember Devadatta. [Laughter.] He was always so jealous of the Buddha. He was always trying to kill him. He drew blood from the Buddha's body in some of his attempts to kill him. We haven't done any of those. You might say, "Oh, but this is stupid, who would do something like that?" Well, there are many people in this world who would! In Newsweek, they had this story last week about one woman using a certain drug to kill her mother. People do these kinds of things when their minds get completely contorted. We haven't done that and so we don't have that heavy karma to purify. We are very fortunate.

5. Having instinctive belief in things worthy of respect: the Dharma, the value of ethics, the path to enlightenment, etc

The next one is that we have instinctive belief in things that are worthy of respect. In other words, there is some feeling inside us that life has some higher meaning than making money. There is some feeling inside us that human beings have an incredible potential and that the Buddha taught something really valuable to us, about how to expose and actualize that potential. In other words, there is something in our heart that is directed towards making life meaningful.

There is something in our heart that sees that there is more to life than just the attachment to worldly pleasures. As much as we are attached to worldly pleasures, there is something in us that feels, “Hold on, there is something more.” We have some confidence in the spiritual path, some appreciation of ethic. Many people don’t have this.

In fact, as we’re going through these qualities of a precious human life, we’ll see that most people in the world, for example, lack this one. Now this is a general statement. I am not talking about everybody. I am just making a very general statement and you are welcome to question it. [Laughter.] Most people in the world are just basically concerned about being happy and living their life, having a nice family, getting enough food. And if they have spare time from that, to work at getting a nice position, being popular with their friends and having a good reputation. Wouldn’t you say that this is what most people in the world think about when they wake up in the morning? Most people in the world don’t wake up in the morning and say, “I have a day to practice the Dharma to become a Buddha.” Most people say, “Oh I have a day, let’s see how I can get some pleasure.” And although many people do have ethical values, people’s ethical values very easily get compromised. People very easily fudge on their ethical values. It is really quite rare in this world to have some distinctive respect for ethical value, some feeling that life has a higher meaning, and some confidence in that path to develop our Buddha potential. Most people don’t think about these things. So it’s nice to appreciate that we have this. This is indicative that we have this habit from past lives—if

people believe in past lives. [Laughter.] And it's something to be really appreciative of.

B. The five richnesses from society

1. Living where and when a Buddha has appeared

We have the five richnesses that come from the societal condition in which we live. The first one is that we live where and when a Buddha has appeared. In other words, a Buddha has appeared in our historical era—Shakyamuni Buddha ...

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

2. Living where and when a Buddha has taught the Dharma

3. Living where and when the Dharma still exists

... It is fortunate that there are a variety of traditions within Buddhism. Although all the Buddhist traditions center on the main basic principles, they have slightly different approaches and emphasis. I think this is really fortunate because different people have different ways of approaching a spiritual practice. People of different cultures approach things differently. People with different personality types approach things differently. The fact that there is this wide range that we can actually look at is something very fortunate. It also helps us appreciate the Buddha as a skillful teacher.

4. Living where and when there's a Sangha community following Buddha's teachings

The next point is that we live when and where there is a Sangha community following Buddha's teachings. I find this one a little bit tricky in the West because when most of the people in the West say "Sangha," they mean just anybody who comes to a Dharma center. In the strictest sense, the word "Sangha" means any particular individual, ordained or lay, who has direct realization of emptiness. That is the strictest meaning of Sangha. And when we say that we take refuge in the Sangha, it's in those particular individuals who have direct realization of emptiness that we take refuge in.

The next gradation of the meaning of "Sangha" is a community of four or more monks or nuns. In the East, when they talk about the Sangha, it's referring to an ordained monk or nun. Somehow, in the West, the word has gotten really diffused and refers broadly to anybody who is a Buddhist or thinking about being a Buddhist. But in this regard here, it's talking specifically about a Sangha community of monks and nuns. Of course, in the West, we are very lucky to have a community of laypeople around us—our supportive friends who help us and inspire us in our practice. But it's also good, I think, to appreciate the fact that there are Sangha communities of monks and nuns. I know this is a very difficult point, but leave it to me, I always stick my feet in the difficult points. So here comes another one. [Laughter.]

Value of Sangha community to society

I find that sometimes, here in the West, people don't seem to appreciate ordained beings very much. People often tend to feel, "Well, although you are ordained and I'm not, we're kind of the same. We both have the capacity to practice the Dharma, so there is no reason for you to sit in front, and no reason for you to be supported—go out and get a job! Go and get a job, earn your way, pay rent, pay for your food and make yourself useful!" Very often in the West, people have that kind of attitude towards monks and nuns. They are certainly entitled to their opinion. But I think for a society, there is some value in having a Sangha community of ordained people who don't go out and get jobs and pay rent and things like that, for a few reasons.

First of all, ordained people have dedicated their whole life to Dharma practice. That's the whole purpose of their life, so they have more time for practice. I think it's nice to appreciate people who are ordained. I'm not saying this because I am in robes—don't get me wrong. (I realize that I am becoming a little bit defensive teaching this, maybe you'll understand why.) [Laughter.] I am not saying this about myself, but just in general, that if one has more time to practice, one is going to penetrate deeper into the studies and make more progress in one's meditation. I think that it's nice to value people who have done this because they set a good example for us and because they have developed qualities that we can then learn from. So I think it is very valuable for a society, whether it is a Buddhist society or a Catholic one or others, to have groups of people who are really dedicated to the religious practice, who can afford

more time to go deeper into it than the majority of people. These people become like experts and they can help the other people in the society.

Secondly, the existence of a Sangha community always poses to society the question of the value of human life. What is the meaning of life? I think it's good that we live in societies where there are groups of religious people because just by their lifestyle, they are posing that question to us. What do we want to do with our life? What is valuable? I think when we live in a place where there is a Sangha community that's following the Buddha's teachings, that's nice, because the ordained people set an example; they pose that question to us. They know more than we do and are generally more advanced, so they can teach us. Now, don't get me wrong, this does not mean that all ordained people are wonderful. It doesn't mean that all ordained people are better than lay people. That is not the case at all.

In fact, in Asian societies, people very much have this view. The lay people think, "Only the ordained people can practice. I am a layperson; so all I do is bow down and offer money and some incense. That's my Dharma practice. I can't practice more because I am not ordained." That view is very prevalent in Asian countries. It's completely incorrect. Lay people can practice the Dharma very well. Lay people have all the abilities to practice. You should rejoice about that. You should use them.

And one thing that can inspire you to use your life well, one resource that you have along the path, are people who are ordained, or even lay people whose whole life has been dedicated to Dharma practice. In

other words, having specialists in the field is an asset to us. They are not our competitors, they are an asset. These people can help us on the path. So this is just to help us realize the resources we have on the path and the potential that we have. Like I said, lay people can practice very well, and you should put energy into practice. One thing that I especially appreciate about teaching in the West is that the lay people really want to learn and practice. Very often in Asian countries, the lay people ... like at His Holiness's teachings, the lay people come with their thermos of Tibetan tea and their cups. They have a picnic! You people aren't sitting here eating cookies while I'm teaching, and I am really glad. You are listening. You are taking notes. You're aware and you're thinking. You're questioning and you're doubting. You think about the teachings when you go home. That's fantastic! I find that lay people in the West have much more enthusiasm for Dharma practice than the lay people in many Asian countries.

5. Living where and when there are others with loving concern: patrons, teachers, so we have clothes, food, other conditions to practice

The last one, is that we live when and where there are others with loving concern. In other words, there are patrons, meaning benefactors, or sponsors of our practice. There are teachers. All these people give us the conditions in which we can practice. Your benefactors are for example, your boss, your customers—these are the people we should be very grateful to. Without them, we wouldn't have the

material sustenance to practice. We live in a time and place where we aren't starving. We aren't homeless. We have the material conditions to practice. This is a great blessing. If we don't even have the basic necessities of life, we would have to spend so much time and energy getting them, we would not have the time for Dharma practice. The fact that those things have come to us so easily is a very great fortune, because it frees us and we could use our time for practice.

Similarly we have access to teachers. This is a very, very important thing. We need people to learn from. Books can help us a great deal; we can get a lot out of books. But you can't ask a book questions and a book can't set an example for you. Having access to living teachers is very important. I've seen the situation in America change so much in the sixteen years since I first met Buddhism. When I first met Buddhism, it was very difficult to get teachings here. I had to pack up and go to India. You people don't need to. You can stay here. You get door-to-door service—the teacher comes here! This is a very great fortune because many people have to go to other places to get teachings.

Look at the history of Buddhism. How many Tibetans had to cross the Himalayas into India? How many Chinese had to go overland through Central Asia to get to India? Or people in Sri Lanka or Indonesia, riding on ships for years and years and years to be able to get teachings. People had to put so much energy into finding a teacher in the past, finding a place where the teachings were and finding the texts. When you read some of these stories of the

pilgrimages that people did from other countries to India to get the teachings and the hardships they went through, it is like “Wow!” These people were so dedicated. They were extraordinary! They were willing to undergo anything, because they really value the spiritual path, they value the Dharma.

In comparison, we have it so easy. You get in a nice, comfortable car and you drive for fifteen minutes or half an hour, and that’s it. You don’t have to worry about bandits on the road, and starving, and all those other things. Teachers come here. So we have quite a fortunate situation. That is something to think about.

HOW TO DO THE MEDITATION

You examine yourself, “Do I have these qualities?” You go through the eight freedoms, and then the ten richnesses. What value does each give to my life? If I didn’t have it, would it be easy to practice? In that way, you come to appreciate everything that you have going for you in your life. This meditation is very good for overcoming depression. When you get depressed and you think, “Oh, everything is rotten in my life! Nothing is going well and I can’t practice. My mind is berserk and this country is crazy” then sit down and do this meditation (on the precious human life). And you see that really, we have a lot going for us in terms of the practice. This is really something to rejoice and feel very happy about. So the purpose of doing that is to make the mind joyful so that we get enthusiastic about making our life meaningful.

In the text, they say that your aim when you do

this meditation is to feel, at the end, like how a beggar would feel if all of a sudden, he realized he had a jewel in his pocket. It's like you are a beggar and you're completely down and out, and then you realize, "There's a jewel in my pocket. WOW! I am so fortunate, what am I going to do?" Similarly, we may have this feeling of mental poverty. We feel as though our life is a mess, but suddenly we realize, "Wow! I have so many things going for me. This is incredible! What can I do with my life? How can I make my life meaningful?" To update the example, it's like you are a little kid in a toy store and all of a sudden, you realize you have a master card, and you can use it. "I have a master card in the toy store. Wow!" It's like the whole world opens up in front of your eyes, what you can do. And you are not going to just sit there, lounge around and play tiddly-winks; you are going to buy everything you can! So in the same way, when we see that we have so much going for us in our life, then we'll make an effort to practice the Dharma because we see that our opportunity now is quite special and quite rare, and we want to make the most of it and not just fritter it away, wasting our time on silly things that don't bring any meaning or purpose to our life.

So before going on, let me stop here and open it up for questions.

Questions and answers

[Audience:] Is the United States considered a central land?

Well, we have to check: is it possible to take ordination here? (Now here we are going according to the strict definition of a central land.) Well, it might be difficult, but it is possible, because people have taken ordination here. In other words, it is possible to get together the requisite group of Sangha to be able to give you ordination. His Holiness is coming to teach Kalachakra, it's not Guhyasamaja, but you are getting close. [Laughter.] So I'd say that it's a little bit more difficult here than, let's say, if you're living in Dharamsala, but it's definitely possible.

[Audience:] With all the different Buddhist teachings which roadmap is the roadmap?

