

LAMRIM TEACHINGS

VOLUME II

INITIAL SCOPE



Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Chodron

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Volume 2

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Cover design by Traci Thrasher

This ebook contains lightly-edited transcripts of teachings given by Venerable Thubten Chodron at Dharma Friendship Foundation, Seattle, from 1991 to 1992. They have been organized and formatted by Lai Wee Chiang.

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

Remembering Death

In the previous session, we talked about the preciousness of our human life. We talked about how to give meaning to our life in terms of seeking temporal goals like dying peacefully and having a good rebirth, and ultimate goals such as liberation and enlightenment. We also talked about how to make our lives meaningful moment to moment by transforming all the actions we do to help us generate love and compassion. And we talked about how rare this life was. It is difficult to get a precious human life because it's hard to create the causes for it. It is rare because there're so few human beings compared to other forms of beings. Through the analogy of the turtle, we can also see how difficult it is to get a precious human rebirth.

Seeing the rarity of a precious human life and the incredible things we can do with it persuade us to take the essence of our life. And the way to take the essence of our life is divided into three major levels.

The first level is the path that's in common with a person of the lowest level of motivation or the initial motivation. That person is somebody who is seeking a happy death and a good rebirth. They want to be free of confusion at the time of death. They want to be free of a painful rebirth. They want a good rebirth. To achieve these, they practice ethics.

The second level is that in common with a person

of the intermediate level of motivation where we seek to be free of all the confusions of any rebirth whatsoever. We want to get off the Ferris wheel. We want to attain liberation, so we generate the determination to be free from all of our confusion. To achieve these, we practice the three higher trainings—ethics, concentration and wisdom.

The highest level of motivation is developed gradually through the previous two levels, but we should have it in our mind as the final goal even when we are on the first two levels of motivation. We always have the aspiration to get to the final one, which is the wish to free others from all of their confusion. All sentient beings are trapped in this yo-yo of existence. A person of this level of motivation wants to attain full enlightenment in order to have all the capabilities and talents necessary to help others to be free of this trap most effectively. The method to do so is the practice of the six far-reaching attitudes and then the tantric path. So that's what we did in the last session. Hope people have been thinking about it since then ... please ...

Remembering Death to Motivate Our Practice

We're going to go back to the initial level of practice, that initial motivation, and go through that in more depth. The first topic is remembering death. And then we will talk about another 'favorite' topic of ours—lower realms. By thinking about these, it makes us more concerned about dying and being reborn. This will make us take an interest in getting some guides.

We then take refuge in the Triple Gem as a guide to help us through all this mess. The general guidance of the Triple Gem right off the bat is about karma. These are the four principal topics in this initial level of motivation—death and the lower realms to activate our interest in doing something, and taking refuge and observing karma to help us solve the problem. I'm trying to give you the general scope, and then slowly narrow it in so that you know where we are and how the topics fit together. This will help you understand things better.

When we start talking about death, the first thing we talk about is the disadvantages of not thinking about death and the advantages of thinking about it. Now you can guess why we begin with the disadvantages of not thinking about death and the advantages of thinking about it. This is because our usual reaction is: “Death? I don't want to think about it!” Isn't it? This is the thing that we least want to talk or think about in our lives, and yet it is the one thing that we definitely will do. The one certain thing that we have to go through is the thing we least want to face.

How our mind works is very interesting, isn't it? We want to ignore reality. But by not facing death and facing our own mortality, we are creating fear in our own mind. We are festering this fear. It's like the little kid who is afraid that there is an elephant in the room. Rather than turn on the light to check and see if there is an elephant, they just sit at the door and whimper and cry. That's the way our society often handles death. Rather than take it out and examine it—“Let's shine some light on it, let's look at it, let's look at

what's going on here"—we just keep it all in the dark and then remain terrified of it.

We make death a very fearful thing by refusing to think about it. But death need not be a terrifying thing. This is why it's very important to reflect on the disadvantages of not thinking about it and the advantages of thinking about it. We always think that if we think about death, it may happen. Well, even if we don't think about it, it is still going to happen.

I remember—and I suppose you have all had similar experiences—that when I was a kid and we drove by a cemetery, I asked: “Mommy, Daddy what's this?” And they said, “What's what?” [Laughter.] And when you finally convince them that there's something unusual there, they go: “That's where people are when they die.” “Well, what is dying?” “Oh, we have to make a right turn here ...” [Laughter.] The most we can get out of them is that people go to sleep for a long time.

From the time we're kids, we definitely get the idea that death is something you don't ask or think about. It just sits there and makes for a lot of anxiety and tension. In our society, even when we do look at it, we try and cover it up. We embalm people to make them beautiful when they're dead, so that we don't even have to think that they're dead. We can actually think that they are sleeping for a long time because they look so beautiful.

I remember when one of my friends' mother died. She had Hodgkin's and so she was really wasted when she finally died. They embalmed her and everything. Then when people went up to see the body they said: “I haven't seen her look that good in a long time.” I

couldn't believe it! That's how we treat death. People are very concerned about it. They make good plans, like who their makeup artist is going to be when they're dead. They want to look beautiful in their casket. This is just indicative of our whole closed-mindedness towards the issue of death. It is also indicative of all the anxiety that goes on about it.

You look at the cemeteries. I don't even remember driving by a cemetery in Seattle—you have them very well hidden here. In Los Angeles, what they do is they make memorial parks out of them. Forest Lawn now has an art museum at the cemetery with copies of the Pieta and all these very famous artwork, so on Sunday afternoons Mom and Dad and the kids can go to the cemetery and look at the artwork. Just completely blocking out death again. You go to see the artwork in the museum.

I remember reading a newspaper article a few years ago. There was one man whose mother was dying. He didn't have enough money to freeze all of her, so they only froze her head, with the idea that you can defrost her head later, attach it to another body and she'll be able to come back to life. Well, the difficulty was, they did it but then they lost her head. It's just so incredible! This is just indicative of the extent to which we deny death. Yet, death is a natural process that happens to everybody.

The Dharma way of thinking about death is to face it honestly. Instead of letting the fear of death fester in the closet, we're going to take it out and look at it. It probably won't be as bad as you think it's going to be, once you take it out and look at it. The purpose of doing this is to get us in touch with reality. By doing

that, it gives us more energy to do our Dharma practice. Understanding death gives us a framework with which to look at our life and appreciate it and take full advantage of the opportunities that we have in this life.

I'll give you a simple example from my own experience. I was once studying a text in India. It had eight chapters in it, a good number of which are about impermanence. Every afternoon Geshela taught us about death and impermanence and we spent a long time on this text. Geshela would talk about death for two hours. I'd listen to death for two hours, go back to my room and meditate on it. I tell you, those months when we were doing that, my mind was so peaceful and calm. It was just amazing. Why? Because when we remember our own mortality, it helps us figure out what is important in our life and what is not important.

It is a very good yardstick to take out when we get confused. You know how we get confused and anxious sometimes and we don't know what to do. If we just think: "Well, at the time I'm dying and leaving this life and going on to my next rebirth, looking back at this, what would have been the best thing to do?"

This is especially good when somebody is bugging you and you're angry at them. You think: "Well, when I die and I look back on this, do I want to be thinking about how I got so angry and irritated at this thing this person did? Is this really going to be important to me at the time I die? Or is this small insult (or whatever it was) really a trivial thing? Why put so much mental energy into it, if at the time of death it's not going to have any relevance to me at all?"

Likewise, with all the things that we worry about so much, if we think: “Well, at the time of death, is all this worry going to do me any good?” And then we really see: “No! Who needs this worry? Who needs to be so concerned about all this stuff?”

So you see, when we think about our life from the perspective of death, all of the things that usually make us so anxious cease to be important. Then automatically our mind gets more peaceful. So, this is one of the ways that we can use death to enrich the quality of our life. That’s the whole purpose why the Buddha talked about death, transience and impermanence.

Six Disadvantages of Not Remembering Death

We’re going to go into the 6 disadvantages of not remembering death. This is a very interesting section.

1. IF WE DON’T THINK ABOUT DEATH, WE DON’T REMEMBER THE DHARMA

The first disadvantage is that we don’t remember the Dharma. In other words, we are not mindful of the Dharma if we don’t think of death. We can see this for ourselves. When we don’t remember our own death, who needs the Dharma? Let’s go out and have a good time! Right?

Look at how most of our society lives. Nobody thinks about death. People pretend it doesn’t exist. The whole purpose of life becomes to have as much pleasure as you can possibly have. People run from

one pleasure to another in their attempt to be happy.

Now in terms of us personally, when we don't think about death, we don't think about the Dharma at all. We're too busy running around looking for our worldly pleasures, for our happiness right now. Sometimes people come to me and say: "You know, I just can't get myself to sit down on the meditation cushion," or "My Dharma practice isn't going well." Well, one of the reasons is that we don't think about the fact that we're going to leave this life. Without thinking about that fact, we don't think about the necessity of the Dharma, so of course we don't sit down and practice.

2. EVEN IF WE'RE MINDFUL OF THE DHARMA, WE WON'T PRACTICE IT

The second disadvantage is that even if we do remember the Dharma, we don't practice it if we don't think about death. We procrastinate. We know this mind very well: "Oh, I'll do Dharma later. I have my career to think about. I have my kids to think about. I have to earn a certain amount of money and get some money in the bank for my old age. I have all these other things to do, so Dharma will come later." "First, I want to get my career, my family, and everything else going. Then when I'm old and I have nothing to do, I'll practice the Dharma." Or "Gee, I don't know. I don't feel like doing anything. I'll do it next time. I don't feel like going to teachings. I'll go to teachings next time. I don't want to go to this retreat. I'll go to the next retreat."

That's the *mañana* mind. *Mañana, mañana ...* I'll

do it later. This is the way we very often are about our Dharma practice. After I sit here and nag you and pester you so much about doing your practice, you finally go: “Well, OK, I’ll try and get up tomorrow morning.” And then the alarm clock goes off in the morning and you think: “Oh, I’ll just go back to sleep, I’ll do my practice in the evening.”

So we just procrastinate. We don’t feel any urgency about our practice. This is because we don’t remember our own transience. We don’t remember that our life ends and that once this time is under the bridge, like water under the bridge, it is no more. So, for those of you who have this kind of procrastinating mind, and you find it disturbing, one of the antidotes is to spend more time thinking about transience. It invigorates you to practice.

3. EVEN IF WE PRACTICE, WE DON’T DO IT PURELY

The next disadvantage is even if we practice, we don’t do it purely because our mind is concerned with worldly things. I’m just mentioning this one right now. I will go through all six disadvantages and then come back and explain this one in depth.

4. EVEN IF WE REMEMBER THE DHARMA, WE DON’T PRACTICE IT CONSISTENTLY

The fourth disadvantage is that even if we remember the Dharma, we’ll lose the determination to practice it earnestly at all times. Our practice lacks intensity,

strength and consistency.

This explains why we rationalize so much: “Well, I meditated yesterday and I really don’t want to push myself too much. I think this morning I’ll take it easy.” This explains why we have this on-off mind about Dharma. We’ll do it for a while and then we get carried away and start doing other things, and we lose interest. Then we come back to it and then we lose interest again.

You might have this feeling sometimes that you have gotten somewhere in your practice but you can never get beyond that. That’s usually because we don’t practice consistently. We’re on again, off again. Because we don’t think about death, we don’t do something every day.

Even if we do sit down to practice, we don’t have much “oomph” in our practice. It’s more like: “Well, I’ll say these prayers because I’ve got to say them and get them done.” But, saying the prayers like that is better than not saying them at all. I’m not saying don’t say them if you don’t do them perfectly. Say them, but if we sometimes feel like we’re not being completely honest when we’re doing all the prayers, it is often because we haven’t really been thinking enough about our own mortality, so we don’t have that “oomph” and that interest that thinking about death gives to our practice.

Another common scenario is we actually get ourselves to sit down, we start to meditate, we do the prayers, but we go: “Oh my knees hurt; my back hurts; well, I’ll get up and go watch TV instead.” We get ourselves to the cushion but we can’t stay there. Again, it happens because we’re not thinking about

death. If we think about death, these kinds of thoughts won't torment us so much.

5. BY NOT REMEMBERING DEATH, WE GET INVOLVED IN A LOT OF NEGATIVE ACTIONS

Another disadvantage of not remembering death is that we get really involved with negative actions. This is because if we don't think about death and future lives, we won't think about the causes that we're creating by the actions we're doing now. We tend to act in whatever way that seems best for the short term, without thinking of the long-term consequences. So, if it is convenient to lie, we lie because we're not thinking about death, we're not thinking about karma, we're not thinking about the problems that lying now will bring us in the future. And then of course, when we get more involved in negative actions, our mind gets more obscured, it becomes harder to practice and we get more confused. It becomes a vicious cycle.

6. AT THE TIME OF DEATH, WE DIE WITH A LOT OF REGRET

Another disadvantage is that when we reach the time of death, we die with a lot of regret. You go through your whole life doing whatever you're doing to get happiness. When you're dying, you look back on your life and you ask: "What have I done? How has my life been meaningful?" Let's say you're dying of cancer or heart disease. You look back on your life, see how you've spent it. "Well, I've spent it putting on big

fancy airs to make people think I'm important. I've spent it running around, playing sports, to get more trophies so that I can believe that I'm worthwhile. I spent it lying to get more money and to cover up all the devious things I've done." "I've spent my whole life getting angry at people, I've held grudges, and haven't talked to people in years and years."

I think it must be incredibly painful to get to that point. The mind gets so tight. There is very little time to relax it and make it peaceful before one dies. I think it must be terrifying to get to that point. I think by remembering death and keeping it in mind always, it makes us keep a very clear slate. If we remember death, we remember that it might come any time. Then we will want to have our emotional life in order. We don't want to have all these "yucked-up" relationships with hard feelings and belligerence and grudges. We don't want to have all the remorse and regret and guilt. If we maintain an awareness of death, then we can clean out a lot of this emotional baggage that we often sit with for decades in our life that just lead to so much confusion at death. That actually makes our lives more peaceful now as well.

The Eight Worldly Concerns

Now let's go back to the third disadvantage of not remembering death: even if we practice, we won't do so purely. This means that if we don't think about death, then even if we practice the Dharma, our practice gets very mixed in with worldly things.

For example, we practice the Dharma because we

want to be famous. Maybe you don't want to have your name in the Seattle Times but you want everybody to look and say: "Wow! That person's such a good meditator. They have done so much retreat and sit in perfect position, immovable." We get some big ego thrill from that.