They are all roadmaps. You have to know the central Buddhist teachings. And then you check up each tradition to see if they have them. I am saying this because in recent years, there have been many people who call themselves Buddhist but they are mixing in many other things with Buddhism, so I think that the roadmap might get changed. For example, when I was in Singapore one time, one man came from Japan, and he said he was a Buddhist. He came to the Buddhist Library. He was very controversial, and some people had told me about him. So I went there to listen. When this guy started talking about God creating the universe, I asked him, "Can you cite a scriptural source for this?" He was talking about God creating the universe and many other teachings that were not Buddhist teachings. He had mixed Christianity and Buddhism together. And so I said, "Can you give me some scriptural sources? How come none of the other

traditions say this?” There are people who do this kind of thing. We should not just blindly follow anybody. But the major, existing Buddhist traditions are all quite solid. They have different emphasis but they are all very, very good. It’s more of us having to find the tradition that’s best suited for our temperament and our personality.

[Audience:] What does “causing schism” in the Sangha mean?

Actually, technically speaking, to be a heinous action, this has to be committed at the time when a wheel turning Buddha is alive. In other words, when a founding Buddha like Shakyamuni is alive. Buddha’s cousin Devadatta committed this one too. Devadatta wanted to split the Sangha and proclaim himself as the new Guru. He drew people away from following Shakyamuni. Technically speaking, to be a heinous crime, it has to be done at the time of a founding Buddha. However, that doesn’t mean that we can be negligent in our behavior, because you can see how harmful it is to the Buddhist community to split people into factions. Now it is quite natural that people will form different groups. There is nothing wrong with that. People forming different groups and different groups having different emphasis, no problem with that. The problem is when people are judgmental and want to cause fighting and quarrelling so that they can get power, so that they can get fame and prestige. That’s the difficulty.

[Audience: inaudible]

It's true that everyone does have Buddha potential. Everyone does think about ethical things sometimes in their life. Everybody does want to be a good person at some level in their being. We can say that. That is true. So this point is not saying that other people are just unethical and everybody's mind is like concrete; they don't have any spiritual intention. It is not going to that extreme. Here we are talking about making it something that is really central in your life. Making it something that is really important to you. We can even look in our own lives and see that, perhaps this hasn't been an important thing for us our whole life. If I look back on my past, for many years I was much more interested in other things. So did I have that quality at that time?

So you see, we are talking here about levels. Everybody has it in some way. But just how many people really listen to that part of themselves? Although everybody is brought up to be ethical, the ethics is up here, in the head, but it's not in here, in the heart. The minute it becomes a little bit inconvenient to be ethical, ethics will be the first thing to go. We tell white lies because it's more convenient. We criticize people because it's easier. And many people actually think it's quite good to do that kind of action. That doesn't mean that those people have no ethical and moral quality in them. They do have, but it's overshadowed by all these other stuff. So all we're doing is saying that this time, in our lives, we do have some feeling that there is a path to enlightenment, that our life has this kind of higher meaning and greater potential.

[Audience:] In a person's spiritual practice, are there some things that are going to be easier for some individuals than for other individuals?

Yes. And I think this depends a lot on previous habits, previous karma. The kinds of things we are interested in, the kinds of things we gravitate towards, the kinds of things that come to us easily. Of course, to become a Buddha, we have to develop our capability in all of the different fields. So when they talk about the bodhisattva who excels in ethics, it doesn't mean he doesn't meditate. He does meditate. And the one who excels in meditation also practices ethics. And when they are Buddhas, they all have the same realizations. On a more conventional level, it may be that one practices his concentration through the basic practice of ethics, and another one practices his ethics through the basic field of concentration, or something like that.

As you can see amongst us, some people are so interested in emptiness from day one. For other people, it's bodhicitta that really appeals to them. So everybody has something that kind of grasps them, and we are all different in that way. But as we develop along the path, we have to develop understanding of all the different things.

[Audience:] Can you explain what it means to practice ethics?

Ethics is the wish to not harm others. It is expressed in the most basic way by abandoning the ten destructive actions. These ten destructive actions are the basic

things to abandon because generally, when people do these, they are motivated by ignorance, anger, attachment, jealousy, or other harmful attitudes. Although ethics at the highest level is the wish not to harm others, we start practicing it on a very basic level by abandoning these ten.

[Audience:] I've heard people say that when you practice tantra, you're beyond ethics. You're beyond good and bad. Is that true?

This is a very common misunderstanding about tantra. Actually, if you know anything about tantra, you'll know that the ethics are very strict in the tantric practice. They are much stricter than in the sutric practice. Now, it is true that when you are a very high-levelled yogi or yogini on the tantric practice, when you have realized bodhicitta, when you have realized emptiness, you might, on the level of external appearances, go beyond one of the five precepts. For example, the Buddha, when he was a bodhisattva in a previous life, saw that one man was going to kill 499 others, so he killed that one man—he broke one of the five precepts. But his mind was in a state of full, complete compassion for everybody when he did the action. He was following the bodhisattva precept, which is a higher level precept than the precept not to kill. The bodhisattva precept says that if you have bodhicitta and you don't commit one of the seven destructive actions of body or speech when it is of benefit to others, then you are breaking a bodhisattva precept. In other words, if you have bodhicitta and you don't lie in order to save somebody's life, you've

broken you ethical vows.

If you don't have bodhicitta, it's a different ball game, folks. We like to rationalize everything. "Oh, I killed that spider, but it's ok." We like to rationalize. But actually, it's only when you are a bodhisattva or when you have the realization of emptiness that you can do those seven of the body and speech. You are doing them with a completely different mindset than when other people do them. You always hear the story in the scripture about this tantric yogi, Tilopa, who would cook fish and eat the fish, and then make them alive again. These people are different. But it is a very common misunderstanding in the West. People think that tantric practice is so high that they can ignore the ten non-virtuous actions.

They think they can do anything they want because they are high practitioners. People don't understand that quite well and they use it as an excuse to do anything they want. When you are a regular, ordinary being, you can't use tantra as an excuse for all of your greed, ignorance and hatred. [Laughter.] When you are a high level person, you can do those same actions, but your mind is in a completely different space.

[Audience: inaudible]

It's very true, we never really know what somebody else's level of mind is. So we can never judge that person. If you see a teacher doing something, you can never say that the teacher is bad. But you can say, "I don't understand why they are doing that action." Or you may feel that the action appears harmful and you

need to ask them why. Or, “I need a teacher that sets a different example because that isn’t a good role model for me.” So we can very well do that. Now, if you look at the very high lamas, their ethical conduct is generally very impeccable. At least, this was the way it basically was in Tibet. Of course, I am sure there were also corruptions, because sentient beings are sentient beings. But generally the impression that I’ve gotten is that the ethical conduct of most of the high lamas is very, very good. The teachers that I know also have very pure ethical conduct. I selected them as my teachers because they set a very good example in terms of ethical conduct for me.

[Audience:] Can you explain what it means to be a “tulku”?

A tulku is somebody who is recognized as a reincarnation of a great master. When a great master dies, a young child would be recognized as being the continuation of that person’s mind stream. In old Tibet before 1959, if you were recognized as a tulku, you were generally put in a monastery, and this is how the leadership of the monastery was passed down. When the abbot of a monastery died, the way they passed it down was through reincarnation. They had a regent or a temporary authority until they identified the reincarnation and that person grew up. This system of identifying tulkus was very much part of a social system for passing down property in Tibet. So sometimes parents really wanted their kids recognized as a tulku, because it meant gaining respect, property and things like that.

In Tibet, if you were a tulku, you were brought up with a very special education. Certain things were expected of you and you lived according to that. There wasn't the space for you to do anything else because the societal pressure was so strong.

Then after 1959, the Tibetans came to India, this whole social system disintegrated. Some of the tulkus or monks or Geshe came to the West and many of them disrobed subsequently. Each person probably has a different reason for disrobing; we can't make a generalization. I remember one of my teachers; he was a Tibetan monk and a Geshe. He came to Italy and was working at one of the Italian Institutes for Oriental Studies. He disrobed after a while, became a layman and got married. He explained to me it was because when he came over in 1959, or 1960, people in Italy didn't know what a Buddhist was, and they didn't know what a man with a bald head walking around in a skirt was doing. He just felt he could communicate better with the people at his workplace if he were a layperson. He also felt that it was very difficult to keep all of his 254 precepts completely pure living in Italy, so he chose to disrobe. So he disrobed actually out of respect for the ordination and respect for the lineage.

Other lamas or tulkus might disrobe for completely different reasons. Some of them aren't so active in Buddhism now. Some of them are still very active in Buddhism. It's hard to make generalizations why they do what they do. But Tibet has undergone a complete societal upheaval and so there aren't the same restrictions or expectations on these people as there used to be.

[Audience:] Somebody said that Tantric teachings seem very suited for the West because it fits our lifestyle, whereas Sutric teachings were more for a monastic type of situation. What do you think he meant?

Now, it's really hard to know. I cannot interpret what somebody else meant. So what I am going to say, is in no way going to be an explanation of what that person said because I don't know what he meant. I can explain my viewpoint on the subject. In some ways, tantra is very suited for the West, in the sense that tantra talks a lot about self-image and very skillful ways of developing a positive self-image, which I think is very good for Westerners. Also, tantra involves transforming things into the path—transforming attachment into the path, transforming sensual pleasures into the path. Each of us is capable of doing that at a different level. For example, when we offer our food, we can imagine a Buddha at our heart, or if you have taken an empowerment, you can imagine yourself as the Buddha and you imagine the food as blissful wisdom nectar. So when you eat, you are not just gobbling down your pizza; you're offering wisdom nectar to the Buddha because you're imagining yourself as a Buddha figure. That's the tantric way to transform eating, which is very applicable for us.

Or when you are getting dressed, instead of thinking of making yourself look gorgeous, you are imagining yourself as a deity. You are imagining the clothes as manifestations of bliss and emptiness, and you are making these offerings to the deity. This way

of practicing can be very, very suitable for us because it gives us a way to transform normal activities and see them in the light of the tantra. How far can you go with this? Each person has to set their own boundaries. In other words, you must know the things you can legitimately transform, and the things you are really doing out of attachment but rationalizing it by saying that you are a tantric practitioner. So each person has to draw their own boundaries.

Also, the practice of tantra is not separate from the practice of sutra. It's founded on the practices of sutra. People should not think, sutra is over here and it's good for monastics, and tantra's over here, completely separate. Tantra is what you build on top of sutra. So I think it is helpful to have all of the teachings so that you have a complete world-view of what the practice is all about.

Things like offering food, offering clothes, or when you take a shower, you imagine yourself as a Buddha and the water is nectar that you're offering to the Buddha—they're very good to do. But we should also keep the basic sutric practice of the six far-reaching attitudes—generosity, ethics, patience, joyous effort, concentration and wisdom—because the whole tantric practice is founded on these six far-reaching attitudes.

Now, in terms of encouraging people to eat meat, drink and things like these; here, we have to be very clear about our own level of practice. When the principal part of your practices is aimed towards generating bodhicitta, it's very helpful to be vegetarian. The force of your practice, what you're really going for is to generate this loving kindness that cherishes others more than you cherish yourself, so

you want to avoid all harm to other beings.

Now, people whose principal practice is tantra and are far advanced on the tantric path need to have a very strong constitution when they do the very subtle meditations with the channels—the drops and the subtle energies in the body. So they eat meat to make the body and the different elements very strong. If you have bodhicitta and you are doing the tantric practice on that basis, then eating meat is quite in line with your bodhicitta. You are at that level where for the benefit of sentient beings, you need to keep your body strong, so you eat meat to do that. The whole purpose of your practice is to become enlightened for others. When you are an ordinary being and you are really attached to meat, and you say, “I am practicing tantra, so I can eat meat,” then you have to look again at your motivation and what’s going on. This is not an area where we look at what other people are doing; we should look at ourselves. Everybody is free to choose whether they want to be vegetarian.

In terms of alcohol, when you are very high in the tantric practice, people can take some alcohol because it works with the subtle energies and the bliss that you’re supposed to be developing in the meditation. So somebody who is a very, very high yogi or yogini can drink, and it’s completely in line with their precepts and with their meditation. If we are ordinary beings and we like alcohol, and we say we are practicing tantra so we need to drink alcohol, then again, we need to look at our motivation. What level of practice are we really at? We should keep the practice to the level where we are at. So this is something we each have to look inside and not look at

what other people are doing so much.

Tsog puja

[Audience: inaudible]

There is a certain puja that is called the tsog puja. It is done on the 10th and 25th of the lunar month. You have two little bowls usually, one with alcohol and one with meat. These are put on the altar together with other offerings. As you do this meditation, there is a whole process in the meditation in which you generate yourself as a Buddha. You dissolve all these things into emptiness. Then through your visualization, you imagine transforming them into very pure substances. This is really to help us get out of our ordinary view and ordinary grasping—that this is this, and that is that, and this is good and that is bad. So you take these things that ordinarily are abandoned, you transform them, and then at a certain point in the puja, they are circulated around and you dip your finger in and you take a little piece of the meat. But, at this point, if you have been doing the meditation, these things are no longer seen as alcohol and meat. They are blessed substances and you see them as nectar, the nature of bliss and emptiness.

Now, I have seen some situations where people pour huge glasses of beer out at the puja. I know some people do that, some traditions do that. In the tradition I grew up in—I am not talking about what the other traditions do—that is not done. You just take a little drop on your finger.

[Audience: inaudible]

How do you balance that? Well, again, this is why just a little bit is taken, and not a whole lot, and that once you do that, I feel you really have a responsibility to meditate well. In other words, your meditation isn't an excuse for your eating that meat, because anyway, you only get this much. But you are using that thing to help you overcome your obstacles to enlightenment. You are doing that meditation for the benefit of that animal—whose meat you've eaten—and the benefit of all sentient beings.

[Audience: inaudible]

So you are saying that even if we're vegetarian, to remember that our food is coming through other people's efforts and that other beings have lost their lives in the production of our food. So to not take it for granted.

[Audience:] I think whatever action we take, we should also think about the benefits versus the disadvantages and if the benefits outweigh the disadvantages, then, maybe we should go ahead with the action.

Yes. We always come back to this thing of whether the benefits outweigh the disadvantages. So one has to have a flexible mind in any situation.

Let's just do a little bit of digesting meditation right now.

Commitment to Lamrim teachings

I decided to do this series of teachings because I found that people had little bits of Dharma understanding from here and there; from taking a course here and there. But nobody really had a global view of how to put all the different weekend retreats together so that they made sense in a big whole. So going through the Lamrim or the gradual path is designed to give people a big overview of the whole path and the advantage of doing that is that then when you get other teachings, you'll know where to put them and you'll also know how to cultivate things in a very systematic way yourself.

For people to get benefit from this, it is important for people to come very regularly. The series is designed for people who are serious. Of course, people can come once or twice to try it out and then decide. But this series is really designed for people who are making a commitment to attend all of the teachings because it is going to take a while to explain the whole path. Just as you count on me being here on Mondays and Wednesdays, I count on you being here too, because this happens as a dependent arising. It is not just me, it is also you. And so since the course is designed for your benefit, then it is important that you come. It is not for my benefit. So, please feel a sense of personal responsibility and commitment to attend all of the sessions.

Daily meditation on the lamrim

I also want to encourage people to start a daily

practice because all the teachings that we are going through are meant for practice. If you miss the early part of the teachings, you can get the tapes. Start a regular meditation practice because through this way you can also sustain the energy that you get here and you are able to develop and you actually start following the path.

The way to structure a meditation session is to do the prayers and visualization to prepare the mind, and some breathing meditation to calm down. Then to do what we call checking or analytical meditation on the different subjects in the gradual path that we are going through. When you receive teachings on something, you take that information, and in your meditation sessions you think about it and go through the points sequentially. Then you really get a taste of the material and you start to get an experience in your heart as well.

So, try to set up a daily practice and spend like half an hour in the morning. If you don't have half an hour, spend fifteen minutes, do something! We always have time to eat, we always have time to sleep, we have plenty of time to talk on the phone, we have more time to go to the movies and discos, surely we can make some time for spiritual nourishment. So I really encourage people to try and do some practice in the morning every day. It makes a difference to your whole day if you do. You take what you hear here and you think about it. You get an experience of it, then you can come back and ask more questions and go back to think about it some more and that way everything becomes very rich and you start to get somewhere. Otherwise if we don't sit down and think

about the teachings, don't try to put them into practice, then this becomes like a university course but without the exam. So, you wind up at the end with lots of notebooks that you put on the top shelf to collect dust, which isn't the purpose of this.

Review

The preliminaries

We have prepared outlines for you so you can get a sense, like a roadmap, of where we are going. In the earlier parts, we covered:

1. The qualities of the compilers of the teaching.
2. The lineage from the Buddha down to the present day.
3. The qualities of the Lamrim teaching itself, the benefits that come from studying it, like we'll know how to put our whole practice together, we'll know step-by-step how to progress.
4. How the gradual path should be studied and taught.
5. How to select a teacher, the qualities to look for in a teacher, qualities to try and develop in ourselves as students.
6. How to listen to teachings and how to teach them.

From there, we went on to the main body of the text which was how to lead the students to enlightenment through the teachings.

How to rely on spiritual teachers as the root of the path

Here the first topic was how to rely on a spiritual mentor. Under this outline we actually covered first, all of the preparatory practices—how to set up your shrine, cleaning the room, taking refuge and making offerings, doing the seven-limb prayer, doing the request, all the different steps that are in our prayer sheet. We described the meaning of the prayers and how to actually do a meditation session. Then we went on to how to rely on a spiritual mentor. This subject is put first because it is very important to have a teacher. Just as we need teachers to teach us how to drive cars and how to cook spaghetti and how to do all the other things, definitely in a spiritual path we also need a teacher. We need some guidance and then we need to know how to take the essence of the relationship with our teacher so that we have a good relationship and benefit from it.

I recognize that not everyone here may feel that they have a teacher. The Buddha is actually a teacher to all of us. So if you don't yet feel the connection to one or more actual people as your teacher, you can consider the Buddha as your teacher, and as time goes on, you might find that you have a special feeling for certain people that you want to make a relationship with them as teacher and student. But take your time in doing that, check somebody's qualifications very well, check your relationship with them to get some confidence that you can really benefit from taking them as a teacher.

Stages for training the mind

After talking about how to rely on a teacher, we started talking about the actual stages for training our mind in the path. The first stage that we come to in training our mind is being persuaded *to take advantage of our precious human life*. First of all, do we understand what is a precious human life and to check up if we have it. Secondly, to see what its purpose and usefulness is. Thirdly, to check up its rarity and the difficulty of getting it. When we understand all these things, we will really have a sense of “Yes, I am persuaded to make use of my life. What do I have to do to actually make use of it?”

What is a perfect human life?

We covered some of the material under the precious human life previously. I’ll just review that and then continue on tonight. We have covered before, recognizing what a precious human life is and the different facets of our life that we have to see and to appreciate. So this meditation is really to help us overcome depression, to overcome taking our life for granted, to overcome the mind that concentrates on the one bad thing that we have done wrong today, and ignores the hundred good things that we have done right. This lop-sided attitude that we have: “This is wrong and that is wrong. I can’t do this and everything is a catastrophe.”

This meditation is an antidote for that because this meditation is saying “Wait a minute! Stop and see what you have going for you.” So then we have to

look. First of all, I'm a human being. That might not sound like some great, wonderful thing, but if you think of what it would be like not to be a human being, being a human being sounds kind of nice. Like when you go out jogging and you look at the dogs, you look at the cats, you look at the worms and the ducks at Green Lake. You watch all the ducks and you think what would it be like to be born as a duck in Seattle. Then you come back and say, "Oh but I am a human being". And then you really see our potential as human beings. The fact that we have this human intelligence, we have the ability to hear the teachings, understand them and put them into practice. A duck does not have that possibility; neither does a dog or cat.

Similarly, if we were born deaf or dumb or retarded or blind or some very severe handicap like that, then it would be really difficult to hear teachings or to read texts or to do some kind of practice. But we're born with all of our senses intact, we can understand the teachings and this is a very, very special thing to appreciate.

It is important every day when we wake up to just have this feeling that I am alive and I can still think and I can still move and I can practice. This is really quite a wondrous thing. Just to concentrate on feeling that and experiencing that and appreciating it. And then appreciate that we have access to the Buddha's teachings, that we are in this country, able to have teachers, teachings, Buddhist publishing houses. In many other countries in the world, it is extremely difficult to get teachings.

Alex Berzin and I are very good friends and he has

gone to some of the countries where it is difficult to get teachings and he told me about it. We sent our little book, “Glimpse of Reality” that we did together, to some of these places like Zimbabwe, Czechoslovakia, Mongolia, different places where it is really hard to get teachings. Later, we get letters back from these people that are incredible, like “Thank you so much, this is so precious”. We sent them something, and they replied with a two-page letter that says they were so appreciative to have Dharma material to read. Here we have so much Dharma materials, so many teachings that we often take it for granted. So it is helpful to recognize the opportunity we have now, instead of getting lazy about everything.

Similarly in this country, we have the religious freedom to be able to practice. Not only do we have access to the teachings, but we can also practice them. When I think of what it was like in Tibet after the Chinese takeover, where even if you were seen just moving your lips (saying mantra), you will be beaten or thrown into prison. Alex told me when he was teaching at Czechoslovakia before the fall of the Iron Curtain, at the house he taught, everyone had to come at different times. In the outside room, they set up beer and a card game and everything, and then they went into the other room to have the teachings. But they had to set it all up in case somebody, e.g. the police came.

Here, we have the religious freedom to just come and meet like this. We can go home, we can set up our shrine, sit down and meditate. I think it is incredible to have this freedom and this ability. And so to really contemplate these things so that we get a sense of

how precious our life is.

In addition to all these things, we have the material wherewithal to practice. Now I know that everyone here feels that they don't have enough money; that is natural. But, we actually do have quite enough money, I mean we are not homeless. We don't have to worry about where our next mouthful of food will come from, we have enough physical comfort, we have enough food and everything we need to practice. So it's just a question of getting on with it, and really when you stop and think about everything we have going for us, any obstacles actually seem quite minimal.

It is important to think about this so that we get a sense of optimism and a sense that we can do the practice, and we want to, because this is a special opportunity. Not all people have precious human lives. Human beings all have human lives but a precious human life is quite different, because not everybody has access to teachings and teachers. Not everybody has the material wherewithal, not everybody has their senses intact; not everybody has even the inspiration to follow the path. You talk to some people about loving-kindness and they fall asleep. Just even the fact that we have this interest in developing our spiritual qualities is a very special trait that we have, and it's something to feel pleased about and to treasure in ourselves. This is not a cause to feel proud over other people or to look down on them, but really recognizing what we have going for us. Otherwise it's like having ten thousand dollars in the bank and yet feeling like you can't go to the store to buy a jar of peanut butter because you feel poor.

That's how we sometimes feel when we concentrate on the one bad thing that went wrong today. We feel so poor that we can't get anywhere even though we have this whole precious human rebirth and all the opportunity.

As you consider these points, thinking about them one by one, you get a real sense of richness and a real sense of delight, almost a sense of wonder. They say it is like a beggar who all of a sudden found a diamond in his pocket by accident, "Wow, this is incredible! Look what I have here!" And so when we meditate deeply on this, this kind of strong experience comes in the heart.

The Importance of a Precious Human Life

From there, we go on to the next topic which is what use is our perfect human rebirth, what's the purpose of it, what's the meaning of it and what can we do with it? We have this diamond in our pocket, what can I spend it on?