Or we practice Dharma because we want offerings, we want to have a good reputation, we want people to admire us and think that we're special. Our mind gets mixed up in all sorts of very mucky motivations all in the name of Dharma practice.

We can see this so often. Once we get into the Dharma, we take our usual trips and practice them in the Dharma circles instead of just in our office. So, instead of competing with our colleagues for a promotion, we compete with the other Dharma students—who can sit the longest, who can talk to His Holiness first, who can be the "in" person in the Dharma group and have the most power. We get jealous of each other. We generate a lot of attachment: "I want a big fancy altar! Here're my Dharma books. Here's a list of all the initiations I've taken and all the great Lamas I know." Our attachment, our desire to be special, to be renowned, comes up all over the Dharma scene.

Our anger comes up too. We get angry at our Dharma brothers and sisters: "Oh, that guy's just out for power! That guy's really on a control trip!" [grumble, grumble] We sit and quarrel and fight. You go to any meeting of a Dharma center and you'll see. I'm joking—half of it. [Laughter.]

These happen because we're trying to practice the Dharma but we're not doing it purely. Our worldly

motivations are getting mixed in because we aren't thinking about our own mortality. We lose the purity of our practice.

Specifically, there're eight worldly concerns that really distract us from our practice. These eight worldly concerns are the demarcation line between what worldly action is and what Dharma action is. This is an incredibly important point. Dharma action is not saying prayers and looking holy and all this kind of stuff. Dharma action is what our mind is doing, whether our mind is free of these eight worldly concerns or not. There's one story I love that the Tibetans tell in this regard.

The Tibetans have many stupas and relic monuments, and everybody walks around these relic monuments. Grandpa and grandma go for their daily walk around the relic monuments and they chant: "Om Mani Padme Hum, Om Mani Padme Hum ...". Then they talk to each other and they gossip about the neighbors. Then they go: "Om Mani Padme Hum, Om Mani Padme Hum ...". And then they gossip a little bit more and they chant a few more "Om Mani Padme Hum's."

There's one man who decided that he was going to practice the Dharma. So he started doing circumambulations. His teacher came by and said: "Oh, it's very good you're circumambulating the stupa but it would be better if you practice the Dharma."

So he figured: "I'll prostrate to the stupa." The next day he was out there prostrating. He was prostrating up and down and up and down, perspiring profusely. Then his teacher came by and he said, "Oh,

it's very good you're prostrating, but it'll be better if you practice the Dharma."

Hmmm? So, he thought, "Well, okay, I'll try something else." The next day he was out there reading his Dharma text. The Tibetans do it out loud when they read their Dharma text, so he was reciting it out loud and thought he was doing something holy. Again his teacher came by and said, "Oh, it's very good you're reading the Sutras but it'll be better if you'd practice the Dharma."

By this time, the guy was at his wits' end. "Am I not practicing the Dharma? I was circumambulating. I was prostrating. I'm reading the Buddha's words. What do you mean by 'practice the Dharma'?" And his teacher said, "Transform your mind."

In other words, it is not the external things. It's the mind, the mental state that's doing the external things that determines whether one is practicing the Dharma. We can never judge whether an action is Dharma or not Dharma from the action itself. We have to look at the mind that's doing it.

This is why Buddhism emphasizes the motivation over and over again. In this way we cut out all the hypocrisy. If we're not mindful of our motivation and we think being religious means doing all these external things, then we get really lost. We may be doing something else externally, but if we have the same old mind, we're still not transforming.

This is a very important point to look at. To always be very aware and question ourselves: "Why am I practicing? Why am I doing this?" Like I've said, we bring so much of our old behavior patterns into the Dharma. If we're not aware of our motivation, it all

comes up: “I’m doing all this great studying because I want to be a very famous scholar. I’m doing all this meditation because I want to be able to sit at the front of the room and have everybody look up to me and praise me and think I’m holy. I’m doing all this service in the Dharma community and in the hospices and food banks because I want approval. I want people to think I’m good. I want some praise.” That is why we can’t look at the external thing we’re doing. We have to look at the internal mind that’s doing it.

I remember one time doing Nyung Nay and thinking that just doing the Nyung Nay practice itself wasn’t necessarily a Dharma activity, because somebody could do Nyung Nay in order to get out of doing all the work at the monastery. I was living at a monastery in Nepal at that time. To get food, it was a whole day affair to go grocery shopping. You had to walk down, take a minibus, fight your way through the cows and garbage in Kathmandu, get your groceries, bring them back on the minibus where you’re packed in like sardines, and walk up the hill for 45 minutes. If you want to get out of doing this kind of work for the monastery, do Nyung Nay. So I was thinking that for some people, doing Nyung Nay could be an incredible escape from doing work.

For other people, not doing Nyung Nay could be an incredible escape from practicing Dharma: “What?! Go a whole day without eating? No way am I going to do that! Do all these prostrations. Get so exhausted. Uh, uh, I might get tired out. I’d better do all my work and chores in the monastery. I’ll let all these other people do Nyung Nay.”

Therefore doing Nyung Nay or not doing it is not

the question. It's why someone does it or doesn't do it, because it can be an excuse doing it, and it can also be an excuse not doing it. We don't know what somebody else is thinking, but we can look at our own mind. And this is really what is most important. Always asking ourselves: "Why am I doing what I'm doing? What is it I'm really seeking to get from what I'm doing?" This is what differentiates a Dharma action from a worldly action.

A worldly action is one that is motivated by concern for the happiness of this life: "My happiness now. My pleasure now." This life's happiness. That's a worldly motivation.

Now we might say, "What's wrong with a worldly motivation?" Well, nothing's particularly wrong with it, but having a worldly motivation is not a particularly human characteristic. Animals also care about "My happiness now." Animals are also looking out for their food and their shelter and their happiness. If we spend our whole life as human beings, just looking out for the happiness of this life, without thinking beyond our own welfare, we're actually thinking very similarly to animals. Of course, we might think about cars and sirloin steaks and VCRs, while animals just think about a good dog bone and a piece of cardboard to sleep on. The object is different, but this isn't important; the attitude is very similar. Most people and most animals want "My happiness now, my pleasure now." And so having that attitude of being concerned with our own worldly gain and comfort isn't a distinctively human attitude.

The eight worldly concerns refer to our attitude of being attached to the happiness of this life. More

specifically, there are eight ways in which the attachment to the happiness of this life manifests. This is a very good framework with which to look at our own life and our motivations, to constantly check up why we're doing things, and if any of these eight worldly concerns are involved in it.

When Lama Zopa Rinpoche, one of my teachers, speaks about the eight worldly concerns, he'll go on and on, day after day. Because they're really important. There're four pairs and each pair involves an attachment and an aversion to a specific thing. They are:

1. Attachment to receiving material things and aversion to not receiving material things or losing what we have.
2. Attachment to praise and aversion to blame.
3. Attachment to having a good reputation and aversion to having a bad one.
4. Attachment to pleasures that come through our five senses and aversion to unpleasant things that we experience through our five senses.

Let's go back and look at these more in depth. As you're doing these, think within the framework of these questions—Which ones do we have? Are there advantages? Are there disadvantages? What are the disadvantages and what can we do about them?

FIRST PAIR: ATTACHMENT TO RECEIVING MATERIAL THINGS/ AVERSION TO NOT RECEIVING MATERIAL THINGS OR LOSING WHAT WE HAVE

The first worldly concern is attachment to material things. We like to possess stuff. We want material things. We want more things. No matter how many clothes we have, we'd always go out and buy more clothes. No matter how many shoes we have, we'd go out and buy more. We have one house but we want to get another house. Or we want to go on vacation. So, we're very attached to getting money and getting material things.

The material things, in and of themselves, are not the problem. There's nothing wrong with having material things. It's the mind of attachment to them, the mind of clinging that is undesirable. "I've got to have these things to be happy." "I've got to have these things to consider myself worthwhile or consider myself successful." Or "I've got to have these things to be able to face the world and present myself to the world." Or "I've got to have these things just to feel happy."

We always want more and we always want better, no matter how much we have. Our economy is built around this first worldly Dharma. We're encouraged to have it with the advertising. We're encouraged to want and to crave and to get attached to things. We all have different things that we're attached to. Our mind can get attached to anything and everything. You give it the opportunity, it will stick to something.

The other worldly concern in the first pair is aversion to separating from the material things or aversion to not getting things. We're encouraged to be very miserly. We do not want to give our things away or share them with others, being very tight with our stuff.

You know how it is sometimes when we are trying to get rid of things. It's so painful to separate ourselves from our possessions. It's like pulling out teeth. Look how hard it is for us to give things away, to throw things out. We feel like we're losing something. Even just to give a dollar away to a charity, is like: "If I give it away I won't have it". We get very tight and it creates so much anxiety in us.

We also have aversion to not getting things. Just think of how many people you're going to get mad at if they don't give you Christmas presents. Some people get very upset: "So and so didn't send me a Christmas card!" "So and so didn't give me a Christmas present!" "My husband/wife forgot the anniversary! He didn't give me a present! This is terrible!" So we get very upset when we don't get things—we don't get the raise, we don't get the extra money, the economy goes bad and our money isn't worth as much. Some people even kill themselves when the stock market goes down. It's all because of this clinging to material things and aversion to not having them.

[Audience: inaudible]

You're asking if the attachment and aversion are due to culture? Well, the Buddha gave these teachings twenty-five hundred years ago in ancient India, so it's not just the society. We can't get out of it that easily by blaming the society. Our society definitely develops and aggravates this tendency, but this basic thing is there in all societies. It's the mind.

The society is a reflection of our different minds

but the basic problem is in the mind because if it's just the society, then you could say, "Well, these third world countries, they don't have the attachment to material things and aversion to not getting it." I tell you they have just as much attachment. But they're attached to different things. They're not attached to sirloin steaks; they're attached to a bowl of rice. They're not attached to a new Mercedes; they're attached to a plot of land or an ox-cart. It isn't so much the object; it's the mind that gets stuck on the object. Like I said, we can get attached to anything.

Though our culture definitely encourages this, we can't blame it on the culture. If we say, "Well, I'm only attached because the society says so," that's giving our responsibility to somebody else. We don't have to be attached. The society can tell you to buy a certain laundry soap but that doesn't mean you have to in order to be a successful person. You still have a choice. The thing is, we have a choice in what we value in our life.

If we don't exercise our choice and get so overwhelmed by the peer pressure and the advertisements and the societal pressure, then actually we're very involved with another worldly Dharma, which is attachment to having a good reputation. "I need all these material things so that people think well of me." "I need these things so that I fit in. Otherwise I'm going to be ostracized, or otherwise people might think I'm a creep." Again it's just our mind which gets so tangled up from the craving for material things, for praise, for reputation and for sense pleasure that we can't see our way through it sometimes. But it's not the fault of the society. We don't have to think in that

way just because the society does.

Our attachment to material things and aversion to not getting material things create tremendous confusion in our lives. Now don't get me wrong, this does not mean that we now have to give all our material possessions away. The problem is not with the material things. The Christmas tree is just sitting here; it's not a problem. If I'm attached to it, my attachment is the problem. The hundred dollar bill isn't the problem. My attachment to it is the problem. So, you can be completely broke, have no material possessions but have a lot of attachment for them. You can be very rich, have a lot of things but have no attachment for them. It all depends on your mind.

How our mind is, is reflected in how we relate to material things. If we have a lot of things and we hold on to them, there's a lot of attachment. If we have a lot of things and we give them away, then there is nothing wrong with having a lot of things, because there's no attachment in the mind. It's not saying that we all have to become ascetics. That's pretty extreme.

I remember one time when I was living in Nepal. It was after one of the courses where Lama Zopa Rinpoche went on and on about the eight worldly dharmas. Then one of the monks thought: "I'm so attached to my bed", so he took the bed out of his room and slept on a mat on the stone floor. Lama Yeshe walked in and asked: "Where's your bed?" The monk said: "I gave it away." Lama Yeshe said: "What are you? You're on some kind of Milarepa trip or something? Go get yourself a bed! Don't be extreme."

So, the idea isn't to give everything away and pretend you're Milarepa. The bed isn't the problem.

The house isn't the problem. Milarepa ate nettles. We may also eat nettles but we can be very attached to them. So it doesn't matter whether you're eating nettles or eating pizza. The problem is the attachment. This is what we have to look at.

On the other hand, there are things that give us a lot of problems because we're so attached to them. You know how we like to save little mementos of this and that. I remember when I was a kid, I saved my toothbrush from when I was 4 years old. All the sentimental things. All the knick knacks and family heirlooms. We can be attached to any kind of junk we want to. This mind of clinging and attachment—that's the difficulty.

We often give gifts to other people with a very impure motivation, for example, giving you a gift so that you'll like me. I'm giving you a gift so that every time you use it, you'll think about me. I'm giving this to you so you'll think how generous I am. Whenever you give a gift to your spiritual teacher, you have to be really mindful of why you're giving it. It's a challenge to give them with a pure motivation. Lama Zopa Rinpoche's really great. With Rinpoche, almost everything he gets, he turns around and gives away. You go in for your appointment with Rinpoche and you give him something. The next person goes in and takes it out, because Rinpoche has given it away.

I remember one time I spent weeks making him some book covers for his Tibetan texts. I got some brocade. There's no sewing machine, so I hand-sewed and stitched these beautiful book covers. I was so proud of myself. At my appointment with Rinpoche, I went in and gave him the set of book covers. After

that a Geshe came for a visit. Rinpoche gave the book covers away to the Geshe who walked out with them. I had to really check up: “Well, why did I give this?” Very often even when we give people gifts, it’s not with a completely pure motivation. As a result, when we give somebody something and they give it away, we get very offended. Isn’t it incredible? As if they don’t value us because they gave that thing away. If we’ve really given it, it no longer belongs to us. It belongs to the other person. They can do whatever they want. So we have to really check up our motivation for giving.

SECOND PAIR: ATTACHMENT TO PRAISE/ AVERSION TO BLAME

The next worldly concern is attachment to praise. This is the mind that loves to hear ourselves complimented. “You look so good. You look so nice. You have such a good figure. You’re so handsome. You’re so talented. You’re so sensitive. You’re so kind. You’re so brilliant. You’re really creative.” Whatever it is that we want to be identified with, we love it when other people acknowledges it. We feed off the nice words about ourselves. If we don’t get enough praise, we manipulate things in certain ways to make sure that we get the praise we want to hear. Like we’ll say: “Gee, I really messed up on that job.” Hint, hint: you’re supposed to tell me it’s really good. Or: “I really feel like I look terrible today.” Hint: you’re supposed to compliment me. We’ll do that kind of thing, kind of criticize ourselves in an attempt to get somebody else to say: “No, no, no, you’re not like

that ...”