There are three basic things that we can use our precious human life for:

1. Temporary goals
2. Ultimate goals
3. Making use of our life moment by moment

TEMPORARY GOALS

What we are talking about here is having a good life now but especially *preparing for death and making*

preparations for our future rebirth. I know that not everybody may have great conviction in rebirth. If you have difficulty with it, you can either listen to the previous lecture that was on rebirth, or you can read the chapter in “Open Heart, Clear Mind” about rebirth.

It is possible, with where we are now, to actually make preparation to die peacefully and then have a good rebirth where we can continue on the path. It is important to make that kind of preparation because we don't know when we are going to die. When we consider all the other life forms there are in the universe, we can look at some of them and say definitely, “I don't want to be born as that, I don't want to be a duck in Green Lake, thank you. Green Lake is nice, and ducks are nice, but I don't want to be one.”

With our present precious human life, we can use our time, our energy to purify the causes that would make us have an unfortunate rebirth. We can use our life to accumulate the causes, the positive potential that will enable us to have a good rebirth. And by a good rebirth, I mean not only one in which we have health and prosperity and happiness, but one in which we again have the opportunity to encounter the teachings and teachers and to practice the path.

So with our present life, we can make preparation for future lives. When we talk about the subject of death (later on the path), then it comes home to us very strongly that we aren't going to be in this body forever. This body is changing, changing all the time. You look into the mirror everyday and there are more and more wrinkles, and you get up in the mornings

and there are more and more aches and pains. We aren't going to be in this body forever. Considering that we are going to check out of one hotel room and move into another one, it is nice to make a reservation at a good hotel. So we want to use our time and energy to create the causes to have a good rebirth in the future.

ULTIMATE GOALS

To pursue our ultimate goals means attaining liberation or attaining enlightenment. These are called ultimate goals because these indicate a final spiritual realization in which we finally have some security in our own mind ...

[Teachings lost due to change of tape]

We are never secure enough. That's because the real security is when we've finally purified the causes for insecurity in our own mind, mainly our own greed, ignorance and hatred. Real security comes when we have full control over our own mental process, when we can use our qualities at will. When we achieve the ultimate goals, we will finally have a lasting security in our life.

We can use our precious life now to *attain liberation*. This is the state of an arhat in which all of the anger, attachment and ignorance have been removed. All of the karma that causes rebirth has been purified. And at that point, we have attained nirvana or liberation and we can abide in the state of bliss. No drugs, no alcohol needed, just plain old, self-

generated, “homegrown” bliss.

Beyond that, another ultimate goal is to *attain the state of full enlightenment*. Here, with full enlightenment, we not only have freed ourselves from the cycle of existence and attained our own liberation, but we’ve gone beyond that, we’ve purified even the subtle stains on our mind. We’ve completely developed our love and compassion so that we have at our finger tips all the skills and talents to be of benefit to others. This kind of state, in which we can make our whole being of benefit to all other beings, is the state of enlightenment. And we have the possibility to attain it on the basis of this precious human life.

It is said in the teachings that just having gotten to where we are right now, having a precious human life, is like half of the battle to enlightenment, even though we might feel so far away from enlightenment. Just even getting the precious human life with all these opportunities is very difficult to get, and somehow we have this possibility right now, and that is like half-way there.

So considering we can do the other half, and there exists methods for attaining enlightenment in this very lifetime, we are very fortunate to encounter them. As we start to study more and more the actual techniques for transforming our mind into the mind of a Buddha, we find that we can even do so without having to go through successive lifetimes; we can do it even this lifetime. So there’s a strong meaning and purpose in our life to work towards.

Another thing that we can do in terms of the ultimate goals is that we can also create the cause to

be born in the pure land. What's a pure land? It is a place where all the conditions are very conducive for Dharma practice. If we take rebirth in a pure land, it becomes very easy to attain enlightenment because we don't have to go to work, we don't have to sit in traffic, we don't have to do income tax, we don't have to paint our house. We have all the time necessary to practice and all the conditions around us for practice. Also, if we're able to be born in the pure land, our minds are very subdued. Somehow, our attachment and anger and ignorance aren't quite so intense and then because we have so many holy beings around us, so much good situations around us, it becomes quite easy to practice. We no longer feel lazy in the morning to get up and meditate because everybody else is doing it. There is a natural enthusiasm in a pure land to practice.

There are different pure lands. One of the most popular one is the Amitabha Pure Land. It is quite popular in the Chinese and Japanese tradition. The immediate goal is to be born in Sukhavati, Amitabha's pure land, the pure land of joy. The way to be born there is to learn about the qualities of the pure land, or the advantages of being born there, then to develop a very strong wish to be born there. And then to create the causes to be born there, by keeping pure morality, good ethical conduct, by thinking of loving-compassion, by making a special bond with Amitabha by remembering his qualities and then dedicating all the positive potential you create from all these practices for that kind of rebirth. If you can create the cause to be reborn in the pure land, it is very, very good. For a good practitioner, a precious human life is

better than being born in the pure land because they say that if you use the tantric methods and you are a good practitioner, you can attain enlightenment much quicker in a precious human body than you can in the pure land. So, it depends where you want to dedicate your merit. I guess we can dedicate for both, kind of have contingency plans, “I want a precious human rebirth, but if it is more advantageous in a pure land, that one is fine too”, because the ultimate goal is enlightenment.

MAKING USE OF OUR PRECIOUS LIFE MOMENT BY MOMENT

This is a very, very important practice. If we have the first two meanings firmly in mind—to attain liberation, to attain enlightenment—then, moment by moment we want to use our time very, very wisely. And so here comes the practice of really being mindful, being aware, “What am I saying and doing and thinking? Are my thoughts and deeds going in the direction of enlightenment or are they going in the opposite direction?” This practice of being quite aware of what we are saying, doing and thinking.

Here is where your meditation practice is very important because then you take the time out to just sit quietly and undistractedly and get to know yourself.

And then, on the basis of that, it helps you during your daily life when you are running around, to have some kind of mindfulness and awareness of what’s going on. And then, when you start to notice it, “Oh! Anger is coming up!” you can apply the antidote. You

can do the different techniques for subduing the anger. Or when you start seeing the dissatisfactions or discontent coming, then you become aware of it very quickly when it is still small and you apply the antidote.

This whole thing of making our life meaningful, moment by moment, by being aware, this is what is meant by getting to know ourselves. We are always saying, “I don’t know myself, I am alienated, I don’t understand myself.” That’s because we are always thinking of movies, highways and novels and all the other stuff. We are not being aware of what we are saying and doing and thinking and feeling, right now. So this practice of *really being present* and getting to know ourselves is very, very useful and beneficial.

Transforming ordinary activities into the Dharma

And then we can actually use different methods to transform some of the ordinary things that we are doing, like we may be aware of ourselves and all, “I’m aware that I’m sweeping the floor,” but so what, how does that become particularly virtuous? How does that lead me on to enlightenment? Here, what we call the thought-training teaching is very beneficial. When you sweep the floor, you try and think that the dirt is all the defilements, the afflictions, the karma of oneself and others. The broom is the broom of wisdom and compassion and you are cleaning your mind and other people’s minds as you are sweeping. This is a process of taking a very ordinary thing and transforming it somehow, so that while you are physically doing an ordinary thing, in your mind you

are thinking about Dharma, in your mind you are cultivating this wish to lead others on the path to enlightenment. You are cultivating altruism. When you are sweeping, you think about purifying your own mind and others’.

If somebody got angry at you, instead of getting angry at them back, when you are sweeping, think “I am going to be able to clean this person’s anger with wisdom and compassion.” So then you see, you don’t get angry at that person, and you actually start to think of something constructive for them. Similarly, when you are washing the dishes, washing the laundry, washing your car, washing yourself in the shower, whenever you are doing any kind of cleaning thing, you can think that this is the water of wisdom and compassion and you are cleaning away the defilements “greed”, “anger” and “ignorance” and all the karma of yourself and others. So, it becomes a transformational thing.

When you go out of the door, you think, “I am leaving cyclic existence behind, I am leaving my garbage-mind behind and I am leading all the other beings out there too.” When you come in the door, think, “I am leading all beings to liberation. I am leading them all into a pure land.” So with the ordinary things that we do day by day, we can transform in this way. When you go downstairs, think “I am going into all the suffering places in this world, out of compassion, to really help others.” When you come up the stairs, or go up the elevator, think, “I am leading myself and others up to higher states of being, and developing our realizations.” This way, you’re thinking of the Dharma all the time.

For those of you who have studied with Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese monk, he has a whole series of what in the Vietnamese tradition are called “gatas”, little things that you recite to yourself before you do everything. It is very, very skillful. He has one that I think is marvelous. When you go in a car, you sit for a moment, and you think, “I know where I am going, and I know why I’m going there.” That’s pretty heavy-duty, isn’t it, considering the amount of time we get in cars and we don’t have the vaguest idea where we’re going in the car, let alone where we are going in our lives? And so just to sit for a moment, “I know where I’m going in my car. I know where I’m going in my life.”

All these little things, like before you answer the telephone, don’t just pick it up on the first ring. As it rings, you sit and breathe and think, “May I be of benefit to the person on the other end of the line,” and then you pick it up and you say “Hello.” When you are at the red light or when you are stuck on the highway because the traffic is terrible, then you stop for a minute and you just breathe and be in the present. And you can sit and think about loving-compassion for all the other beings and all the cars in the traffic jam around you. You can look at all the people on the sidewalks on the highway, and think they all want to be happy and none of them want pain.

All these little circumstances in our daily life, if we slow down, we become aware, we can transform them all into the path to enlightenment. So really taking time, slowing down a bit. It doesn’t take that much time to slow down. Sometimes just even sitting and

taking a deep breath or taking three deep breaths. When you get to your job in the morning, just sit for a moment, and think, “I want to be of benefit to everyone I encounter at work today.” When you come home at night, you think, “I want to benefit everybody that I see at home and wherever I am going in the evening.” And just try and think like that. It only takes like fifteen seconds. If you do it in a long way, it takes a whole thirty seconds, but it makes a big difference.

Here, it is interesting that when we are talking about the purpose or meaning of our precious human life we are seeing it in terms of long-term goals, and in terms of spiritual meaning, in terms of preparing for our next life, in terms of transforming our mind now so that we can attain enlightenment. You will notice that it is quite obvious that the purpose of our precious human rebirth, there is not a fourth point called “making a lot of money” or “climbing up the corporate ladder.” These goals are conspicuously off, not printed here. And so we can see that the opportunity with this life, to make it meaningful, we have to shift gears slightly, from the way that we’ve often been brought up to think as the meaning of our life.

I was brought up thinking that a good career, a nice house, a lot of money, a family, lots of prestige and going to nice parties, fame and all these is the meaning of life. These were what are to be achieved with our lives. From a Dharma viewpoint, they are very nice but they are very transient. They are here and then they are gone. And so from a Dharma viewpoint, the real way to make our life meaningful is

by doing this internal transformation so that wherever we go, whatever we do, we can be happy; finding a long term, a more everlasting happiness and use of our life.

Some issues we may face

Alienation

Sometimes, when people start to practice Buddhism and they start to shift gears, from money, materialism, fame and good times to Dharma, they go through this thing of, “Ay, I don’t fit into society anymore. I think completely differently from these people, I don’t fit in with them anymore.” That’s a very normal and natural stage to go through in your Dharma development. I know that happened to me and it happens to most people I know. But, here is where it’s really important, this whole practice of loving-kindness.

Sure, we may have different goals in our life than other people do. But, the feeling of loving-kindness still means we are very connected to them. Why? Because they do a lot to benefit us. We are very dependent on them. We live in a world together. We are really not alienated at all. So they depend on us, we depend on them. We are very related, and as we cultivate this feeling of loving-kindness more and more, we recognize that even though we all think differently and may have different goals in our life, underneath it all, what we are all looking for is happiness.

We may have different ideas of what happiness is, different methods to attain our own visions of

happiness, but that is no reason to feel alienated and separate from people, because underneath it all, the thing is, we all want happiness. Also, we live in the society with them and we inter-relate so much—we can't live on our own, it's impossible. We are very intimately related with all the people that we share this planet with. If you remember this, then the process of shifting gears is not so painful and you don't feel alienated.

Also as we get into the Dharma practice and we start shifting gears, because we understand how our own mind and our own feelings operate, we begin to understand other people better. We understand better what other people are going through simply because we have taken the time to start looking at ourselves. And that again breaks down that feeling of isolation, and that understanding that we now have gives us a feeling that we have something to offer to others too.

So it's not like "I am on a spiritual path and you are on a worldly path, so what can I do for you?" But we actually see that through our own inner development and cultivation, there is a lot we can do for others, and it can come out in very small but very, very significant ways. Again, if we're really tuned in to what's happening, we can connect with other people very strongly in situations where you don't even think you are going to.

I am saying this because I am just thinking of something from my personal experience. I was taking a bus from San Francisco, in one of these mini-buses at the airport, and we were all sitting there, scrunched in. I started talking to the young woman beside me who goes to university at San Jose. And now she is

going to start reading Dharma books and she just wrote me a letter. At that time, I didn't just turn to her and say, "Well, you have a precious human rebirth and you should try to" You just talk to people and if you are a friendly, happy, pleasant person, you convey something to other people. It doesn't matter whether they know you are a Buddhist or not. The fact is you are really communicating with them. You can do this with people at the bank and people at the supermarket and people at your workplace.

You don't need to talk Buddhist jargon like the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, samsara, nirvana and all these stuff. You just talk basic human kindness and communicate. We see that actually, in fact, having shifted gears to making our life meaningful in a Dharma way, we actually feel more in tune with others. We actually are able to communicate better with others.

Say your friends come to you with problems. You begin very easily to be able to see, "Oh, that's because of attachment." Lots of our problems are due to attachment. Your friends come and confide in you, and you can see a problem coming from attachment or from jealousy or from pride or from anger or from making too big a deal out of oneself. And then we talk about the different antidotes to these things to people but without saying anything about Buddhism. Just talk common sense. You help them to solve their problems through Buddhist techniques (they don't know it), and as you get more familiar and you practice those techniques yourself, you will find the vocabulary to express them very simply to other people. So you shifted gears but you communicate even better with

other people than before.

Feeling small

Another thing is that all the past great masters achieved realizations based on the same human body that we have. That's important to remember because sometimes we hear stories about Milarepa and Marpa, and this great guru and that great meditator, and we go, "Oh my goodness! These people are so high and holy and look at me!" But, remember, they had the same life we did, the same precious human life, the same qualities, the same opportunities, and the thing is that they made use of their life. If we put in some effort, we can also make use of our life, we have the same qualities. So when you look at His Holiness the Dalai Lama and all of his wonderful qualities, he is a human being, just like us. If he can be like that, we can also. It is important to remember that.

It is important also, by remembering the preciousness and purpose of our life, to not waste our time. It is like if you find a diamond, and you know the worth of the diamond, you are going to really use it, you're going to use it soon, and you're not going to put it on the table and wait for a thief to come take it. We would usually feel very, very bad if we wasted our money. If we bought something and it wasn't worth the price, we'd have so much regret and repentance: "I wasted my money on this completely useless thing that broke!"

From a Buddhist point of view, getting hung up in that kind of regret is useless. What we should regret is when we waste our life, when we waste this precious

opportunity we have to attain temporary and ultimate goals. When we waste our opportunity to make our life meaningful moment by moment, that is something to regret.

Questions and answers

I will pause here and see if you have some questions because we have completed the second section.

[Audience:] What are some of the reasoning underlying the assertion that we can all attain enlightenment?

Well, because we have the Buddha potential, we have the basic substantial cause or perpetuating cause for becoming a Buddha. When something is produced, you have the substance or the thing that actually transforms into what it's going to become; we have the tree that is the substantial cause or what we call the perpetuating cause of the paper. Then we have all of the other causes and conditions: the logger who cut it down and the paper mill and all these other stuff. We have a substantial or perpetuating cause to make something, and then we have all the conditions. Now, if you don't have a tree, if you don't have the substantial cause to become paper, there's no way you are going to get paper. You may have the logger and the paper mill but there is no way you are going to get the paper.

So the substantial cause is an important, essential element in producing the result. In a similar way, our Buddha nature is the substantial or perpetuating cause

that is the basic thing that will enable us to become a Buddha. Now, talking from a tantric viewpoint, we would say that the fundamental innate mind of clear light (if you want a fancy term) is that substantial cause, or that perpetuating cause.

In other words, that extremely subtle mind, that is clear, aware and empty of inherent existence, is the basic thing that allows us to become a fully enlightened Buddha. So, just the fact of having a mindstream is all we need to have the substantial cause for becoming a Buddha.

What we need now is all of the cooperative conditions like the Dharma practice, e.g. keeping ethics, being generous, developing loving-kindness and so on. We need to engage in the different techniques and methods so that we can take that clear light mind and purify it of its obstacles, develop all of its good qualities so that it can become the mind of a Buddha.

[Audience: inaudible]

You mean like if a person before has heard something about karma but they don't really understand it, and then you're talking about loving-kindness and simple things and they say, "Well, I thought Buddhism was all about karma?"

I think if a person at that point expresses some interest in learning about reincarnation and about karma, then I think we can explain it to them, because sometimes people are curious and sometimes they might even think of it as funny. Sometimes people kind of scoff, "Do you really think we can be reborn

as a duck?”

What I would do if somebody has that attitude was, at the beginning of talking about rebirth I wouldn't talk initially about being reborn as dogs, because that's stretching that person too far. I would just talk about being reborn as human beings and that a person's mindstream does go from one body to the other. There are some people who have memories and if you read their stories of how they remembered previous lives, and you tell these stories to your friends then it makes them stop and think.

It was very interesting. I was staying with my brother and I had a picture on my small traveling shrine of Serkong Rinpoche, who is my root teacher and his reincarnation who in the picture was five years old at that time. My little niece came up and asked me who are these people, so I started to explain, “This was him in the previous life and I knew him, and he died and now he is reborn as this child”. She is very curious and says “I don't think that happens.” But it was quite interesting, she brought it up later on in the day, she was thinking about it. She asked, “Do you really think we get born again?” So we talked about it. It's OK with me if she doesn't come out as a convert. But to get people to start to think about things like that. They begin to think, “Well, maybe I am not my body. Maybe when I die, it isn't just a big hole of nothingness. But I continue to exist and I can actually improve.” So I think to explain things about karma and rebirth in a simple way, so that they get a good understanding of it.

[Audience:] What can we do to help correct some

people's persistent wrong understandings of Buddhism, especially when they don't seem open to it?

So you've tried to correct their understandings and they haven't gotten it. Well, it's a thing of being sensitive and seeing when somebody is open, because you're right, sometimes people are confused and they don't seem to want to clarify their confusion right away. And so sometimes there, it is better to leave it quietly, don't talk so much directly about Buddhism, but just be a kind person so that you re-establish a good relationship with them and you continue a friendship. After some time, their mind might change and you might be able to talk about more technical things of Buddhism again.

If they come and they ask you a question, you can respond to the question. But if you get the feeling that they're just taking everything completely backwards and upside down, then maybe just show by your example by being a kind and friendly person and leave it for right now, and then maybe they'll come around at a later date. It depends very much on the situation, each person is different. For some people, it might be like that, and we might feel like, "Wow, I don't seem to be able to explain it, but are you interested in reading a book?" Then the person might say, "Yeah, give me a book." And then you can give them a book. Sometimes, like if there is an article about the Dalai Lama or something about Tibet, then you show it to that person and they may say "Oh! This is interesting," and they get warmed up or get into it again. It really depends on each individual

situation.

The Difficulty of Getting a Precious Human Life

This is a very important one to understand, the difficulty, the rarity, so that we get a sense that our life is not only precious, not only meaningful, but also that it is a very special occasion. Because otherwise, if we don't see our present opportunity as rare, we can very easily fall into the thing of, "Well, it would be nice to practice Dharma, but I don't really feel like it. So I will do it next lifetime". We can keep procrastinating. We can get a little complacent and laid back.

And so this meditation is to help us realize that actually what we have now is quite special and quite rare, and it's difficult to get it again, so better use it now. There are three ways to see that:

1. From the viewpoint of whether it is easy or difficult to create the causes for it.
2. From the viewpoint of analogies.
3. From the viewpoint of its nature or from the number of beings that have precious human lives.

Through all these three ways, we can see that it is difficult and rare.

FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF WHETHER IT IS EASY OR DIFFICULT TO CREATE THE CAUSES FOR IT

Causes for a precious human life

From the viewpoint of the cause, to create the cause for a precious human life, we need three principal causes:

- Good ethical behavior, good ethical conduct, because that creates the cause for us to get a human body.
- Doing the other far reaching attitudes—generosity, patience, joyous effort, concentration and wisdom, because that ripens our mind so it gives us all the other qualities of a precious human life.
- Dedicating all of our positive potential and making very, very strong prayers to have a precious human life in the future. Because if we create a lot of positive potential, but we don't dedicate it, it can get destroyed by anger. Or, maybe it will ripen and we will get reborn in the god realm and have super-duper sense pleasure for a few eons and then it is all over and we are back to where we started again. So, it is important to dedicate it so that our karma ripens in a Dharma way.

Difficulty of creating these causes

Is it easy or difficult to create one of the principal causes for getting a precious human life? We think of the ten destructive actions; killing, stealing, unwise sexual conduct etc.

Is it easy or difficult to be patient? Somebody

comes up and insults us. What is our usual reaction? Somebody cheats us. What's our usual reaction? So we can see it's really difficult. What about joyous effort like taking delight in doing constructive actions? How much of a sense of delight do we have? How much of a sense of drudgery do we have? Then "concentration". Next "wisdom". How much time do we put in a day cultivating our wisdom?

We look at these things, "Is it easy to create ethics? Is it easy or difficult to do the far-reaching attitudes? What is our habitual behavior right now? What actions do we do very well and which ones don't we? We begin to see that it's very difficult to create the causes. What we have now is really a miracle, so let's use it wisely. Let's get ourselves together, considering that we have this potential to become a Buddha, considering that we have this inner beauty. Why waste it? Let's put our energy into creating the causes for precious human rebirth and for enlightenment.

FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF ANALOGIES

The blind tortoise

We can also see from the viewpoint of analogies that it is very difficult to get a precious human rebirth. Here in the scriptures, we have a lovely story about a tortoise. There is a huge vast ocean. There is one tortoise. He is blind. He is usually at the bottom of the ocean. He comes up once every hundred years. There is a golden yolk, a golden inner tube (to update the story) floating on the ocean. What is the chance that

this tortoise have, coming up once every hundred years and being blind, to stick its head through the inner tube? Pretty low, especially when you think the ocean is so vast. Sometimes, he might be thousands of miles away. Sometimes, he might be only a foot away. But still, it doesn't matter, he missed it. So try again after another hundred years.

The way the analogy relates, is: the ocean is like the ocean of cyclic existence. The tortoise is like us. Being at the bottom of the ocean is like being born in all the unfortunate realms, all the situations where it's very, very difficult and there's much confusion and pain. Coming up once every hundred years is like getting a good rebirth. That's not even a precious human rebirth, just coming up to the surface, that's like getting any kind of human rebirth, or being reborn as a god or demi-god. You are only up there for a second and then you go down again. The golden yolk, the golden inner tube, is the Buddha's teachings. So the Buddha's teachings are floating; it goes from place to place. It goes from Tibet to the West, from India to China, from Sri Lanka to Thailand, all over the place. It's never stationary. So this golden inner tube is going around; the Buddha's teachings keep changing places.

We are blinded by our ignorance, blinded by all of our misconceptions. We are usually in the unfortunate realms, and we come up to the surface once every hundred years. Putting our head through the golden yolk of the Buddha's teachings is like getting a precious human life.