Or sometimes, especially with people whom we're very close to, if they don't praise us enough or tell us enough nice sweet words, we get angry at them. And we get demanding with them: “You haven't told me you love me this week! You owe me some ‘I love you's’.” We get very attached to this kind of praise. And then we manipulate things to get the nice sweet words that we crave.

Conversely, we have a very strong phobia about any kind of criticism. “Criticism? Me? Are you kidding? I'm perfect. Criticism belongs to the other fellow!” When people tell us about our mistakes, even if it is a mistake that we actually made, we get mad at them. Even if we made the mistake, the other person's bad and wrong because they saw it. We get angry at them. Or we get angry at people because they mistakenly thought we made a mistake. We are so sensitive. We don't want to hear one slight word that might indicate that we're not God's gift to the world.

You can see in our interpersonal relationships how complicated relationships get because of our craving for sweet words, praise, compliments and encouragement and our aversion to hearing any kind of unpleasant words, feedback we don't want to hear, blame and criticism. We can make so many examples in our life, and see how much problem we get into because of them. Somebody criticizes us, then we get angry and we speak harshly to them. Or we go and divide their relationship with somebody else. We bad-mouth them to somebody else, to split them up. Or we make up some lies just to get even at this person who harmed us. We sit and gossip for hours and hours

about all these horrible people who don't see how wonderful we are. We get so confused and create so much negative karma because of this very strong attachment to praise and aversion to blame.

Learning to evaluate ourselves

I think the real underlying thing that this rests on is that we don't have the ability to evaluate ourselves. We do not look at our own behavior and evaluate ourselves with a clear mind. As a result, we get so attached to hearing nice words about ourselves. If we don't evaluate ourselves with a clear mind and see what our good qualities are and what we need to improve on, then we usually go through life with the feeling of: "I'm not very worthwhile." We have low self-esteem. Because we don't believe in ourselves, because we can't look at our own behavior and our own mind and recognize what our own talents are, we need other people's praises and kind words to build up our own confidence. We need other people to tell us what those things are. We think that if other people tell us we have those qualities, then we must have them and we must be good people.

Conversely, if they tell us that we have bungled something, that we're awful, then we must really be awful. We completely believe what other people say about us. That's why we get so mad when they tell us unpleasant things. If we didn't really believe what they said about us, why get mad at them? If we had the ability to evaluate ourselves correctly, then why get mad if somebody else sees a fault that we know we have? We know we have it, what's wrong with

admitting that we have it? Everybody else sees it. It's like somebody telling you that you have a nose on your face. It's there. Everybody sees it. "Yeah, I made that mistake." Why get so mad when other people say it? We get so mad because we don't do that kind of internal evaluation to look at our own weaknesses.

Similarly if somebody blames us for something we didn't do or they exaggerate what we did do, we get upset and belligerent. Why be upset if we didn't do it? Again, if we were able to look at ourselves, and we knew our own reality, if somebody's accusing us of something that isn't our problem, then why be upset about it? We get upset only because we're attached to what other people say, we're attached to what they think. It's only because we're out of touch with ourselves that we completely give all this power to other people's words.

So what is the real antidote to the attachment to praise and aversion to blame? What I recommend is, in the evening meditation, look at the day and see what went well and what needs to be improved. Look at our own lives in a very honest way without being overly critical, without our judgmental "I'm a piece of garbage" mind, and without our proud, arrogant mind. But just look: "What went well today? What did I do well?" And feel happy about it. Not to get proud, but to rejoice and acknowledge that the quality's there.

Conversely, when we messed up, let's acknowledge it. It's not so bad. It's not such a catastrophe. It can be purified. It can be amended in some way. If we do that, then we're not going to give the power of our self-respect and self-confidence to other people. We're going to retain it for ourselves

because we'll be able to look at ourselves accurately. That would solve a whole lot of problems. If we constantly rely upon what other people say about us and think it's true, we're going to get awfully confused.

I don't know about you, but I had a few very clear incidents in my life where within a very short period of time, I've gotten completely opposite feedback from different people. And if I believed everything both people told me, I wouldn't know who I was anymore. I remember one time one person came up to me and said: "You're such a horrible nun. You keep your vows really loose and lax and you're just letting everything go. You're a very bad example." And then just fifteen minutes later, somebody else came up and said: "You're so strict. Why don't you relax? You're so uptight about every little detail in your vows, it's driving me nuts."

If I were to completely believe whatever anybody else said, I'd be totally confused. But I was so glad that incident happened, because it pointed out to me how other peoples' opinions of me are simply that—opinions. Whether I'm too strict, whether I'm too loose, only I can determine that. If we don't look at ourselves and evaluate ourselves, there is no way to be in touch. And then we will have all this attachment and aversion, depending upon what other people say.

But if we can look at ourselves, then if somebody comes along and tells us we made this mistake, we can check up and say: "You're right, I did. Thank you for pointing that out." And we don't feel like we're losing any of our ego territory because we admit our mistakes. So what if we made a mistake? As long as

we have the Buddha nature, underneath we have this very firm foundation for confidence. So what's so wrong about admitting our mistakes?

This is something we need to do some in-depth meditation on, folks. And we need to do it repeatedly, because this one of praise and blame is a very deep-rooted one.

THIRD PAIR: ATTACHMENT TO HAVING A GOOD REPUTATION/ AVERSION TO HAVING A BAD ONE

The next pair is attachment to reputation and aversion to a bad one. This pair is slightly different from praise and blame. Praise and blame refer to the nice, ego-pleasing, pleasant words said directly to us. Reputation refers to the opinion that a large group of people have of us. For example, whatever field of work we're in, we want everybody in our field to think that we're good. We want to be known as competent, reliable, talented and marvelous. Whatever it is—our career, our hobbies—we're all attached to having a good reputation in that field. One person wants to have a reputation as a good guitar player. Another person as a good skier. Another person as a good fence builder.

Again the problem lies not with the reputation, but with our attachment to the reputation. We want everybody in that big group to know how good we are. We want to have a good reputation in our family. We want the family to know that we're successful. We want to prove ourselves to the family. We can also have such an attachment in a Dharma group—we

want everybody in the group to think we're wonderful. "I want to be known as the best Dharma teacher, so be sure and tell everybody!"

Conversely, whenever we hear that a bunch of people are talking behind our backs and spreading bad rumors about us, we go completely berserk: "My reputation! They're all criticizing me! Nobody will respect me. Nobody will listen to me. Nobody will come to me for business. What's going to happen to me?" You can see the kind of turmoil that attachment to reputation creates in our life. It also explains why when we go into a room, we have a very difficult time listening to other people; we're too busy presenting them with the image that we want them to have of us.

We have this image that we want to create in the public eye. When we go to meet strangers, we pull out our business card: "I am Director of this, Chairperson of this, Head this, dah, dah, dah. And I do these hobbies." Especially when we meet new people—we almost try and package ourselves and sell ourselves. Here's my personality. Here's how you're supposed to think of me. Don't you like me? We're very attached to this kind of reputation. If the person is completely blasé about all of our great qualities, we feel very offended. If they cut us off or are bored by our exposé, we feel very offended. And we are completely uninterested in what they have to say. We can't listen to them; we are too busy creating our own good reputation.

FOURTH PAIR: ATTACHMENT TO SENSUAL PLEASURES/ AVERSION TO UNPLEASANT THINGS

The last set is attachment to the pleasures of our senses and aversion to unpleasant things. This is attachment to any kind of pleasure that comes to our senses.

For example, with seeing, we always want to see beautiful things. We want to have beautiful paintings in our household. We want to have a beautiful house. When we go on vacation, we want to stay in a beautiful place. We want to have clothes with beautiful colors. We want to have a car with a beautiful color. We don't want to see ugly things. We get very upset when we have to see ugly things. So we spend all of our time trying to see beautiful things and avoid all the ugly things that we don't want to see.

Then we're attached to sounds. We want to hear beautiful music. We want to hear lots of beautiful music. Beautiful sounds. Anything beautiful to the ear. We don't want to hear anything awful to the ear, like screeching of the brakes, or nails on the blackboard, or the news at 6 o'clock. Again, we spend our time running around, trying to get beautiful sounds and trying to get away from the ugly ones.

Smells. We want to smell beautiful things—perfume, good food, or whatever it is you want to smell. We don't want to smell the bad things. We have sprays.

We want to have nice things to eat. We are very attached to food. This is one of our big ones. I remember being way up in the Himalayas in Lawudo, at 14,000 feet, and this Italian guy was talking about pizza. All there were, were potatoes and tsampas and he was day-dreaming about pizza!

Have you ever stopped to consider how much time

we spend talking about food? This is really indicative of the amount of attachment we have for it. We talk about all the good places to eat. We talk about good recipes and what we ate at certain places. We talk about what we want to eat. We go out to a restaurant and spend half an hour discussing everything on the menu so as to ensure we pick the best food from the whole menu. And then of course when it comes and it isn't as good as we want, we get very upset. "Waiter, waiter, come here, come here!" We talk in a loud voice and everybody in the restaurant turns around to stare. "This is overcooked! This is not what it's supposed to be!" And we get very offensive. "Take it back! Make me something else!"

Or somebody or whoever we live with cooked us dinner. "What? This stuff again! Why don't you cook something else, Mabel?" [Laughter.] We're so attached to food. All the time. We eat and then we want to go have ice-cream and chocolate or whatever it is that we're attached to. We are so attached to good things to eat. And we have so much aversion to eating bad things.

When you go to India, these attachments become very, very clear. Instead of nice clean streets, there're dirty streets and there're beggars. There's pollution in the air and the smell of pee pee and excrement on the streets. Your hotel room is in this dull, green, cracked paint color. Everything's old and rotten and falling apart. You can't get the good food you want. People really freak out when they go to India, and they come running back to America and go straight to McDonald's! Our attachment becomes really evident. We get incredibly hostile and anxious when we don't

have the sense pleasures that we like, things we're attached to and things we cling to.

We want nice soft touches. We want to have beautiful things to touch. We want to be warm enough. We don't want to be cold but we want to be cool enough; we don't want to be hot. So much time is spent just to make sure that our body experiences everything that is most marvelous. You enjoy yourself in this hot tub or that sauna, or some swimming pool. We spend our precious human life that we can use to attain liberation and enlightenment, running after sense pleasures.

DISADVANTAGES OF THE EIGHT WORLDLY CONCERNS

One of the chief disadvantages of these eight worldly concerns is that we totally waste our time. We can be using this life to get in touch with our Buddha potential and make it grow. We can use it to develop our internal peace, loving-kindness, openness, receptivity and compassion. Instead of using our time to develop these qualities, we use it to get material things. We use it to make sure that we are getting enough praise, protecting our reputation, looking for nice things to eat, to see or to hear. We completely waste our time.

In addition, by seeking all these things that we like, or running away from things we don't like, we create a lot of negative karma. If you look at the reasons for doing the ten destructive actions, they all relate to these eight worldly concerns. Why do we steal things? Because of attachment to material stuff or attachment

to reputation. Why is there unwise sexual behavior? Attachment to tactile sensation. Or attachment to reputation, attachment to praise. Why do we speak harsh words? Because somebody offended our reputation or somebody didn't give us the material we need or somebody stole from us or somebody doesn't appreciate us. Or somebody burnt the food.

The disadvantages from the Dharma point of view of engaging in the eight worldly concerns become very clear. Not only do they make us very confused and unhappy this lifetime, they make us create the negative karma to wind up with more problems in our future lives. Also, they completely obscure us from utilizing our beautiful, inner human potential and beauty. Therefore the demarcation line between a worldly action and a Dharma action is whether an action is done motivated by one of these eight worldly dharmas or eight worldly concerns or not.

REVIEW

We did all this discussion under the topic of thinking about death because by thinking about death, it will give us a way of looking at our own life so that we can live more peacefully now, prepare for our future lives and realize our own potential. If we don't think about death, we will not think about the Dharma, so we will not think about using our potential or planning for future lives or doing anything spiritual. If we don't think about death, then even if we think about the Dharma, we have the *mañana* mentality: we procrastinate, we postpone our Dharma practice. Or even if we remember the Dharma, we don't do it

purely because our mind gets all confused with the eight worldly concerns. For example, we start being generous in order to get a good reputation.

If we don't think about death, then even if we practice the Dharma, our practice isn't consistent; it isn't intense; it isn't energetic. We're on again, off again. All our excuses and rationalizations overpower us and we create a lot of negative karma by acting destructively. And then at the time of death, we will have a lot of regret when we look back on our whole life and ask ourselves: "What was the meaning of my life? What was the purpose? What do I have that I can take with me?"

Whether we will have a lot of regret or not at the time of death depends on how we acted during our life: if we have been very involved especially with attachment to the happiness of this life, seeking material things, praise, reputation, sense pleasures; if we have been spending all of our time trying to get away from losing our material possessions, from being criticized, from having a bad reputation, or from experiencing anything unpleasant sensually. As long as we spend our time like that, then at the time we die, we're going to have a lot of regret, because what have we done with our human potential? Nothing. We may or may not have gotten all the pleasures we wanted but they are all over anyway. When we die, all the pleasures from the eight worldly concerns, all the pleasures from the happinesses that we get in this life are all like last night's dream.

When you wake up this morning, it doesn't really matter what you dreamt about last night, because it's over. Similarly we might have been completely

obsessed with somebody criticizing me yesterday: “How can they do this to me?” We get so upset because of this criticism. Or you might have gotten so entranced when somebody said: “I love you” and “You’re so beautiful” and “You’re so talented and creative.” But today, all that had happened yesterday is gone. They no longer exist. The pleasure, the pain and the aversion—they are like sand falling through your fingers. There’s nothing to show for it at the end of the day. Why get so upset, anxious and neurotic about all these attachments and aversions? Better to use our energy to transform our mind, i.e. to practice the Dharma.

Acquiring a good reputation to serve others

[Audience: inaudible]

You’re saying that to be a bodhisattva, to practice well and serve others, it is beneficial if others have a good opinion of you and think you’re reliable and trustworthy. You can’t really help others if they don’t trust you. Or it’ll be more difficult.

That’s very true. But there’s a difference between having a good reputation and being attached to having one. There’s a difference between having a bad reputation and finding it very disagreeable having one. The thing is that we want to act well. We want to act well first of all for our own karma.

Second of all if you’re practicing the bodhisattva path, if you sincerely care for others, you definitely want them to have a good opinion of you, not because you’re attached to them having a good opinion of you,

but because it helps them if they do. So it all depends completely on your motivation. You can have a good reputation and seek to act in a way that other people will think well of you, but not because you're attached to it.

Using meditation to check on our motivation

[Audience: inaudible]

Our meditation is the time when we can shine the mirror and ask ourselves why we are doing what we are doing. Sometimes it may not be clear. Sometimes we'll find that our motivation is mixed. We'll have a good motivation and a lousy one at the same time. Or we'll flip back and forth between the good one and the bad one. It's beneficial to notice that and then try and apply the techniques to free ourselves of the bad motivation and develop the beneficial one. And sometimes we won't even be able to look at our own behavior and know our motivation till years later. Sometimes we do something thinking we're doing it for a certain reason, but the next year we look back on it and say, "I was really pulling the wool over my own eyes." But that's OK. We don't need to get down on ourselves when that happens. But it is good to keep shining that mirror.

Importance of continually reflecting on death

[Audience: inaudible]

What you're saying is that you are very aware of

death at this time when a dear family member almost died. It really helped you to tune in very much more to that person, to your whole family, to your life. But when the crisis subsides, so does your awareness, and you're kind of back to the old habits.

The antidote to that is to continually reflect on transience and death. We're going to get into the 9-point death meditation, which is a very good way of maintaining that vivid feeling of the preciousness of our life.

Dealing with criticisms—how to be open to criticism and be able to put it in its place and how not to get overwhelmed by criticism which is not beneficial

[Audience: inaudible]

This is what I think. It'll be helpful to teach kids, from the time they are very young, and adults too, that every time we're criticized, let's just stop and reflect on our own behavior—did I do that? If I did it, maybe I have to say, “Yes, I did it,”—but is it all that horrible that I did it?

For example, my punctuation is terrible, but does that mean I am a horrible person? Just because my punctuation is terrible, does that mean I am a hopeless writer? No, it just means I need to do more work on my punctuation. You see, what we tend to do is, when we get this much criticism, we generalize it and start telling ourselves a whole other story, and create a whole self-identity on the basis of that amount of criticism.

I think this is really where the ability to evaluate things realistically comes in. So our punctuation is terrible, so our sentence structure is terrible, so our essays get all marked up with red pen—you should have seen what Steve did to “Open Heart, Clear Mind”: there was more red ink than black ink on the paper when it got done—but does that mean I’m a lousy writer? Does that mean that we’re horrible people? Does that mean that we’re beyond hope? Does that mean that we’re a failure and our family is never going to be pleased with us and that we can’t do anything right and that we’re a total catastrophe and that there’s no basis for any kind of self-respect, simply because our punctuation is wrong?

Sometimes, when people give criticism, they give it with this whole extra thing, but do we have to believe it?

**Importance of dealing with criticisms internally:
listen, learn from valid criticism and dismiss
unhelpful criticism**

There are two things that are going on: first of all, we have to know what to do with the criticism internally; then we have to know how to deal with the person who is criticizing externally. You need both those factors, because if you don’t deal with the effect of the criticism internally, but just try and stop the person who’s criticizing you, you’re still believing what they’re saying. You’re still internalizing it, only you’re letting all your anger out on them, or somewhere else: “It’s all the world’s fault, it’s all these people’s fault, because they’re criticizing me!” The real issue is I’m

believing what they're saying. So the big thing is first, we have to work with that part of us that hates ourselves. And then we need to think about how to deal with the other person who is doing whatever they're doing. But if we don't look at that part of ourselves that beats up on ourselves, then even if the other person stops criticizing us, we'll take over.

It isn't a thing of "Do I internalize the criticism or do I throw it away?" It's "Let's look at the information that the person is sharing. Let's see if there's anything I can learn from it." Suppose someone tells me that I'm a completely horrible nun, that I keep my vows poorly and that I'm a very bad example. I will look at my own behavior. I will go through my list of vows and I think, "Well, I keep them moderately well. Not perfectly. But I kind of do well within the boundaries. There is room for improvement but I'm not a total catastrophe." That's what's important, not what this person says about me.

We need to evaluate ourselves. If this criticism can be useful for us, if it describes something we're doing, then use it to improve ourselves. If it doesn't help us at all, then we don't need to take it to heart. We can just leave it by the way. But you can't do that unless you first look and see if what they said has any relevance. If we simply dismiss any criticism, then we've fallen into this thing of aversion to blame, aversion to criticism, and we become completely close-minded. Then nobody can give us any negative feedback at all, because we're so sensitive and easily offended. And we don't listen to anybody.

It's very interesting. I find that when people start criticizing me, my instant reaction is "Uuh!" And then

I kind of go, “OK, I’m going to sit here and listen to them. I’m going to open the doorway and let them criticize. Let them give me some information. They might tell me something that’s interesting and that’s useful for me. They’re also telling me a lot about themselves and how they’re seeing things. That will help me know how to relate to them better.” So that’s what I try and do.

Our usual reaction when we hear criticism is we turn away, or throw it back to the other person, yell, shut it out. We will do anything but hear it. I find that it’s easier if I just say, “Well, I’m just going to try and listen and see if there’s something that I can learn from in here. Even if there’s nothing I can learn from in here, this person is another living being and what they’re saying is giving me information about the problem that they’re having right now, which is something I do need to take into consideration.”

Somebody might be blaming me for bungling something. Or they may be blaming me because they think I’m arrogant and proud. I might look and say, “Well, I didn’t bungle that and I don’t really feel that I’m being arrogant and proud, but, I still have to pay attention to this person who feels I’m arrogant and proud. How can I talk to this person to help them understand that maybe they were looking at this situation and interpreting it this way, when actually I was meaning something else?” So, it’s still worthwhile to listen because if our relationship with that person is important, what they say is something that we listen to. It doesn’t mean we have to believe all of it.

Aversion to criticism & attachment to praise: two

sides of a coin

Somebody else's criticism can't hurt you. Their criticism is only words. Our internalization of the criticism, our believing it, is what harms us. The more sensitive we are to criticism, it's indicative of the more attached we are to praise. So, [referring to audience example of people who easily believe anything negative that somebody tells them and spend hours examining it] these people who are internalizing all those bad stuff they're getting, when the person who criticized them before then comes along and says, "Oh dear, you're so ravishing tonight!" then they're on Cloud Nine! These two opposites—attachment and aversion—go very much together. You can't say, "Let's get rid of the aversion to criticism, but hang on to the attachment to praise." As long as you have one, you're going to have the other.

Getting in touch with our human dignity

[In response to question on battered women and efforts to build up their self-confidence—is it attachment to praise if she listens to words like “we consider you important and you deserve better than being beaten up” and she says, “Yes, I am a good person, and I deserve better ...”]

I don't think that's attachment to praise. If she starts thinking, "I'm a good person. I deserve better. Who do these people think they are!?" then she's just going on another extreme. But if she looks, and she gets in touch with her basic human dignity and says, "Yes,

I'm a human being like every other human being. I don't need to beat up on myself, and I don't need to let other people beat up on me because I beat up on myself," that's positive.

So it's a thing of not just getting whoever it is who's beating the woman to stop, it's also getting her to stop hating herself at the same time. Developing a balanced sense of self-confidence—that's what it's all about. To get that balanced sense of self-confidence, you need to get rid of the attachment to the praise and the aversion to the blame, thinking, "I am a valuable human being. I'm alive. I have the Buddha nature. I have inner qualities. I have a precious human life. I have the basis to have a happy life and to do something useful for society." That's completely in tune with reality. Saying, "I am wonderful. I am fantastic. I have to have the best of everything. I have to be treated like royalty. Everybody has to appreciate me and tell me how wonderful I am,"—this kind of attitude is poison.

Having human dignity is very important. Being attached to an over-inflated sense of who we are is poison. But you see, we're not going to get the dignity from the society. We have to get it from in here. Because if we keep looking to other people for our dignity, we're giving our power away. And we're not going to get it. Because face it, if we don't believe in ourselves, the whole world could praise us and tell us how wonderful we are, and we will still beat up on ourselves. So it isn't the society ... of course we're influenced by society. But what I'm saying is if we want to do something with our life, we have to take the responsibility.

It's not an easy thing. This requires years of going over and breaking old habitual thought patterns, because we're all very well trained to beat up on ourselves. But the way to change that habit is not by getting praise from the outside and getting attached to it. The way to change that habit is by looking inside and getting in touch with that very valid sense of human dignity. That immovable sense of human dignity that is there because we're a living being.

Assessing ourselves: having a balanced, reliable sense of self-confidence

It's a thing of looking in our own mind and being sensitive: what is our attitude about ourselves? Do we have a balanced, reliable sense of self-confidence which won't be disturbed by other people's criticism? Or do we have an unreliable sense of self-confidence that is based on being attached to nice words that people say to us, and consequently being overwhelmed when we get blamed for something? That's why I keep coming back to this—that we have to be able to look at ourselves and know ourselves, and be able to assess ourselves. If we do that, then we can listen to all the feedback we get from others, we can listen to praise, and we can check up: "Does that praise apply to me? Do I have those qualities?" And, "Oh yes, I have those qualities, I'll rejoice." That's very good. That's very different than getting attached to the praise and feeling so wonderful because I have these qualities.

Ways to develop our innate sense of human dignity

[Audience: inaudible]

There're a few different ways of doing it. One way is, at the beginning when we take refuge and generate the altruistic intention, we visualize the Buddha, who's a reflection of the Buddha we're going to become, coming on top of our head and dissolving into light. That light flows into us and we feel that our mind has merged with the Buddha's mind. We can sit there with that light in our heart, and try to feel: "The future Buddha I'm going to become, I'm going to bring that into the present right now, and be that. Let me feel this loving-kindness for others." You concentrate on that light at your heart. You let go of all your notions of who you are—I am this, I am that, I can't do this, I can't do that, I'm so horrible, I'm so wonderful. Then your wisdom mind appears in the physical form of the Buddha with the body of light, and thinking that your loving-kindness in its fully ripened form, you radiate this light out to all living beings. I think this kind of visualization and meditation is an incredible way to get in touch with: "Hey! Actually, I can feel this way. And there is something good about me."

Another way, I think, is just to sit down and think about what Buddha nature means. There's a chapter in "Open Heart, Clear Mind" about that. Think about what it means to have the potential to become a Buddha. What does that mean? What is this clear and knowing nature of my mind? What are these good qualities that I have? We are not completely awful. We have many good qualities within. We can look inside, notice those and pick them out. They may only

be this big right now, but the thing is, whenever you have a sprout, the sprout has the potential to become a tree. We don't need to put down the sprout because it's a sprout. We need to look at the sprout and say: "Wow! You can become a tree." So we can look at our own good qualities now and say: "Wow! Look! Sure I might get angry and blow my top and bad mouth other people, but I can also talk nicely to people and I do have some kind of a kind heart, and if I put the spotlight on that, and stop beating up on myself so much, that might actually grow."

Learning not to get entrapped in our negative image of ourselves

The wisdom side of us recognizes that the awful image we have of ourselves is a hallucination. Through the process of all of our conceptualization, we have put ourselves in this tiny little room and feel entrapped by the world. But it's actually our image of ourselves that has entrapped us, so we should say: "This is just an image. I don't need to hang on to that. Okay, I did bungle something as a kid, and I did get scolded. But I'm forty years old now and I don't need to act like a three-year-old. I'm not a three-year-old. I don't need to hold on to whatever it was that happened." Whether it happened when you were three, or twenty-three, or forty-three or eighty-three, you don't need to hold on to that, because that was one event in your whole life, and it's not the defining character of who you are. But we just kind of highlight certain things and then cast them in mental concrete, and then fight against the walls that we've

put around ourselves. Recognize that we don't need to do that. When you start to see this judgmental mind coming: "Why can't you do this right? Why can't you do that right? Why don't you do this? You should do this. You ought to do this. Somebody else is doing this. Why can't you be like them?", or when you're doing the breathing meditation and the mind goes: "Why can't you concentrate better? Why can't you ..." Just look at it and say, "Be quiet." Or just look at it and say: "It's chattering away but I don't need to believe it. I don't need to think like this. This thought is not me. This is just a thought going through my mind. It's not me. It's not even realistic." Learn to identify which of our thoughts and feelings are based on reality, and which are based on hallucination.

Well, the thought is an existent thing, but the object of the thought, what the thought is thinking, is not necessarily realistic. I can think about purple elephants. My thought about purple elephants exists; purple elephants don't.

Non-attachment to money

[Audience: inaudible]

Well, if you take the example, let's say, of somebody who's practicing to be a bodhisattva. They may have inherited five million dollars, but that doesn't mean that in the very next week, they're going to give all five million away. They may want to spend some time and check out how best to give it so that it becomes beneficial to other people. They may want to take some of that money and invest it, and use the interest

to support a Dharma center. They may take another amount of the money and just give it away to make a shelter for homeless people, or give it to a Children's Home, or something like that. Just because you're unattached to it doesn't mean you get rid of it all of a sudden. Or that you just throw it away recklessly.

There is a lot to think about. Let's just sit quietly for a few minutes. I really encourage people to think about these things in your morning or evening meditation. Put a note on your alarm clock that says, "Meditate."

Freeing ourselves of anxiety

[Audience: inaudible]

I've made the comment that when there's anxiety, it's because there's attachment. So you're saying if we can notice what it is that we're attached to that is causing the anxiety, what we're trying to cling on to in order to make permanent, and free ourselves of that attachment, then we can be free of the anxiety.

Often, when we have a negative emotion arise, like you were saying, we have anxiety and our immediate response is, "I don't want to feel this. So let's suppress it. Let's repress it. Let's pretend it doesn't exist. Let's go out and get drunk."

We have to recognize it's there and acknowledge the fact that we're anxious about something. Trying to avoid the anxiety by distracting ourselves doesn't get rid of it. It's like trying to clean your dirty dishes by adding more food to them. We need to acknowledge the anxiety, accept it and experience it. And then,

knowing that we don't have to keep on experiencing it and be under its influence, we can apply the antidote. Recognize what it is we're attached to, and work with the attachment that is causing anxiety.