When you sit there and meditate on this analogy, it gives us some sense of "Wow!" It's like I pinch myself, "Do I really have this opportunity now?" We

see how precious it is.

When you are doing meditation on this, you would sit there and create the whole scene and look at the tortoise going here and there, and the teachings going here and there, and think about how it relates to us in cyclic existence. You will come out with the feeling that our life is very, very special. And again, a renewed feeling of how important it is to use it wisely.

FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF ITS NATURE OR FROM THE NUMBER OF BEINGS THAT HAVE PRECIOUS HUMAN LIVES

To see if it's rare or not to have a precious human life, we look at the numbers of beings that have precious human lives. What is the population of America now? More than 250 million? How many beings in America have precious human lives? There are a lot of human lives but how many have precious human lives? Even within America, if you compare the number of human beings to the number of animals and insects, it's just astounding. If you take Seattle; the number of human beings versus the number of animals and insects, there are so many little spiders, ants, cockroaches, beetles, butterflies, caterpillars, dogs and cats and cows and everything else. The animals and insects really outnumber the human beings.

Among the human beings, those with precious human lives are even fewer. When you start comparing the numbers of precious human lives to human beings to animals to all the other beings in all the other realms, it's a very, very small number that has precious human lives. A precious human life is

very difficult to get.

One time, the Buddha bent down to scoop up a little bit of dust on his finger nail and he said, “The number of beings who have an upper rebirth, (this is not even a precious human life but a fortunate rebirth) is like the dust in my finger nail and the number of beings who have unfortunate rebirths is like all the dust in the whole world”.

When we think like this, in terms of numbers, it sinks into us more and more, that this opportunity is very rare, very difficult to get. So again, this feeling comes up, “I must use it wisely. I want to get myself together and not waste the opportunity.”

Review

We just reviewed slightly the qualities of a precious human life, being born as a human with the sense faculties intact, having access to teachers and teachings and religious freedom, having the interest and motivation to practice the path and so on.

We talked about the purpose and the meaning of what we can do with our life, in terms of temporary goals, in other words, preparing for future lives so that we can continue with our practice, so that we can have happiness in our future lives. And we talked about ultimate goals, so that we take the essence of this life and use it to become either an arhat who has attained liberation, or a fully enlightened Buddha. We can do that on the basis of this body. Just as all the past realized beings had done it on the basis of this human body, we can also attain these ultimate goals.

And then moment by moment, we can transform

every activity into part of our spiritual practice. When we sweep the floor, when we wash the dishes, we are cleaning the negative karma, the defilements of ourselves and others. When we get in the car, we know where we are going. When we answer the phone, before we answer it, we think “May I be of benefit to the other person”. When we are stuck in a traffic jam, we think everybody else wants to be happy. We use every small circumstance in our life—going upstairs, going down, going in and out of the door. When you pass things to people, say you’re passing the ketchup, you think mentally, “May I be able to give them the Dharma and lead them in the path.” When you give people directions, you lead them on the path. In these ways, you transform ordinary things and give them a Dharma, a spiritual significance.

Once we know we have a precious human life, we know it’s meaningful, then we consider its rarity and the difficulty of getting it. We do that first by thinking that it’s rare. It’s difficult to create the cause because it is difficult to act ethically. If we look in our world and how we act, the frequency of constructive versus destructive actions, the intensity of them, we begin to see it’s quite difficult to keep good ethical conduct.

It’s equally difficult being generous and patient and having joy in our practice and concentrating and being wise. All these things are difficult. In that way too, it’s difficult to create the cause. In addition, once we have created the cause for a precious human life, it’s easy to destroy it, because if we don’t dedicate our positive potential and we get angry, we burn it up. Even if we have dedicated it, if we get angry subsequently, we

postpone it from ripening. So, we begin to see it's difficult, it's hard.

Secondly, when we think in terms of the analogies, when we think of the tortoise in the huge ocean, this poor blind tortoise in its confusion trying to get its head through the golden inner tube; like our confusion in all of samsara, being blinded by our ignorance, having that opportunity to contact the Buddha's teachings and to practice them—how precious, how rare that opportunity is.

Thirdly, in terms of numbers, how difficult it is to get this opportunity. When we start looking at the number of beings in the upper realms versus the number in the lower realms, the number of animals versus the number of human beings, the number of human beings versus the number of those with precious human lives, we will see that this is a very precious opportunity, something to really value.

For instance when you get your pay check, you don't leave your pay check hanging around. When you get something valuable, you take real good care of it. From a Buddhist point of view, having this opportunity to do Dharma practice is more valuable than a pay check, more valuable than a diamond, more valuable than a promotion. Because diamonds and promotions and these things, they are here and then they are gone. How long will we have them? But if we use our precious human life and develop our own inner beauty, this result can last a very, very long time and have very far-reaching effects.

Let's sit for about five minutes and digest. Review the points in your mind. This is a thinking meditation, a checking meditation. Think over what we have said.

Try and generate the feelings that we've talked about through thinking in this way.

Let's look at the first sheet that says "Overview of the Lamrim: Outline". We've just finished a major topic talking about the precious human life. One of the goals of this course is to give you an overall view, so I want to have you look briefly at the major topics in the outline as we move into the next section.

How to Take Advantage of Our Precious Human Life

In the outline, 4.B.1 is "Being persuaded to take advantage of our precious human life." We did that already. We've persuaded ourselves that we have something precious. So now we go on to the next stage which is: "4.B.2 How to take the advantage of our precious human life". Within this, there are three main subtitles:

1. Training our mind in the stages in common with a person of initial motivation.
2. Training our mind in the stages in common with a person of intermediate motivation.
3. Training our mind in the stages of a person of higher motivation.

The whole gradual path is set up with the goal of becoming a Buddha, with the goal of generating the altruistic intention to become a Buddha for the benefit of others, and that is the highest level of motivation. The reason the first subtitle is called training our

minds ‘in common with’ a person of initial motivation is that some people only have the initial level of motivation. We practice in common with them but not just as they do. And then some people only go as far as to have the second level of motivation. We practice in common with what they are doing but not just as they are doing. We are going beyond. So from the very beginning, the whole gradual path is set up for us with the idea that we are going to go to the end of it, we are not going to get stuck somewhere in the middle.

Expanding our minds progressively through the three levels of motivation

It’s very important to understand these three levels of motivation because within them is contained all of the teachings of the Buddha. If you understand these three levels of motivation, the different practices that are associated with them, then whenever you hear any teaching by any teacher of any tradition, you’ll know where it fits into the gradual path. And this does away with a lot of the confusion that we often have in practicing the Dharma.

These three levels of motivation are a very progressive expansion of our minds. Initially when I come to teachings—I can’t speak for you, I can only speak for myself—I wasn’t really looking for anything. I knew something was not quite right in my life and I knew there was something more. I didn’t know what it was, but I was basically just wanting to have a better life and be happy. Often we come to Buddhist things initially just because maybe

somebody died, or we have problems in our family, or we are unhappy, or we feel like there is something more and we're looking for something that is going to help us quickly solve whatever problems we're facing. That is the motivation with which we usually come to teachings, although I can't speak for any of you. And that motivation is OK. It's a very real, earnest motivation that we have.

As we come into Buddha's teachings, we gradually begin to expand that motivation. The initial motivation is basically concerned with our own personal happiness now, isn't it? Most of us want to be happy now. Fair enough. We are not thinking, "I want to be happy three eons from now and it's nice if other people are happy", but we basically come because we want to be happy immediately. That is our basic motivation. Now, as we start practicing the teachings, we begin to expand that motivation.

The first way we start to expand it is time wise. We begin to look ahead a little bit more in the future. Instead of being like the child, "I want my soccer now mommy, I don't want it after dinner, I want it now," instead of approaching life with that kind of attitude, we begin to look ahead in our life and we begin to see that our life will have an end. That death is something that will definitely come. It's definitely in the script and there is no way to rewrite it. So we start thinking, "Oh, if I'm going to die, what is going to happen after death?" And we start thinking about rebirth—what is going to happen to us after we die. It's not like some big empty hole. There is something that continues. What is going to happen to us at that point? And so, by looking ahead and seeing that this is definitely

something that will happen and that there is no way to get around it, we become concerned with, “How can I die in a peaceful way? How can I make that transition to a new life in a peaceful way? How can I have another life that will enable me to keep on practicing? How will I have a good life instead of being born as a duck in Green Lake?” No offence to the ducks, [laughter] but if you had your choice, where would you rather be right now?

So, we start to expand our motivation. Each of these three levels of motivation involves looking at something we don't want (something that's undesirable), seeking something that is a resolution to that, and thirdly, finding a method to bring that about.

Level 1. Training our mind in the stages in common with a person of initial motivation

In this first level of motivation, we are turning away from having a restless, tormented death and a confused, painful rebirth. We are seeking to die peacefully, to have a happy transition, and to have another rebirth which is happy, in which we can continue to practice. The method for doing that is by keeping ethics, specifically observing karma, abandoning destructive actions on one hand and putting our energy into acting constructively on the other hand, because our actions create the cause for what we are going to become.

So we have something we're turning away from, something we are seeking and a method to attain it. That is the first way of expanding our mind. Instead of my happiness now, it's my happiness at the time of

death and in the future life.

Level 2. Training our mind in the stages in common with a person of intermediate motivation

Then after a while we begin to think, “Well it’s great to get a good human rebirth. I really want that. It’s better than being a duck. It’s better than being a worm. But if I am just going to wind up with another good life, I am still going to have problems in it, and I am still going to get old and sick and die, and I am still going to be confused, and I am still going to get angry, and I am still going to have attachment and jealousy, and I am still not going to get everything I want. If I am still going to have all these difficulties, then what is the end point? There has got to be something more than just having a rerun of what we have now.” So at this point, what we are turning away from is all the pleasures of having a life like we have now, or even having a life better than what we have now while still caught in this whole system of afflictions and karma, in which our minds are completely propelled by whatever thoughts that come into our mind uncontrollably.

We are turning away from all of that confusion, all of that garbage situation of being born and getting old and getting sick and dying and not getting what we want and getting what we don’t want. What we are generating is the determination to be free from all of that. We are aspiring for liberation. We say, “I want to be free from these things. It’s nice to have a good rebirth, but I want to get off this Ferris Wheel. There has got to be something better.” So we are aspiring for

liberation or nirvana, which is the cessation of being under the control of our ignorance and afflictions and karma, and all of their consequences and difficulties. We are turning away from that whole cycle of rebirth. We are turning towards liberation and nirvana, where we can have a lasting kind of happiness. The method to attain that is called the three higher trainings. There is the higher training in ethics, which we have already started to practice; the higher training in concentration, so that we can control our mind and subdue the gross defilements; and the higher training in wisdom, so that we can understand reality, and thus do away with the ignorance that plagues us. That's the method that we are going to use, with this second level of motivation. You can see we are still expanding our motivation.

Level 3. Training our mind in the stages of a person of higher motivation

Now, with the third level, the highest level of motivation, we are expanding our motivation yet again. Instead of my happiness now, instead of my happiness at death and in the next life, and instead of my happiness in liberation, we become very, very aware that we live in a world with billions and billions of other living beings. And that we're incredibly dependent on them. And that they've been unbelievably kind to us. They want happiness as much as we do and they want to avoid problems as much as we do. And so, to just pursue our spiritual path with the attitude of bettering our own rebirth or attaining our own liberation is rather self-centered. We come to

confront that part of ourselves that is still looking out for my own happiness, except now it's my own spiritual happiness. And so we look and say, "Hey, I am capable of doing more than this. I am capable of being of great benefit to all other beings, and considering their kindness towards me, I should exert myself for their benefit."

So at this point, what we are turning away from is the self-complacent peaceful state of our own liberation. We are saying being liberated myself is nice, but actually it's limited. We want to turn away from that. And what we want to do is to develop a very strong altruistic intention to become a Buddha so that we'll be best able to lead others to lasting happiness.