Sometimes we don't want to acknowledge it because we're afraid that it's going to blow up. I think this is where it's very helpful to sit with the breath, and recognize, "My breath is going in. My breath is going out. All this fear is coming up, but it is just a thought. This is just a mental experience. All this anxiety, and all my projection about how horrible the future is going to be, is just a thought. Because my reality right now is, I'm breathing in and I'm breathing out." We need not be so afraid of our thoughts and our feelings as they're only thoughts and feelings, that's all. We are not so afraid of experiencing them, because they're not like big, ferocious dogs, ready to bite us. They're not going to take our arms and legs off.

We concretize things very much. "I am my thoughts. I think this, therefore I'm a bad person. I think this, therefore it's true." We take our thoughts so seriously. We take our feelings so seriously, not realizing how much they change. We feel so stuck with some big issue, some big crisis one day, but the next day, we think, "Hold on. What was I so upset about?" Here is where the meditation on remembering transience and impermanence is very important. We remember that all these things keep changing. The good stuff keeps changing, no sense to get attached. The anxiety keeps changing, no sense to get overwhelmed by it. All these things arise due to causes and conditions, they have limited duration,

they're going to change into something else. But while they're happening, we're sure they're real! This is exactly why we have to think about this stuff over and over again, so that we can call it to mind when the garbage is coming up.

Handling criticism

[Audience: inaudible]

We're in a situation where we realize somebody is criticizing us. We may react in our usual habitual pattern, which is either with anger: "What? They're criticizing me?! They're wrong!", or just completely the opposite: "Well, they're right and I'm just a catastrophe!"

Instead of reacting in these ways, we recognize, "Hold on. This is somebody's opinion. Their opinion is not me. It's their opinion. It might have some useful information in it that can help me grow. So I'm going to listen. But just because somebody thinks this and says this, it doesn't mean it's true." We don't believe everything President Bush says, why should we believe everything somebody who is criticizing us says? On the other hand, that doesn't mean you just completely disregard it as, "This is somebody else's opinion, they don't know what they're talking about!" We have to be willing to take the information in, and check up and see if any of it is useful to help us grow. And also recognize that if somebody is losing their temper at us, it's indicative that that person is upset. Out of compassion and concern for the other person, we want to be able to communicate better with them

so that they don't walk around all muddled in their own anger.

Remembering death

We were talking about the six disadvantages of not remembering death. It's helpful to remember that meditating on death helps us get our priorities very straight. A big difficulty in America now is that people have so many choices that they don't know what to choose. And people don't know how to set their priorities. So they get all distracted running around doing all sorts of things. This causes a lot of anxiety and stress because we don't have the ability to see what the most important thing is. When we look at our life in terms of the fact that we are going to die, then it helps us set our priorities very clear. What we become interested in, is what can we take with us when we die? What can we take with us that is going to be long lasting, and what are things that are only temporal, that aren't going to be of any long term benefit, that we can just leave aside?

So here, we come to see the benefit of the Dharma practice, because when we die, it's our Dharma practice that comes with us. It's our habitual training of the mind in good qualities that lets those good qualities continue on into a future life. It's the good karma we create by practicing Dharma that is going to influence what happens to us in our future lives. Remembering death helps us see the value of the Dharma and set our priorities. We will not get so wrapped up in seemingly important things that seem important only because we're looking very narrow-

mindedly through the lenses of our happiness now.

If we look closely, so much of our upset in our daily life comes from looking at everything through “This is interrupting my present happiness!” And we get angry and we get jealous. Or because we’re craving this happiness, we get proud, and we get arrogant, and we denigrate other people. So when we think in terms of death and set priorities in life, then getting our way and being a big guy and being this and that—these things just don’t seem so important anymore. If I don’t get exactly the kind of food I want, it really doesn’t matter. If my body isn’t as gorgeous and athletic as I want, it really doesn’t matter. If I don’t have as much money as I would like, it really doesn’t matter. And so we are able to live a lot more peacefully.

Why we’re not making progress on the path

Sometimes we wonder why we don’t make progress on the path. This is because we’re usually distracted from practicing Dharma. Since we don’t practice, we don’t make progress. If we created the cause, we would surely receive the result. It’s because we get distracted from creating the cause that we don’t progress along the path. Remembering death is a good antidote to help us eliminate our distractions. When you feel, “Wow, I’m sitting here but I’m not getting anywhere” and you start getting judgmental: “Oh, I’ve been practicing Dharma for a whole week and I’m not a Buddha,” then it’s good just to sit and remember death and impermanence and put our mind back into the practice instead of seeking worldly

pleasure.

This also involves recognizing that the things in this life, the pleasures we have, they do bring some happiness, but they don't last a long time. This is important to understand, because usually when we're seeking some kind of happiness—the kind of happiness in this life that acts as a distraction—we usually have the idea in the back of our minds that once I get this, it's going to bring me long term happiness. We might say intellectually, “Oh of course, eating this extra bowl of ice-cream is not going to make me everlastingly happy.” But, when we're attached to ice-cream, there's that part of our mind that is completely convinced that if we only have another bowl, we can be happy forever! What we think up here, and what we're grasping onto in our heart, are very separate at that time. So thinking about death and remembering these things bring the understanding from up here [pointing at the head] down into our heart. So then we don't get overwhelmed by these cravings and desires. Because we're able, through our heart, to recognize “This stuff is perishable. This is transient. That brings some nice feelings, but it doesn't last forever. So why go bananas over it? Maybe there's something more important to put my energy into that will lead me to experience a longer-lasting happiness.”

Setting our priorities

So you see this all relates to setting our priorities, recognizing what's important in life and what's not. And when we do a deep meditation on this, and

especially go into the eight worldly concerns we discussed last time, we'll definitely begin to feel that everything that we have been doing up until now has by and large, been a huge waste of time. [Laughter.] Now, I know you don't like to hear that. And I don't want to present you with a foregone conclusion. But it's something to consider, having the courage to ask yourself: "What I've been doing up until now—how much of it brings some lasting value, and how much of it has really been a waste of time at the end of the day, considering that all that happiness that I may have gotten from chasing after what I think I want, that all that happiness is perishable, doesn't last long."

The courage to be honest

I think this is a big challenge for us, especially as we grow older and approach middle-age. Our ego gets more and more locked in, and we don't like to evaluate our lives, because we feel that if we find one crack in what we've been doing, we might actually have to tear the whole building down, and that is too frightening. That's why you see sometimes as people get older, the ideas get solidified and rigidified. Even though the people know something isn't completely right in their life, even though they know they're not a hundred percent happy, it's just too threatening to look at one's life, because one has spent so many years building up this ego identity of who I am, that it's just too scary. But if we get enclosed, encapsulated by this fear of looking at ourselves, then that actually becomes very painful. It's interesting. We're afraid of pain so we don't look at ourselves.

But that very fear that prevents us from looking at ourselves makes our mind extremely painful, because we live our life in complete denial. We live in complete mental evasion of what's going on.

And so I think that all through our life, especially if we're Dharma practitioners, we have to develop that courage to constantly ask ourselves: "Is what I'm doing worthwhile in the long run, for myself and others?" If we check up all the time, then when we die, we're not going to have any regrets. If we don't check up on that, we live in our fear, pretending everything is alright in our life, then not only are we anxious during our whole lifetime, but at the time of death, we can no longer keep the show up. At the time of death, all the masquerade falls away, and then there's a lot of terror. So it makes a lot of sense for our own well-being, to be very vigilant about this. Really ask ourselves, "Is what I'm doing worthwhile in the long run for myself and others?"

DETACHING OURSELVES FROM THE EIGHT WORLDLY CONCERNS

We started going over the disadvantages of not remembering death and we elaborated on the third one: detaching ourselves from the eight worldly concerns. Because we see that if we want to practice Dharma, what prevents us from practicing is these eight worldly concerns: the attachment to the happiness of this life. And so last week we talked about attachment to getting material things and aversion to not getting them or being separated from them; attachment to praise, hearing nice, sweet words,

feeling encouraged, and aversion to getting blamed and ridiculed and criticized; attachment to having a good reputation so that everybody thinks well of us, we're famous, we're well-known, we're appreciated, and aversion to having a bad reputation where a lot of people think we're despicable; and then attachment to sense pleasures in general, attachment to things going well, so that we have nice things to see, and hear, and smell, and taste, and touch.

Actually, giving up attachment to food and to clothes is considered easy, believe it or not. Giving up attachment to reputation is the most difficult. Why? Because we might be contented with, "OK, I'll eat cereals every morning for the rest of my life." "OK, I'll just wear blue jeans for the rest of my life. But really, people have to think well of me because I do this. I have to have some ego-gratification. I have to have some praise for being noteworthy because of how much I'm sacrificing." This attachment to our reputation is the most difficult one to weed out.

So as we go through this, don't feel alarmed when you start noticing in your life a lot of attachment to reputation. Don't get alarmed, but just recognize this is something that's difficult, that takes a lot of time to work through because our mind can get attached to anything and everything. We can get attached to looking the best. We can get attached to being noteworthy for looking the worst! We can get attached to everybody noticing us for being rich and high-positioned. We can get attached to everybody noticing us for choosing to throw society's values back at them. Any of this kind of attachment to building up the "I" as some kind of noticeable,

glorious thing, becomes attachment to reputation. We have to be careful about this.

The Chinese also add—in addition to food, clothes and reputation—sex, sleep and money as well. And if we look, these are also some of our major attachments, aren't they? Very attached to sexual gratification. Very attached to the pleasure of sleep, even though we aren't even awake long enough to enjoy it. It's not saying that we shouldn't sleep. Of course we should sleep. We need sleep to refurbish our body. But it's the attachment and clinging to sleeping more than we need to, that becomes detrimental. And of course attachment to money leads us to do all sorts of crazy things to get it.

These are just some outlines through which to look at our own attachment to the happiness of this life, to check up what is my attachment in terms of food, clothes, reputation, sexual pleasure, money and sleep. Do I have a lot of this kind of attachment? Does it bring me any benefit? Does it have disadvantages? If it has disadvantages, what can I do about it?

Pointless in getting judgmental

Now, I must say we westerners, when we take this teaching and start to notice all of our attachments, we tend to get very self-critical: "I'm so bad because I'm so attached!" We beat up on ourselves and criticize ourselves because we're so attached to so many things. Buddhism is not saying that we need to beat up on ourselves emotionally. That is completely a figment of our afflicted mind. The Buddha wants us to be happy and peaceful and calm. So in terms of

recognizing our faults, we just need to recognize them, and recognize that it isn't that we're bad because we have faults. It's not a question of being good or being bad. It's a question of if we're attached to these things, it makes our life miserable. So it has nothing to do with being a good person or a bad person; we don't need to criticize ourselves. But just recognize, "Is this really making me happy or not?"

We tend to get very judgmental about ourselves. We hear this teaching and then we start judging ourselves and we start judging everybody else. "That person's so bad. They're very attached to their garbage cans." "That person's so bad. They're very attached to dah, dah, dah." "I'm so bad because I'm so attached to dah, dah, dah." It's not a question of being good or bad. That's our Judeo-Christian upbringing that we're projecting on the Dharma at that point and we don't need to do it. This is a very subtle thing. Really look in your minds because we do have a tendency to start telling ourselves all sorts of negative stories that are totally unnecessary.

The meaning of detaching or freeing ourselves from the eight worldly concerns

The third of the six disadvantages of not remembering death is: even if we practice, we won't do so purely. This involves recognizing our eight worldly concerns and freeing ourselves from them. By the way, when I say "freeing ourselves from them", it means detaching ourselves from these things. It's very important to understand the Buddhist concept of detachment because the English word "detachment" is not a good

translation for what is meant in Buddhism. That's why a lot of misconceptions about Buddhism come. We tend to think, "Oh, I'm so attached to food and money and reputation and these things. I've got to be detached." So we mistakenly think that means we have to give up all our money, never eat again, and give away all our clothes. Or we think: "Giving up attachment to reputation, friends and relatives means I'm never going to have any friends again. I'm going to be completely aloof and uninvolved. Who cares about anybody else?"

Both of those are wrong ideas. They are common misconceptions about what freeing ourselves from the eight worldly concerns mean. It doesn't mean we have to give up all our worldly possessions and things like that, because the problem isn't the reputation. The problem isn't the money. The problem isn't sleeping. The problem is our attachment to these things. We definitely need money to live in this society. We definitely need to sleep. We need food. We need clothes. We need friends. There's nothing wrong with this. And like I brought up last time, if we're going to benefit others, we need some kind of respectable reputation so that others trust us. But we want to use them without attachment, with the motivation to benefit others. So instead of attachment, feeling "I need these things in order to survive", we have a more balanced mind. That's what detachment means. It means balance. It means if we have them, fine. If we don't, we'll survive, it's OK. If I have the kind of food I really like, fine. If I don't have it, that's OK also. I can enjoy what I do have instead of getting so stuck: "Oh god! I have to eat pizza when I wanted

Chinese food!”

Being detached actually means that we're able to enjoy what we have rather than getting stuck and longing for something that we don't have. This is important to understand. So it doesn't mean we have to give everything up physically. Rather, we have to transform our attitudes in how we relate towards things. Then that makes our mind very peaceful.

Especially in terms of human relationships. Often we hear stories of these great meditators who went up to caves. They gave up society and stayed in a cave. And we feel, “Well, I just have to be independent of all these people and not involve in human relationships at all! Because otherwise I'll be attached.” That's not possible. Why? Because we're always involved with human relationships. We can't survive without human relationships. We live in society—that's relating to human beings, isn't it? So it's not a question of freeing ourselves from society, because even if you're up in the mountain, you're relating to society, you're still a member of society. You just live in a far out place. But you're still part of the society of all sentient beings. We definitely interrelate with everybody else just to get the necessities of our life. So detaching ourselves from friends and relatives isn't a question of moving far away and never speaking to people again and remaining aloof and cold and distant, because that could be due to an affliction. But it again means having a balanced mind. Having balance in our relationships with people.

So if we're with the people we get along with very well, fine. If we're not with them, life is also fine. The

difficulty with the attachment is, when we're with the people we like, we feel so great (till we get into a fight with them, but we pretend that doesn't happen). And then when we separate from them, instead of being able to enjoy the other people we are with, our mind is stuck somewhere else dreaming about somebody else that is no longer in our present reality at this moment. So we completely miss out on the beauty of the people we are with, because we're so busy fantasizing other things.

So again, this thing of detaching ourselves from friends and relatives isn't detachment in the sense of being uninvolved, it's just being balanced in the way that we relate to them. Appreciating them, but recognizing that we can't always be with the people we like the most. And that those people we like the most haven't always been the people we like the most either! So no sense to always be so attached to them. And that frees our mind much more to enjoy the people we're with.

The Ten Innermost Jewels of the Kadampa Tradition

The second part of this is called the "Ten Innermost Jewels of the Kadampa tradition." These ten jewels are things that help us gain some kind of equanimity in relationship to the eight worldly concerns. These ten aren't listed on the outline, otherwise the outline would get too long. There're basically three general categories. There're four trusting acceptances, three vajra convictions and three mature attitudes towards

being expelled, finding and attaining. If none of these makes sense, don't worry. Hopefully it will after it gets explained.

THE KADAMPA TRADITION

I should explain the Kadampa tradition that practiced this. This was one tradition that came from Atisha, the great Indian sage who brought the second wave of Buddhism from India to Tibet. This tradition is one of my favorites because these people were genuine, sincere practitioners. They abandoned all these worldly nonsense and goopy mind, and they practiced very purely without a lot of show and pomp and flamboyance. They just did their practice without looking for attention to it. I feel that that's for me, personally, a very, very good example. There's a great tendency in our mind when we start giving up our worldly attachments to want people to notice how holy we're being, or we want to make some progress in the religious hierarchy. I love it when my family asked me, "Where are you in the hierarchy of Buddhism?" I never know how to answer that. But there's the mind that likes to have a title, "I want to be famous. I want people to notice how much I've given up."

It reminds me of when I was in Taiwan at one point. The Chinese don't use the terms "Lama" and "Geshe" and "Rinpoche" and all the titles like the Tibetans do. They just have "Shi-fu" and "Fa-shi"—maybe they have some others in Chinese, but these are the two I always heard that are kind of applied to everybody. So some of the people from the Tibetan

tradition were there for a conference. Because nobody from the other cultures knew how to use the terms that the Tibetans use, Lama Lhundrup all of a sudden became a Rinpoche. One Australian monk became a Lama. So everybody was becoming Lamas and Rinpoches. [Laughter.] We used to tease each other about it. It's very easy in a tradition that has lots of titles, different-sized thrones, different kinds of hats, different kinds of brocade, different hairdos, and different robes, it's so easy for our mind to get sticky in all of these.

A. THE FOUR TRUSTING ACCEPTANCES

The first trusting acceptance: as our innermost outlook on life, being willing to accept the dharma with total trust

The Kadampa people didn't get involved in any of the above. They were really out to practice very purely without getting a lot of status and prestige. The first four of the ten innermost jewels are called the four trusting acceptances. The first one is: "As our innermost outlook on life, being willing to accept the Dharma with total trust." Accepting the Dharma as a very simple and effective way of thinking, speaking and acting. This comes through recognizing we have a precious human life, thinking about the impermanence of our life, thinking about what's important, setting our priorities, and coming to the conclusion that practicing Dharma, i.e. transforming our minds, is the most important thing to entrust our life to.

This is something for us to think about. We may

not feel this way right now. We may think our bank account is the most important thing to entrust our life to. But this is a way to start to train the mind to really look. Think about the preciousness of our life. Think about death. Think about our Buddha nature and what we can do. Set our priorities. And hopefully come to the conclusion that actualizing our potential, becoming a Buddha, practicing the Dharma, is the most important thing to do in our lives. So we entrust our life to that.

The second trusting acceptance: as our innermost attitude towards following the dharma, being willing to accept with total trust even becoming a beggar

Now, the second one is: As our innermost attitude towards following the Dharma, being willing to accept with total trust even becoming a beggar. Now ego is going to start to shake a little bit. “OK, fine. I’ll entrust my life to practicing the Dharma. That’s great!” But then part of our mind gets really scared when we think: “If I practice the Dharma, maybe I’m going to be poor. If I sit and I go to teachings all the time, and I do my meditation practice and I don’t work 50, 60, 85 hours a week anymore, maybe I’m going to be poor. I’m not going to get the next promotion.” Some of our buttons are starting to get pushed. This is our attachment to the eight worldly concerns. So then, we have to understand what is important in our life and not compromise it. If we’ve decided in the first trusting acceptance that we’re accepting the Dharma, then don’t compromise that

value because of our attachment to worldly things.

In other words, if something is important to us—not in terms of important because we're trying to get what our ego wants, but important in terms of ethics, in terms of the meaning of our life—then we have to live by it without letting all of our worries about money and things like that interfere with it. Because there's going to be no end to worries about money. Even if you stop your Dharma practice because you're worried about money, and you go to work to get more money, you're never going to have enough money. The mind that is attached to money never has enough. So what we're saying here is, if Dharma is the center thing in our life, the chief support of our life, then live by it and do not be so afraid of what's going to happen materially to us.

The Buddha dedicated eons of his merit and made a prayer that all the people who follow his teachings purely will never starve, even in times of famine and gross inflation. This has been my experience, although it may not mean much. I haven't worked since 1975, and I haven't starved yet. There have been times when I've been very broke, but I haven't starved. And so I think there is something to this. You never really hear of people starving because they practice the Dharma. But our mind gets all fearful about it anyway. So we have to entrust ourselves to the practice even if it means becoming a beggar. And this is breaking our attachment to security, financial security. It's also helping us get in touch with the fact that preparing for future lives, practicing our spiritual path, is at the end of the day more important than surrounding ourselves with a lot of money and

possessions that never bring lasting happiness. We have to penetrate that in the mind. We say that here but we have to feel that in our heart.

The third trusting acceptance: as our innermost attitude towards becoming a beggar, being willing to accept with total trust even having to die

The next trusting acceptance: As our innermost attitude towards becoming a beggar, being willing to accept with total trust even having to die. So what happens is, we're saying, "OK, I'll practice the Dharma. OK, I'll be a beggar." But then, the fear comes up: "I might die of starvation! I don't want to die of starvation!" And freak-out comes again. That'd make a nice movie title, wouldn't it—"Freak-out comes again". [Laughter.]

So here, it's important, again, to center in very much on what our priority is. That even if it means that we die of starvation in order to practice the Dharma, it's going to be worth it. Why? Because we've had infinite number of previous lives and we've had all sorts of wealth in previous lives. Where has it gotten us? In all of our previous lives, have we ever died of starvation for the Dharma? We usually die with lots of attachment, and trying to get as much stuff around us as possible. We have to try and develop the attitude that even if I were to die of starvation, it would be worth it in order to practice the Dharma. Why? Because Dharma practice is more important than living a life in which I don't practice but spend all my time getting possessions and food. This is confronting our grasping mind that is attached

to all of these things. It is asking us to do a lot of deep soul-searching, to overcome the fear of dying of starvation by having enough faith in the efficacy of the practice, to know that even if we did die of starvation, it would be worth it. But since the Buddha dedicated all these merits, we probably won't. But it's hard to have that kind of faith. It's asking us to check up very deeply.

The fourth trusting acceptance: as our innermost attitude towards death, being willing to accept with total trust even having to die friendless and alone in an empty cave

The fourth innermost attitude or trusting acceptance is: As our innermost attitude towards death, being willing to accept with total trust even having to die friendless and alone in an empty cave. You can tell this was in Tibet. Here, it might be “die friendless and alone in the middle of a big city, or on the street”. Here, we've gotten through, “OK, I'll practice the Dharma because that's worthwhile. I'm willing to risk becoming a beggar because I believe in my practice. I'm even willing to risk dying in order to have the time and space to practice. But I don't want to die alone. And what's going to happen to my body after I die?”

So again, more fear comes up. More attachment and clinging come up at this point. Here, it's important to remember that if we practice well, we won't mind dying alone. If we don't practice well, then we're going to want lots of people around us because we're going to be terrified. But the thing is, none of the

people are going to be able to give us any long lasting comfort because we're going to be experiencing the ripening of our own negative karma at that time, which other people can't stop. They can't stop our death. They can't stop the ripening of our karma. Whereas if we devote our mind to practicing very purely, then even if we die out on the street, we can die very blissfully. The mind that gets very attached to having lots of friends and relatives around when we die—this is very indicative of a lot of fear and a lot of attachment going on in our mind, which means that we're likely to be very unsettled at the time we die.

Of course if you have Dharma friends near you when you die, that's great, because Dharma friends will encourage us in the Dharma. They'll help us put our minds in a good attitude. So there is no problem with wanting our Dharma friends to be around us when we're dying. What is problematic is the clinging mind that thinks: "I want all my family around, holding my hand. I want to know I'm loved. I want everybody crying and carrying on because I'm dying." That might seem to make us happy but actually it causes a very disturbing mind at death time. Because they can't stop the death. They can't stop the negative karma. And if we've given up our whole practice in order to ensure that we die in a proper setting, we're not going to have any good karma to take with us at the time we die.

This one is also asking us to look at our attachment to what happens to our body after we die. Because some people get worried about, "I want a big funeral procession. I want a big grave. I want a nice monument on my grave. I want my picture displayed.

I want to be remembered. I want to be put in the obituary column in the newspapers so that everybody can mourn me.” Some people get very concerned about that. “I want to have the services of good embalmers so I’d look good.” “I want a nice, expensive coffin.” “I want to be buried in a nice, pleasant place, at a nice, high-class cemetery.”

So what this point is getting us to look at is that when we’re dead, it really doesn’t matter where we’re buried. And it doesn’t matter whether we have a big funeral procession. And it doesn’t matter whether a lot of people mourn us. Because when we’re dead, we’re dead. We’re not going to be hanging around this earth anymore, looking at what’s going on. So why worry about it when we’re alive? This is helping us again, to free ourselves from all this clinging attachment to big funerals, and being mourned, and having a nice grave, and things like that. Because it really doesn’t matter. Our body isn’t us.

B. THE THREE VAJRA-LIKE CONVICTIONS

The first vajra-like conviction: to go ahead with our practice without considerations for what other people think about us

Now the next section is the three vajra-like convictions. Vajra-like, or diamond-heart convictions. These are sometimes also called the three abandonments. So the first one here is to go ahead with our practice without considerations for what other people think about us, because we practice. So this is going against that part of our mind that says,

“Well, you know, if I practice Dharma, other people are going to think I’m weird. And if I tell people I’m a Buddhist, they might think I’m new age.” This kind of stuff. We’re kind of ashamed of our practice. We don’t feel real confident about it. We’re ashamed of it in some way because we’re afraid of what other people are going to think about us when we practice.

I’ve noticed this in people. Many people, when at work, when it just comes up in a casual conversation, they don’t want to say they’re Buddhist. I am referring to people who’ve converted from other religions to Buddhism. A common reason is, “Well, other people are going to think it’s weird.” I think it isn’t so much that other people are going to think us weird. It is more that we’re embarrassed. We don’t feel comfortable with it. Because lots of times I’ve heard many people tell me stories about how they’ve been so afraid of what other people are going to think about them practicing. But it’s usually been all in their own mind. Their own fear. Other people haven’t thought that badly of them.

This kind of fear—what other people are going to think about us if we practice—becomes a big deterrent to practice. This is what peer pressure is all about, isn’t it? This is what conforming to the American dream is all about. Or conforming to whatever it is we think we’re supposed to conform to. We’re very attached to our reputation and so we give up our practice because other people discourage it or we’re afraid of what they’re going to think of us because we practice. This is a big hindrance.

This does not mean that we don’t care at all about the effects of our actions on other people. In other

words, in saying “to go ahead without considerations for what others think”, it means in terms of the Dharma, to go ahead and practice without worrying about what other people think. It doesn’t mean to go ahead and do anything we want to in our life without concern about the effect it has on others. Because if we go ahead and follow our attachments and cheat people and deceive them and go to our families with, “I want to do this and I want my needs met. And I want this. And I want that.” Or at home or at our workplace, we say: “I don’t care what it does to you. I don’t care what you think. I want my way!” That’s just more garbage. That’s not what this point’s saying. We need to be very sensitive to the effects our actions have on others. But in the sense of giving up the Dharma because we’re afraid of what other people are going to think— *that* we have to give up. Why? Because it becomes a big obstacle in our mind, and it keeps us attached to reputation.

It’s very interesting because if we don’t live our life according to our own convictions, but according to what other people want us to be, we usually wind up to be very unhappy. Psychologists usually say that somebody who does this doesn’t have a very strong sense of self. This kind of people usually go along with what everybody else wants them to be instead of living according to their own ethics and principles.

From a Buddhist viewpoint, the kind of person that does everything the way other people want them to do it, and I’m talking about it here in a negative way—giving up what’s important to do worldly things—that person actually has a lot of self-attachment. They may not have a strong sense of self in a psychological way

—here “sense of self” meaning the sense that “I am an efficacious person”—they may not have that because they’re letting peer pressure and society overwhelm them. But from the Buddhist way of using the word “self”, they have a very strong sense of self. And it’s actually a lot of attachment to reputation, “I want people to think well of me. Therefore I’m going to do what they want. It’s not because I care about them that I’m doing what they want. I want to do this not because I think it’s good. It’s because I want a good reputation.” So there’s actually a strong sense of self involved in that.

This is very interesting to think about. Very often, in psychology, they usually say, “This person who doesn’t have boundaries, and this person who goes along with what others want, doesn’t have any sense of self.” In the psychological way, they don’t. But in the Buddhist way, they do. There are different ways to use the words “sense of self”. You can see that.

The second vajra-like conviction: continuously remain deeply aware of our commitments regardless of circumstances

The second one of the diamond-heart convictions is to keep the constant company of awareness of our commitments, to abandon things that get in the way of our keeping our Dharma commitments. This could mean abandoning what others think about us because we practice. It could mean abandoning negative influences of others that make us break our vows and commitments. It could mean abandoning laziness. And you can see, we have to have a diamond heart—

strong awareness of our commitments and our vows in order to keep them going at any time and in every situation. If we don't have this, then some day if we find ourselves in the company of the people who drink, even though we may have a precept not to drink, we'll start drinking because that's what's expected of us, or because we're afraid what people are going to think. Or even if we've taken a vow not to lie, if our boss wants us to lie for the business, we'll do it. Or even if we've taken commitments to do certain mantras or meditation practices every day, we won't do it because we're too tired. Or we forgot about our commitments. We don't value them.