The method we practice to do that is called the six far-reaching attitudes. Sometimes it's translated as the six perfections or in Sanskrit, the six paramitas. In the refuge prayer when we say, 'By the positive potential I create by practicing generosity and the other far-reaching attitudes'—it's referring to these six: generosity, ethics (here comes ethics again, can't get away from it [laughter]), patience, joyous effort, meditative stabilization or concentration, and wisdom. And then after we've done that (those six far reaching attitudes), the method we'll use is the tantric path.

You can see, as we look at these three levels of practice according to the three levels of motivation, that it does contain all the teachings of the Buddha.

Appreciating the different traditions

The Theravada teachings include the first two levels

of motivation—seeking a good rebirth and seeking liberation. And then there're elements of the Theravada path that talk about some of the things in the third level, like love and compassion. But it's the Mahayana teachings that emphasize the cultivation of love and compassion, and put that as supreme, and provide all the techniques for developing that third level of motivation.

So you can see in this schematic layout that what we call 'Tibetan Buddhism' contains the teachings of Theravada, Zen, Pure Land—all the different Buddhist traditions. All those teachings are contained within this framework of the three levels of motivation, and the methods that one practices to attain the goals that one is looking for at each level of motivation.

Understanding this alone is a very strong reason why we should never, ever criticize any other Buddhist traditions. We may practice one particular tradition, but the practices of other traditions are in our tradition. It's not like all the different traditions do separate things that are unrelated. Not at all! So, this opens our mind to appreciating the teachings of other traditions and other presentations.

It opens our minds also to appreciating that different people have different levels of spiritual aspiration at one particular moment. We might have one kind of aspiration. Our friend might have another. That's OK. You can see there's this sequential process.

The three-step process needs to be practiced sequentially to develop an intense third level of

motivation

We can see by this layout that we have to go through this sequence (of the three levels of motivation). This is very important. We have to go through the sequence of developing each level of motivation in a very intense way. Some people would rather not develop the first two levels of motivation. They want to go directly to the teachings on love and compassion. “I want to meditate on love and compassion. I want the method of the bodhisattva. Generosity, effort, patience—I want all that. Don’t tell me about the method of the lowest level motivation where I have to think about death. I don’t want to think about death! And don’t tell me about the practices I have to do in the intermediate level of motivation, where I have to think about ageing and sickness and ignorance and suffering. I don’t want to think about that either! I just want love and compassion.” [Laughter.]

It’s good to want love and compassion. It’s better than a lot of what other people want. But if we want our love and compassion to be intense, if we want it to be real gutsy, courageous love and compassion, the way to do that is by thinking about the first two levels of motivation. Why is that so? Well, in the first level of motivation when we are thinking about death and future lives and aspiring to make them both go well, we are thinking about impermanence. By thinking about impermanence and transience, that will lead us later into the practices of the second level of motivation, thinking that all of cyclic existence is impermanent.

Since everything in cyclic existence is transient, we can't hold on to any of it. And because it's always changing all the time, and because there is nothing that we can finally grasp on to, to make ourselves secure in the worldly way, we have to acknowledge the limitations of our present state. We see the defects of being as we are now. We have to look quite honestly at our own dissatisfaction, at our own being uncontrolled, at the fact that no matter how much effort we put into making this life or any life go well, there is always going to be headaches. No matter how much social action we do, no matter how much legislation we have, no matter how many demonstrations we go to, that this is still going to be samsara. It's still going to be cyclic existence. Why? Because we are under the influence of ignorance and anger and this whole afflicted vision that we have. We have to confront that head on, really see the disadvantages of our current way of being (this is what is meant by suffering), and the situation that we're stuck in by the force of our own confused, ignorant, disturbed mind.

Having compassion for ourselves

Seeing that, we develop the determination to be free. A more Western way of saying the determination to be free is to say having compassion for ourselves. You don't find this in strict Buddhist terminology. But the meaning of the second level motivation of determination to be free is to have compassion for ourselves. In other words, we look at the situation we're caught in by the force of our ignorance and our

karma, and we develop compassion for ourselves. We want ourselves to be free from this whole cycle of confusing mess, not only now but forever. We recognize that we're capable of another kind of happiness. We have that very deep compassion wanting ourselves to be happy, and in a very far-reaching way, not just wanting happiness in chocolate.

The deep compassion for ourselves comes from looking at our own difficulties and miseries. You can only generate this kind of compassion—compassion which is the wish to be free of difficulties and miseries—when you recognize what the difficulties and miseries are. That's the only way. Before we can think about others' difficulties and miseries, we have to look at our own. Before we can generate the altruistic intention of the third level of motivation, wanting others to be free from all their difficulties and problems and confusion, we have to have that same compassion and attitude for ourselves. Before we can understand the depth of others' pain, we have to understand the depth of our own pain. Otherwise understanding others' pain is just intellectual blah-blah; we won't have any gut feeling if we're completely out of touch with our own situation.

So you see, to have the third level of motivation, which is real compassion and altruism for others, seeing their difficulties and wanting them to be free from that, we have to have the second level of motivation in which we're in touch with all the disadvantages of being in cyclic existence ourselves. And before we can see that, we have to think about the fact that everything is impermanent and transitory and there's nothing to hold on to—the basic practice

in the first level of motivation.

If you understand this, you'll see how, if we're going to develop love and compassion, we really have to go through this three-step process to get it. Otherwise, our love and compassion becomes Pollyanna [foolishly optimistic]. It becomes very Pollyanna. We can't sustain it. We lack courage. Whenever we face hardship in trying to act compassionately, we just lose our courage. We become discouraged. We back down. We need to do the first two steps, and get everything at a very deep level.

Keeping in mind the three-step framework enriches our understanding whichever step we are currently practicing

Meanwhile, while we're doing the first two steps, we have the goal of the third one in mind. So from the very beginning, when we're meditating about death and unfortunate rebirths, refuge, and all these other topics, we have in our mind, "I want to be a bodhisattva. I want, at the end of all of this, to be able to free all beings from their misery."

Really spend some time contemplating this. When you go home the next few days, in your morning meditation, think about these three levels, that they're each turning away from something. They're each seeking something. Each has a positive aspiration, and there's a method to do each one. Really think about them and go from the first to the second to the third and see how they develop organically. And then go backwards and see how, to have the third, you need

the second, and to have the second, you need the first. Think about how all the teachings are contained in these three.

At the beginning, I was learning all these different meditations and all these different techniques, and although my teacher taught me the three levels of motivation, I didn't spend enough time thinking about them and how they fit together. So there was a lot of confusion about all these. But once I took the time and thought about how they fit together, then things start to fall in place.

While we practice sequentially, we still have the final higher practices as our aspiration and as our goal. This is why in your Lamrim meditations, you do a different subject each day, starting at the beginning—spiritual teacher, precious human rebirth, death, unfortunate rebirths, refuge, karma, four noble truths, how to free ourselves from suffering, equanimity, seeing sentient beings as our mother, developing love and compassion, etc. We do each meditation in sequence, and then we come back and we start again. We keep doing these in a cyclical manner.

That can be very, very helpful. It's not that when we do the first one about spiritual master, or the one about precious human life, we just think about that and don't think about anything else. Rather, we might focus on these earlier meditations because that's where we're really at in our practice. But we also have the overall view because we've done a little bit of meditation on all of the stages. We can see how they fit together. We can also see that the more we understand the end practices, when we come back to meditating on the earlier practices, for example

precious human life, or the importance of having a spiritual teacher, the better we'll understand them. The more we understand the beginning practices, the more it helps build the foundation for the later ones. The more we understand the later ones, the more it enriches our understanding of the beginning ones.

So we begin to see how all of the teachings fit together. Of course this takes some time. We need to put some effort into thinking about all of these. Nobody else can do it for us. There's no little pill to take. We have to put in the effort to do the contemplation and meditation ourselves. But as we talked about last time, all the highly realized beings attained their realizations on the basis of the precious human life. We had a precious human life too. The only difference is that they put in the effort while we went sunbathing and drank Coke instead. It's basically a matter of putting in the energy.

That doesn't mean pushing ourselves and driving ourselves and dragging ourselves, but it means that we have to know where we're going and put the energy in to get there. We do that in worldly things, don't we? If you have a career goal, you know what you want to get away from (which is living out on the streets), and what you want to get towards (which is money and security and so on), and the method is to go to school all those years to fill out a good resume. And you have the energy to do it. And you do it. If we can do it for worldly things, certainly we can do the same for spiritual things, because when we do it for worldly things, all that benefit disappears when we die. But if we put that same effort into spiritual practice, the benefit doesn't disappear when we die; it

continues on. It's really just a matter of putting our energy in that direction.

Questions and answers

[Audience:] What do I do if I keep getting distracted during analytical meditation, and have a lot of doubts about where my practice is going?

For that, it's very good to do some breathing meditation to settle the mind down. Also, I think it could be very good to go back to our basic motivation. A lot of time, the distractions come because our motivation at the beginning of the meditation isn't very strong. So we come back and develop a good motivation by going through the three steps. We recognize our own ability and our own potential. We have this heart-felt commitment to other beings. We want to develop ourselves in order to benefit them, and that acts as a very strong motivation for our doing the meditation well. When we have a sense of universal responsibility for others, we develop a feeling that what we're doing in our meditation is important. It may not bring about the ultimate happiness of others this instant, but when your faucet is leaking and you're filling a bucket, all the drops are necessary to fill the bucket. The present meditation may just be a few drops in the bucket, but it's going towards filling up the bucket. Does that answer your question OK?

[Audience:] What's the difference between contemplation and meditation?

Well, by contemplation, here what I mean is thinking about the things. Checking them up. We have a three-step process which is hearing, thinking or contemplating, and meditating. Hearing is getting the information, like hearing the teachings or reading books or discussing. Thinking about it is establishing its veracity, gaining some confidence that this is the way it is, checking it up. Meditating on it is the actual step of transforming our mind into that feeling.

So when I say ‘contemplating’, I’m emphasizing the second step. You hear the teachings now. When you go home, you contemplate and think about them: Is this true? Does this make sense? Are there really these three levels of motivation? Can I develop them? Do I need the first two to have the third? How do they relate together? Do I even want to do this?

So you think about whatever that has been explained. You think about the different points in the explanation. You think about what it is you’re turning away from in the first level of motivation, what it is you’re going towards. What’s the method to achieve that? How does that method work to achieve it? And then having done that, is that sufficient? Well, no, because I want to get out of cyclic existence altogether. So that’s what I’m turning away from, and what do I want to go towards? I want liberation. What’s the method? The three higher trainings. How do those three higher trainings work to eliminate the ignorance that’s binding me to cyclic existence?

You think about these things—how they work, how they interrelate. And then you go on to the third level of motivation. Is my own liberation sufficient? You imagine yourself, “I’m here in this huge enormous

universe. Billions of solar systems. Billions of different beings on this earth and in all of the universe. Is it sufficient that I'm just concerned with my own liberation? Well, actually I'm capable of more. It'd be much better for everybody concerned if I really use my potential." And so we think about that, turning away from the self—complacent peace and going towards full enlightenment, looking at the six far-reaching attitudes and the qualities of the tantric path to know how those things enable us to attain that goal.

You sit there and really think about it. You're going to have to think about it many, many times. All these things in the Lamrim, I've been doing this kind of contemplation since I started at the beginning, and I feel like I still don't really understand the very depths of what's going on. As you do it, you understand different layers of it. Your thinking about it isn't just intellectual thinking. It isn't like writing a term paper on the three levels of motivation. But by thinking about it in relationship to yourself and the significance it has for your own life, then some feeling comes about your own potential, and about the direction you want to take in your life, about how you want to live. Some very strong feelings can arise when you contemplate these things. At this point, you really concentrate on the feeling that's arising. You really hold that, and this is the third step: meditation.

[Audience:] The three points that are supposed to help us realize the rarity of a precious human rebirth are all based on certain assumptions, and I'm not convinced. How do we know if they're really true?

Trusting the Buddha's words

Yes, they are all very hidden phenomena. In Buddhist teachings, a way to deal with extremely hidden phenomena is to explain that if there're some things that the Buddha said that you know for sure are true, you begin to have trust and confidence in the Buddha. So then you believe the other things that he said, basically out of trust and confidence in him, even though you may not know it from your own experience. But that sometimes just makes us go completely bonkers. [Laughter.]

But there's no way around it. Anything we do in life involves a certain amount of trust. When you start first grade, you're trusting that there's going to be a high school for you to go to and there's going to be funds that operate the high school. There's an enormous amount of trust that we use in living our lives. Now, it's not a question of, "Well, I'll just not think about those things. I'll trust them even though I don't understand them," but rather, we accept it provisionally, "I'll accept it, and I'll see how it works. I'll continue to check up on those things and I'll continue to work where I'm at." This is also what I was saying earlier, that as you understand the later things, you'll understand the earlier ones better.

You see, one of the big hindrances we have is that we have a very strong conception of who we are. When we say 'I', we have this very strong feeling of 'I', 'me', this body, this mental state, right now. We have that so solidly that we can't imagine being anything else. We can't even imagine being old. Have you ever looked in the mirror and imagined what

you're going to look like if you live to as old as eighty? We don't even think about that. And that's something that's going to be our own experience: being old and wrinkled, and the body not working. Have you ever imagined what it would be like to have Alzheimer's? Some of us are going to get Alzheimer's. We can't even imagine that, and yet I'm sure if we really think about it, yes, why not? Somebody's got to get Alzheimer's. It's not just those other old people. It could be me.

We can't even imagine what it's like to be a baby, even though it was our own experience. We were definitely a baby, but we can't even imagine what it's like to be one and not understand anything about what's going on around us, and to be completely dependent and helpless. And yet that was our own experience not that long ago. So you see, this very rigid idea of who I am makes us so close-minded, so that we can't even get in touch with our own experience of this life, let alone think about death and future lives.

Changing our perception

Actually, we can look at any experience from more than one angle. You can comb the cat and squish the flea and think it's a wonderful thing. You can comb the cat and squish the flea and all of a sudden here's the whole path to enlightenment in your mind, because you're thinking about ethics and everything. And so it keeps coming back to the fact that—here is where you see the whole idea of emptiness—we think everything we perceive is reality. We think everything

that we think, everything we perceive, all of our interpretations, all of our biases, all of our prejudices, all of our opinions, we think they are reality. That's our big problem. And part of that is we think who we are now is actually who we are. That's what locks us in to so many things, because that prevents us from even considering the fact that things might not be exactly as our opinion thinks they are. It's so difficult for us to even question our opinions.

When we begin to see this, we begin to understand why ignorance is the root of cyclic existence and the root of all the problems. We begin to see how we are so framed in by our ignorance and yet we think we know everything. This is our big problem. So that's why sometimes, when we begin to get a sense of how we imprison ourselves by our own way of thinking, we start to create a little space to think, "Well, the Buddha turned me on to the fact that I'm imprisoning myself, and that I'm all hung up in my opinions and perceptions and interpretations of who I am. He opened my mind to begin to question that. Maybe Buddha knows something I don't. Maybe I should just consider some of the things that he talked about. I don't have to believe them as a big dogma to be a good Buddhist, but I can let them into my mind, because the Buddha did open my mind in one way that is very important. I can start to check up on some of these other ones." And then we think about them. We start watching things. We start observing things. Then things start to fall into place.

So, still on this question of, "How do we know that ethics creates the cause for good rebirth? And that generosity, patience, joyous effort, concentration and

wisdom create the conditions to have this precious human life? Because that isn't our experience." Well, if you start looking at your own life a little differently, maybe it is. Maybe that framework could be used to describe our own experience.

For example, I look at my own life. How is it I am a Buddhist nun? In our society, we usually attribute things to genetics and environment; there's no talk about karma. If I look genetically, there is not one single Buddhist amongst all my ancestors. So I don't think I'm a Buddhist because I have genes to be a Buddhist. Now if I look into my environment, I was not raised as a Buddhist. The community I grew up in was not Buddhist. There was one Japanese boy whom I went to school with, but I'm not even sure if he was a Buddhist. [Laughter.] All I knew about Buddhism was those pictures in the books on the world's great religions. The people with these joss sticks and these statues—I look at them and I thought, "They worship idols, how terrible! Aren't these dumb?" That was my impression of Buddhism as a youngster. So in my environment, there was nothing to make me a Buddhist. Why am I a Buddhist then? Why did I decide to become a nun? It wasn't due to the genes, and it wasn't my environment this life.

So that opens my mind to begin to think that perhaps, there was something from previous lives. Perhaps there was some familiarity, there was some inclination, there was some contact that happened before this life, so that this lifetime, somehow, my mind was interested in it. I can't see my past lives to know what happened, and I have no memory of them at all. But you can start to see that maybe, this whole

idea of rebirth could explain that. And maybe, this whole idea of karma could explain what is in fact my own experience this lifetime. So our mind begins to stretch a little bit.

You said, “These are extremely obscure phenomena. We can’t prove them to ourselves. We don’t know them. Why should we take anybody else’s belief, especially the Buddha’s, because who is this guy?” Then, look in your life, and see how many people you’ve trusted. When you get in an airplane to go somewhere, you don’t know for sure the guy was licensed. You don’t know if he’s not drunk. There’s an incredible amount of trust when you get on the airplane.

We use electricity. Do we understand how it works? Every new thing that scientists come up with, it is like God’s latest revelation, we’re sure it’s true. The fact that next year, they do a different experiment that changes the whole thing, doesn’t make us doubt at all. We completely go along. We believe. We read something in the newspapers, we believe that what the journalists interpreted is correct. We go through our life with an incredible amount of trust and belief, most of which is in beings who are not fully enlightened.

Be realistic about being in control

We like to be in control, we like to believe that what we perceive is real. We like to believe that our opinions are true. We like to feel this whole sense of control and security. And so we go through our life trying to be in control, trying to be secure, trying to

prove that everything we think about is right. And yet, if we look at our lives, we can see that that whole endeavor just brings us all of our problems. Because all of our conflicts with other people mostly center around our wanting to convince them that our way of seeing the situation is the right way. Whoever we're in conflict with, they're seeing the situation incorrectly. If they'd only change their mind and see it as we do, and change their behavior, we'd all live happily ever after. And as my friend who does conflict mediation says, he gets all the nice, agreeable, flexible people who come to his courses, and all the other idiots who were stubborn—they stay away! [Laughter.] He always marvels, "Isn't that interesting?"

When we really start to look, to question things, it can be a tremendous shaking up of our world view. If we come to the basic question of whether everything is completely wonderful in my life now, if we just ask ourselves that question—do I have everlasting happiness at this moment? The answer is very clearly, 'No'. We can see that. Besides having to deal with all those other obnoxious people, and the society and the war and the pollution, just the fact that we're going to get old and sick and die is not something we would choose to do on our holiday. Just having to face that is not a hunky-dory situation. And if we look at that, and say, "Hold on. I'm in this situation. This is what's going to happen. Is it really wonderful? Is this all I'm capable of in my life? Is this what I want to keep experiencing?" Then we may begin to say, "Hold on. No. There's got to be another way to live. There's got to be a way out of this mess." We begin to think, "Well, maybe if I change my way of thinking about

things, I could also change what my experiences are.” That gives us a little bit of encouragement to start to re-examine our opinions and beliefs, because we begin to see that our current opinions and beliefs just keep us stuck in this situation that is not 100% fantastic. And then the whole thing about control. We like to have control. We feel we’re in control. But if we ask ourselves, how much in our lives do we control? We can’t control the traffic on the highway. We can’t control the weather. We can’t control the economy. We can’t control the minds of the people we live with. We can’t control all the functions of our own body. We can’t control the aging process. We can’t even control our minds when we sit to do the breathing meditation for ten minutes. It’s also a fantasy to think that we’re in control, because if we really open our eyes, we’re not in control. The point is, we can become in control. There is hope. [Laughter.] Or what we can also do, is we can relax into the fact that we’re not in control. Instead of battling reality, and making our lives this constant battle, we can just relax into it and accept what’s happening. But that involves a change in our ideas. That involves letting go of our opinions.

Of course we can still have aspirations. We still relate and change things and all. But we want to avoid this mind that approaches every situation with, “This has to be what I want it to be,” and when nothing is the way we want it to be, gets angry or disillusioned or discouraged.

This whole “should” mind. “There shouldn’t be wars.” Why shouldn’t there be wars? As long as we have attachment, anger and ignorance, why shouldn’t

there be wars? This is the reality of the situation. But we get all hung up and insist, “There shouldn’t be wars!” Instead of dealing with the attachment, anger and ignorance, we’re busy battling the reality of the war. And we get overwhelmed by it.

On the specific issue of control during meditation. When you’re doing mindfulness meditation, just be aware of our own lack of control and relax with it instead of fighting it. Become aware of what’s happening in each present moment without trying to put the blueprint of what we want it to be on top of it.

[Audience:] How solid does our ‘determination to be free’ have to be for us to persist in the practice?

It’s like all the other understandings of the path. It’s something that grows on us. It’s like any of the topics we understand. When we first hear them, we understand it. Then we go deeper and we think about it more. We hear about it again. And we think about it again. And it keeps growing and growing and growing. The determination to be free—it probably starts out with most of us being fairly intellectual about it, but as we keep coming back to it, and we keep understanding our own situation better and our own potential better, then the determination to be free automatically grows. At one point in the path, they say it becomes spontaneous, day and night. You don’t even need to cultivate it anymore. But however much we have of it now, it can act as a motivation to keep practicing, and that enables us to develop that determination more, practice more, and so on.

[Audience:] If we can't change old age, sickness and death, why even think about them? Why don't we just accept them and go on with our life instead of trying to make a determination to be free from them?

Well, on this issue we actually need two minds. There're two minds that come together. We need to accept something, but we can accept something and try and change it at the same time. In other words, accepting it means that we accept that this is reality. This is what's happening. But that doesn't mean that we have to accept it as a pre-determined, forever and ever thing, when it's actually within our power to control the causes and conditions that produce it.

This is where we get confused in the West. We think that if you accept something, then you don't try and change it. It's like, "If I accept social injustice, then I won't do anything to try and remedy poverty, racism and sexism." So then we get into this thing of, "I won't accept it." And we get all self-righteous and morally indignant, angry at all these creeps who are racist and sexist and pollute the world, and who don't run the world as we think it should be run. The thing to do in that situation, is we have to accept, "OK, the world is like this. This is what's happening right now." That doesn't mean we need to get angry about it. That doesn't mean we need to continue to let it exist either. We have to accept that it is the present reality right now, but we can change the causes that are going to produce it in the future.

It's the same thing with aging, sickness and death. They are our reality, so we accept them. We're going to get wrinkles. We're going to die. We're going to get

sick. That's just our reality. That's the reality of having the present body that we have. But there is a possibility to do something about this in the future so we don't have to keep going through it.

If we could really accept just that one thing of aging, we could approach it seeing its benefits, and grow old gracefully. Similarly, if we look at the issue of our own death, which is what we're going to talk about next time, if we can accept the fact that we are going to die and be able to look at that reality and just come to terms with it, then we won't be so afraid of dying. Because we don't want to look at it, we pretend it doesn't exist. We color it and we make it beautiful and we ignore it and we build up so much garbage around it, but that's all a big mask for the very real fear that's sitting in our hearts because we won't accept it, because we won't look at it. So just being able to accept that we're going to die, then we can die and be perfectly happy.

OK. Shall we sit for a few minutes and digest everything? Try and think about what you heard in terms of your own life. Let it sink in. Make it part of your own being.