So this diamond-heart conviction is to have a very strong resolution to keep whatever vows and commitments we have taken in our practice. And to see them as ornaments, as jewels, as very precious things. Not as things that get in the way. Our vows aren't things that limit us from doing things and put ourselves in prison. Our vows are things that liberate us from our negative habits.

The third vajra-like conviction: carry on continuously in our practice without getting caught up in useless concerns

The next one is the vajra or diamond-heart conviction to carry on continuously without getting caught up in useless concerns, like running after pleasures of this life or getting discouraged because we don't have what we think we should have. Discouragement and depression are big, useless concerns. Sometimes we're starting to practice the Dharma and then we think,

“Oh wow, I’ve devoted my life to this Dharma practice. Now I’m not the most popular person in Seattle.” Or “Now all my brothers and sisters make more money than me.” Or “I’m fifty years old. I should have a retirement fund and I don’t have it. What are other people going to think? And what am I going to think and what’s going to happen to me?”

So all these kinds of discouragement, these kinds of fear or a judgmental attitude towards ourselves. “I don’t have all these worldly things. Therefore I’m a failure. I don’t have a big business card with lots of titles. I don’t have this, that and the other things like everybody I graduated from high school with has. Therefore I’m a failure.” This kind of discouraged, depressed mind that is involved with attachment to the happiness of this life, is something to be given up. Instead, we should have a very strong conviction not to get caught up in useless things.

Now it’s important to emphasize here that there’s nothing wrong with having friends or wealth. Dharma is not asking us to give up friends and give up wealth. But the thing is if our attachment to these things get in the way of our practice, or if the influence of these things get in the way of our practice, then we have to be willing to give them up.

There’s nothing wrong with having friends, but as soon as our friends start saying, “Why are you going to teachings twice a week? What a drag! Better stay home and watch television, there’s a good movie on.” Or “Better do this, that and the other thing.” Or “Why are you doing Nyung Nay? You’re not going to eat for a whole day? That’s not healthy! You should eat and keep your blood sugar up.”

All these things that people may say, they mean well. But if this becomes a big hindrance to our practice, then maybe we have to give up those friends and seek other friends who think more in line with what we firmly believe to be the meaning of our life. Doesn't mean we hate these other people. It just means we don't remain stuck in our gooey attachment towards them.

Similarly with wealth. Having money can be beneficial if we use it to help other people. No problem with having the money. But if having wealth takes us away from the Dharma, then maybe consider getting rid of it. If you have to spend all your time worrying about your stocks and your bonds and your investment and this and that, and you have no time to practice, then what's the use?

As for our friends, we can have very meaningful relationships with our friends. And in fact Dharma friends are extremely important to us and we should definitely try and cultivate them and make as the core part of our friendship, our mutual Dharma practice where we help each other in the practice. Then our friendship becomes very, very beneficial.

C. THE THREE MATURE ATTITUDES

The first mature attitude: being willing to be expelled from the ranks of normal people

There're three mature attitudes. The first one is a mature attitude that is willing to be expelled from the ranks of so-called normal people because we don't share their limited values. Now, I have to emphasize

here, this does not mean that in order to be a Dharma practitioner, you have to be expelled from the ranks of normal people and be considered a weirdo. It is saying that we have to give up that attachment that wants to belong and be appreciated and be accepted in the in-crowd. Because if we're attached to that kind of thing, then it becomes an interference in our practice.

This is also a thing of building up the courage to accept criticism because we practice. Some people may criticize us because we practice. There is no need to get discouraged and overwhelmed if people criticize us for practicing the Dharma. Just recognize that these people have a limited world outlook. These people don't understand about rebirth. They don't understand about Buddha nature. At one time we probably thought just like them. It's not that they're bad people, but we do not want to be influenced by that. In this way, we are willing to be expelled from the ranks of so called normal people. That means giving up the attachment to what other people think about us and giving up the aversion to being criticized because we don't share the same values as others. Sometimes we do get criticized. Like maybe in the time of the Gulf war, if you went into the office and you said "I don't believe in killing," your colleagues might criticize you. Having the courage to endure being criticized because we don't share the same values as other people.

The second mature attitude: being willing to be relegated to the rank of dogs

This doesn't mean that we're going to be hanging out in the gutter with the dogs—although Naga would certainly like us to hang out more with him and play with him some more. What it means is, even if we have to face hardship in our practice, we're willing to go through the hardship. This is a very essential thing to have to be able to practice the Dharma. If every time we face hardship we fall apart and we want security and comfort instead, we're never going to get anywhere in our practice.

So finding ourselves among the ranks of dogs—it means even if sometimes we're poor, be willing to be poor so that we can continue to practice the Dharma. If it means being uncomfortable because we have to travel somewhere to attend a teaching, then being willing to be uncomfortable to travel somewhere and get the teaching. If it means being criticized by people, then okay, we're willing to be criticized because we know the value of the Dharma. It's so important to be able to practice purely that we're not swayed by what the general public thinks. The general public, and often unfortunately even Buddhists themselves, have very worldly values and they value people who look good instead of people who actually practice.

You'll see the great Tibetan yogi Milarepa who lived in the 11th century. He attained enlightenment in one lifetime, and he had been a criminal before he started practicing the Dharma. If there's hope for him then there's definitely hope for us. But he did really sincere practice. He was very poor so he just ate the nettles that grew by his cave and he wore very simple clothing. People would look at him and they would

feel so sorry for him. His sister came one time to visit him and said, “My brother, my dear brother, you’re so poor and you’re eating such rotten food, and you’re living in a cave, and you’re freezing, and your clothes are rags. Why don’t you go be this Buddhist scholar and teach a lot of people because they’ll give you money and offerings and then you can have a good life.” Milarepa answered, “Forget it. If you think I’m going to sell my Dharma practice to have a comfortable life, what use is that?”

Milarepa went then on to explain how in the degenerate times in which we live, very often people who look good are proclaimed as very great Buddhist masters. But those people don’t necessarily practice. Whereas some people who are real practitioners other people just totally ignore and criticize.

You can see it. You can see it very clearly nowadays. One teacher of mine, you’ll hear me talk about him a lot, Geshe Yeshe Tobden. He really practiced these Ten Jewels of the Kadampa—incredibly humble, such a humble teacher. His hair was usually a little bit too long, so this gray hair kind of sticking up. Very wrinkled. His lower robe, we call it a shamtab, was always too high and his socks were falling down. He kind of shuffled because he had these old shoes. His robes were usually dirty because he lived up in a cave above Dharamsala. He’d come into town and if people didn’t know who he was, they’d say, “My goodness, look at that dirty old monk.” He didn’t look like anybody special. But he was this incredible practitioner and he did his practice totally secretly, totally secretly. He did the highest tantric practice and everything but he never showed

anybody anything of it—extremely humble.

Geshe Yeshe Tobden was invited to Italy to teach. I was there at the time that he arrived in Italy and we had nice china and silverware for him to eat with. It was the first meal he was there, he didn't even know us, first meal. He looks at these dishes and the silverware and he says, "Get rid of these and bring me a plastic plate. I'm not going to eat off of this stuff." Then he came in to teach and we had prepared this big Dharma seat. You know, if you respect your teacher you make a very big Dharma seat—with a very nice enamel cup with tea and a very nice seat. He walks up there and he pulls the cushion off the seat, puts it on the floor, and sits on the floor. He wouldn't sit on the big seat we had made for him. He was a real practitioner along these lines. If people criticized him he didn't care. He lived in poverty in this cave up above Dharamsala. It was cold there. I visited him one day in the cave. It's cold and it's dirty. He kept the cave clean as he could, but still when you live in a cave it is never completely clean. He was a real great practitioner—so being willing to do that.

The third mature attitude: being completely involved in attaining the divine rank of an Enlightened One

This is the tenth of the Ten Innermost Jewels of the Kadampa—being completely committed to our Dharma practice to progressing towards Buddhahood. Having that as the innermost thing in our life and if it means some discomfort in this life, so be it. That attitude of being willing to go through hardship is so

important because as long as we're in cyclic existence there are going to be hardships. There are going to be things that happen that are uncomfortable, either physically uncomfortable, or people are going to criticize and blame us.

There's always going to be something going on that doesn't meet with our approval. If we're practicing the Dharma and we know we're in a good situation to practice, then we have to be willing to go through those difficulties in order to continue our practice. If every time we have a difficulty we throw up our hands and say, "I'm going back to what's secure and familiar and comfy," then how are we ever going to work with the eight worldly concerns? We're just constantly giving in to them all the time.

Anyway, even if we go back to what we were doing in the past—thinking now, "Oh, I'll be so much happier. I'm living here in a monastery, there's this going on, and I have to do this, and I have to get up so early, and I can't do this," and on and on and on and on. "Maybe I'll go back to my life as I used to know it. It was so much more comfortable then. I had my refrigerator and my car and my credit card. I could get anything I wanted and that's happiness. I'll go back to doing that." The mind can be like that, "Oh yes, I'm going to go back and do that."

Think about it. What was it like when you were living that way—when you had your refrigerator and your car and your credit card? Were you happy then? No! So if we're going to give up the Dharma for a little bit of hardship, and run back to a life that we think is comfortable, then let's ask ourselves if that life was really comfortable or not? Were we really

happy? Did we ever really have security in that life? Check up and examine.

This kind of checking is quite important in our practice. If we don't do it we're not going to be able to practice continuously. We're going to be constantly depressed and bummed out; and our mind is constantly going to be day dreaming about, "Oh, if I were only here I could practice better. If I were only doing that I could practice better." We're just going to not get anywhere really.

The Importance of Practicing the Dharma

What we're getting at here in talking about the eight worldly concerns and then the Ten Innermost Jewels of the Kadampa, what we're getting at is the importance of practicing the Dharma. The first step of that is giving up attachment to the happiness of this life—because we want a greater happiness that comes from Dharma practice.

Giving up the attachment to the happiness of this life doesn't mean that we put ourselves in suffering situations. We are giving up the attachment to the happiness. If happiness comes our way—fine—we enjoy it for what it is. We don't have to feel guilty because we're happy. We don't have to feel guilty if we have sense pleasure or if people praise us or something like that.

What we're giving up is not the objects but the attachment. That's really important to understand. It doesn't mean that we go out and buy the worst quality food and we sleep on a cold floor. We sleep on what's

there, we can be comfortable, no problem. We can eat good food, no problem. We need to keep our body healthy. What we're trying to work on is the attachment to these things. It's the attachment to getting them and the aversion to not getting them that causes the obstacles in our Dharma practice. It causes problems in this life also. So that's one point when talking about the eight worldly concerns and the Ten Innermost Jewels of the Kadampa.

Another point of all of this is for us to really understand what "practice the Dharma" means. So what does "practice the Dharma" mean? Does "practice the Dharma" mean wearing robes? Does "practice the Dharma" mean having prayer beads? Does "practice the Dharma" mean shaving your head? Does "practice the Dharma" mean waking up in the morning and meditating? Does "practice the Dharma" mean having an altar in your room? What does "practice the Dharma" mean? We have to be real clear that to "practice the Dharma" means to give up attachment to the happiness of this life (which means give up the eight worldly concerns) and transform our mind. If we do that, even we're in crummy clothes, even people criticize us and blame us, our mind is going to be happy. Our life is going to be meaningful because through the Dharma practice we're actually transforming our minds and progressing on the path to enlightenment.

CHAPTER 2

The Actual Way to Become Mindful of Death

Nine-Point Death Meditation

I. DEATH IS DEFINITE

a. Nothing can prevent our eventually dying. Everyone who is born must die, no matter who we are.

The first point under that is that everybody dies. This is something that I think we all know already, don't we? Everybody dies. But we know it up here in our head and we haven't really actualized that. It's very helpful just in this first point—that everybody dies and nothing can prevent our death—here what I do at this point is I start thinking about people I know and remembering that they die.

If you want you can start with historical figures. Look, even the great religious leaders all died. The Buddha died, Jesus died, Moses died, Muhammad died. Even great religious leaders die. Nothing prevents death. Also the people we know, our grandparents, our parents maybe have died. If those people haven't died yet, they will die. It's very helpful to think about the people that we are very attached to and remember that they're going to die. Or even visualize them as a corpse—because it's reality, they

are going to die. To remember this helps us to prepare for their deaths.

Along that line let's remember also that we're going to die. One day we're going to be a corpse lying out and people will come and look at us. If we had a regular death, not in an accident, they'll come and look at us and go, "Too bad". If they embalm us, "Oh, she looks so peaceful." Or maybe people will be crying or who knows what they'll be doing. But one day we'll be laid out, unless we're in too bad of an accident and they don't want to show the body to anybody. Just to think everybody's going to die whether we know them or don't know them. Go person by person. Think about that and really let that sink in. That's very powerful for our mind.

b. Our lifespan can't be extended when it is time for us to die. With each passing moment we approach death.

The second point after nothing can prevent death and everybody dies is that "Our lifespan can't be extended when it's time for us to die." Our lifespan is getting shorter moment by moment. When it runs out, there's nothing you can do. Now it's true that sometimes people are sick and we may do certain spiritual practices to remove karmic obstacles that may bring on an untimely death. So that can remove an obstacle to somebody living out their whole lifespan. But our bodies aren't immortal and most of us are not going to live past a hundred—definitely. How old is the oldest known human being? I don't even know.

[Audience:] Just a little over 100, 110 or something.

Figure 120. Definitely most of us here are over twenty-five, so figure in another 100 years for sure we'll all be dead. Everybody sitting here in this room won't be here any longer. This room may still be here but none of us are going to be alive on this planet and other people are going to be using this room. There's nothing we can do to extend the lifespan past a certain point because the body by its very nature dies: it decays and dies. From the time it's born, it's in the process of decaying and dying and there's nothing we can do that can prevent its demise. There are even stories at the time of the Buddha. Was it Maudgalyayana who was the one who was very skilled in magical powers? I think it was him. Anyway, he could do all these fancy magical powers and go to another universe and things like that, but even if you do that you still can't avoid death. So even if you have clairvoyant powers, even if you can fly in the sky, even all sorts of special things people can do—it doesn't prevent death. Every moment that's passing, we're getting closer to death. That's really something to think about.

Every day when we wake up in the morning to think, "I'm a day closer to death than I was yesterday." The next day, "I'm a day closer to death than I was yesterday." Geshe Ngawang Dhargye, one of my teachers, used to say that he couldn't figure out why we Westerners celebrated birthdays. He said, "You're only celebrating that you're one year closer to death. What's the point?" It's true when we think about it. The lifespan is running out. If we think of our

lifespan like an hourglass and the sand's going down there, there's only so much sand in the upper part of the hourglass. One day it's going to run out. There's no way you can stop it from going down. That's just the nature of things, so there's no way to extend our life span.

c. We will die even if we have not had time to practice Dharma.

There's a story they tell in this context about one old man who said, "This is the story of my wasted life: the first twenty years of my life I spent playing and getting an education. The second twenty years I spent working and supporting my family. And the third twenty years, I'm too old to practice."

It was very interesting. One year in Bodhgaya His Holiness told this story. There was a young American boy. I think he was about ten years old at that time. I was sitting close by him in the teachings. He heard that story and he thought and he thought. Later he said to his mum, "I want to be a monk." And he became a monk!

If we have this idea of later, later, later—I'll practice Dharma after I've done all these other things—that may not necessarily be the case. We're always in the middle of doing something else, we will not have completed everything when death comes. We have to be really aware that death is definite. It is inevitable. The conclusion to draw from that, is that because death is inevitable, there is no way around it. Therefore, I should practice the Dharma, in other words, I should transform my mind. Why? So that this

inevitable thing can be a pleasant experience for me. So that I can use my life wisely to face the greatest challenge of my life. So that I can keep doing my Dharma practice.

Conclusion: We must practice the Dharma, that is, we must transform our mind.

II. THE TIME OF DEATH IS INDEFINITE

Now we may recognize that *death is definite*, and that it's important to practice Dharma. But we may still have the *mañana* mentality: "I'm too tired this morning. I'll wake up early tomorrow morning to meditate." "This fruit is very nice. It'll be nice to offer it to the Buddha. But I like it and if I offer this now, I won't get to eat it. I'll get some nice fruit for the Buddha tomorrow instead." "I know there's Dharma teachings tonight, but there's also this old movie on TV that I've wanted to see for a long time, so the Dharma can wait. I'll listen to the tapes." This is the *mañana* mentality. We're always going to do it later.

And so here in the second main heading, we begin to think that the time of death is uncertain. In other words, we're not sure how long we're going to have to live. We always want to postpone the practice until later, but in actual fact, we're never certain we're going to have time later to practice. Why? Because the time of death is indefinite.

Now if you think back to this morning, and then you think of right now. Many people who were alive this morning have died now. I would say almost all of the people who were alive this morning and were

dead by tonight, when they woke up this morning, they didn't think "I'm going to die today." Even if you're sick in the hospital, you wake up in the morning thinking, "I'm going to live today. I'm not going to die." Yet death happens.

Stories

1. I had a friend whose mother was deathly sick with cancer. Her stomach bloated up. She couldn't get out of bed. Yet she sent her daughter out to buy her new bedroom slippers. It is so clear: "Death isn't going to happen to me now. I still have time to use these slippers even though I can't get out of bed." And yet death happens in so many situations just like that. Maybe even if you're dying of cancer, you still don't think, "Today, I'm going to die." Death always comes as a shock when it happens.

Many people die just so suddenly, either from traffic accidents, or seizures, or strokes, or heart attacks. It's very helpful to think about people you know who have died and the circumstances they died in, and whether they've been aware that they were going to die that day.

2. I have one Dharma friend whose younger sister died when she was in her late twenties. Her younger sister did ballet dancing. She was in her home, practicing her ballet dancing, and her husband was in another room. Her husband heard the record end, but it still kept scratching. He couldn't figure out what was happening, because whenever she was doing her dancing, she would turn it over and practice again. So

he went into the room and found that she had had some kind of stroke. In her late twenties she was dead. Just like that.

3. I met a woman right before I came back to Seattle. She had a daughter who was twenty-six years old who died of a heart attack.

If you start thinking, there're just so many things like that. It isn't guaranteed that we're going to die only in old age. So many people die when they're young. We always feel that it is other people who die when they're young, but all those people who died when they were young also felt the same way, that it is other people who would die when they were young. When I was preparing for this talk, I was just sitting and thinking about all the Dharma people I know who have died, including people whom I have gone to Dharma courses with and sat next to.

4. I sat next to one young woman, Teresa, on my first Dharma course. She'd been to a course before, so she helped me and we talked. We corresponded a little bit because we were both going to go to a course in Nepal. I said I'd take her out to dinner. And she said she'd take me out to dinner when we got to Nepal. So I got to Nepal and I was at the meditation course but Teresa hadn't arrived. I didn't know what was wrong. There were other people who knew her saying, "Yes, she left America. Why wasn't she here? What happened?" It turned out that there was one man in Thailand (I think a French man) who was murdering people. Teresa met him at a party and he asked her out to lunch. He poisoned her food and they found her

body in a Bangkok canal. I said to myself, “Wait a minute. This is my friend who is supposed to come over. We were going to meet in Nepal and go out to dinner. These horrible things don’t happen to people like my friends. This happens to other people.” It doesn’t. It happens to people we know. It happened to her. And so we start to think of so many situations like that.

5. One time when I was in India, I had just become a nun, and I was walking down from Tushita one day. For those of you who know McLeod Ganj, as you come off the bus station going along the road towards Tushita, it kind of curves. There are some shops on the right side now. In those days, there wasn’t any. I was walking down one day and on the right side, there was an Indian version of a stretcher—two bamboo poles and a canvas sack. It was the most incredible sight. There was a leg bone with a green sock and a brown shoe sticking out of it. And obviously the rest of the body was underneath. We found out he was a young Westerner who came to India to have a good time. He went hiking in the mountains. We don’t know what happened to him. He disappeared. He had been missing for a while.

Obviously he had died somehow. The animals had eaten his body, because all that remained were the bones, and of course with this green sock and brown shoe sticking out. And he had come to have a good time! How many times do people go on trips, thinking they’re going to have a good time, but they never returned after having their good time?

Or people go to work, thinking they’re going to

come home, and they don't make it home. Or people lift up their spoon to eat, and they die before they have a chance to put it in their mouth.

6. My cousin was getting married. He was from Chicago. His fiancée was from California. He and his mother (my aunt) had come from Chicago for the wedding. My aunt was staying at the bride's house and the morning of the wedding, she didn't come out of the bathroom. She died in the bath-tub. We always think that death comes later, not now. "My son is getting married; I don't have time to die now." But look what happened.

a. In general there is no certainty of lifespan in our world

It doesn't matter whether we feel we have time to die or not. *The time of death is indefinite.* People die at all sorts of ages. Some people die in their nineties. Some people die in their thirties. Some people die when they're children. Some people never make it out of the womb. There's no guaranteed lifespan on our planet. This innate feeling inside of us that "I have forever," or "It will happen later" is a complete hallucination, because there's no guarantee. Absolutely none.

It's really helpful to think very, very deeply about that. Because then, each day when we wake up, we feel like our life is a very precious treasure. We're still alive. What an incredible treasure. "I want to make my life useful. I want to make it meaningful."

b. There are more chances of dying and less of remaining alive

Then the second sub-point here, is that there are many more chances of dying than there are of remaining alive. Now this sounds very strange. But think about it this way:

1. You lie down, and you don't move. You do nothing. Eventually, you're going to die. Right? In other words, it takes incredible effort to keep our body alive. We have to feed it. We have to protect it from the elements. We have to give it medicine. We have to exert so much effort to keep the body alive. Whereas if we didn't exert any effort, the body would just automatically die. As you can see, it's so much easier to die than to stay alive. Our whole life is such an effort. So much effort to stay alive.

2. And then, so many of the things that we create to keep us alive, actually become the cause of our death. This is again why there're so many more chances of dying than staying alive. We make cars to make our life easier; I don't know how many people die on the road each year. We make houses to keep ourselves alive; look what happened when there was the earthquake in Armenia, how many people died because their house fell on them. We create all sorts of modern appliances to make our life easier; and we electrocute ourselves.

It's really quite amazing. Even the food which is supposed to be the source of our life. We eat it and people choke and then that's it. And so just everything that we think that's going to increase the lifespan, again it doesn't necessarily, because it

actually is in fact very, very easy to die.

c. Our body is extremely fragile

And then the third point here, is that our body is extremely fragile. We feel big, strong. But if you look at it, one little virus that we can't even see with our eyes can kill us. When you think about that, one little bacteria. You step on one thorn, I mean, so many small things can kill this big body. So many little insects, little animals, can kill this body. The skin is very easy to break. The bones aren't that difficult to break either. Our body is really not that strong. It's very fragile. So again, another reason why it's quite easy to die.

It's helpful when we're doing this meditation, to think about this in terms of ourselves. To think about the fragility of our own body. To think about how so many things that are supposed to be conducive for life can become the cause of our death. To think about the fact that we're always in the middle of doing something, but that is no guarantee that we're not going to die. Everybody who's dying is always in the middle of doing something. So again this whole notion of "I'll die later when I've finished all my work,"—when will we ever finish our work? There's nothing to give us a sense of security, or to put off the feeling of death.

Understanding that death is definite, we want to practice the Dharma. Understanding the second point, that the time of death is indefinite, then we get the feeling, "I want to practice the Dharma now." It's not sufficient to say, "*Mañana, mañana.*" In other words,

“I really want to take it and make this an important thing in my life now. Why? Because I may not have tomorrow to practice.” Lama Zopa used to tell us, “Your future rebirth can come before tomorrow!” And yet we spend so much time planning for tomorrow and for the rest of our life. How much time do we spend preparing for our future rebirth? So this helps bring us back to the present. We become very wise, very alert while we’re alive, not on automatic mode.

Conclusion: We must practice Dharma continually, beginning now.

III. NOTHING ELSE CAN HELP AT THE TIME OF DEATH EXCEPT THE DHARMA

a. Wealth is of no help

The third major heading here is that nothing else but the Dharma can help us at the time of death. This point really strikes at the core. For example, our wealth. We spend our whole life trying so hard to get money, trying to get material security, trying to get possessions—buying clothes, getting houses, getting comforts, getting things. Yet at the time we die, does any of it come with us? Does any of our possessions come with us? Does any of our money come with us? None of it comes with us! Yet we spend our whole life working for it. And we have nothing to show at the end of our life, except all the negative karma that we’ve created in the process of seeking after all these material possessions—negative karma created by

cheating other people, or by clinging and by being miserly, or by taking things that belong to other people, or by screaming at other people who harm our possessions.

So all this stuff that we've worked so hard to get, that we've created so much negative karma to get and to hold on to, comes to nothing at the time of death. And worse than that, all of our relatives are going to fight over who gets it. You lie there on your deathbed, and all the relatives are coming up asking you to sign this and that. Who's going to get this, who's going to get that. It's incredible what happens in families sometimes when somebody dies. Incredible! Other people fight over who gets the jewelry and who gets the stocks and bonds. Can you imagine working your whole life to get material possessions and all your kids or your brothers and sisters fighting over them while you're trying to die peacefully? Or you're sitting there worrying about what's going to happen?

When I was in Dharamsala, I had a friend, a Tibetan woman. Her father died. And as he was dying, he told her that in 1959 when he escaped from Tibet, he had some gold coins. He came into India and buried the gold coins somewhere to protect them. And here he was dying, and he was trying to tell his daughter where the gold coins were. This is how he left this life. The mind's still clinging on to the gold. I think that's so tragic. And yet many people in our country are very similar.

The wealth does absolutely no good at the time of death. Because when we're dead, it doesn't matter whether we've died on a nice, soft comfortable bed, or whether we've died in the gutter. It really doesn't

matter after we're dead. And it really doesn't matter after we're dead, whether we have a beautiful casket and beautiful flowers, with everybody crying politely at our graveside, or whether nobody shows up, and we're just thrown in a mass grave. It really doesn't matter.

It doesn't help to accumulate wealth with this clinging, grasping mind, thinking it's the be-all and end-all of the world and that we need so many things. We need to buy a nice plot at the cemetery. People do that. They preorder their plots. They preorder their tombstone. Incredible business! And the wealth, what good does it do? The Chinese have this custom of burning paper money to send wealth with their relatives on to the next world. They won't burn real money. So you spend real money to buy paper money. And they burn tons of paper money and paper houses and all this stuff to send on to their relatives. These things don't get there!

We do need a certain amount of wealth to live and to stay alive; we have to be practical. But that mind that is just obsessed and that mind that accumulates so much more than we need, and the mind that can't share and can't give, and that mind that creates so much negative karma out of lying, stealing, cheating, whatever, to get our possessions, those minds are really useless.

b. Friends and relatives are of no help

Secondly, our friends and relatives don't help us when we die either. We put so much emphasis on attachment, clinging to friends and relatives,

depending, needing, possessing. “This person’s so important, I can’t live without this person.” Another person becomes so much a part of our own ego-identity, that we don’t know who we are if we separate from them. And yet at the time we die, we separate, and they can’t come with us. No matter how much they love us, and no matter how much they praise us, they can’t stop us from dying. No matter what they do. Even if the whole world loves us, and are sitting there praying, praying, praying, “Please live, please live, please live,” they can’t do anything to stop us from dying. So the mind of clinging attachment, this mind that forsakes the Dharma practice to have the pleasure of attachment, relationships with other people, this mind distracts us from what’s really valuable, thinking that “If only I can make this relationship work, I’ll be happy. I’ll be fulfilled.” But we’re never fulfilled. And then we die and the other person stays here. What to do?

So again, no matter how popular we are, how good our reputation is, how much people love us, how many friends we have, at the time we die, we die. They can’t stop it. And in addition, if we’ve created a lot of negative karma out of our attachment in our relationships with people, then although the people don’t come with us at death, all that negative karma does. We lie to protect our loved ones; we slander other people to protect our loved ones; we criticize and blame and yell and scream at other people because they harmed our loved ones—so much negative karma we can create. We cheat other people to get more things for the person we love. We kill animals to protect the person we love. We do so much

negative karma in the name of “love”, which is actually very often a lot of attachment with a little bit of love. And then at the time we die, there’s nothing to do but separate. There’s no choice.

I’m not saying here that you should give away all your wealth and give up all your relationships. That’s not the point. The point is when we’re clinging to the wealth, and we cling to friends and relatives, that’s where the problem comes. Because with the clinging, we develop wrong motivations. That leads us to negative actions. With the clinging, we neglect our Dharma practice to get the happiness from friends and relatives and possessions. So the problem is that clinging mind. The solution isn’t to give up the relationships and possessions. The solution is to give up the clinging, the attachment. And to really recognize what wealth can and cannot do for us and what our friends and relatives can and cannot do for us.

And like I was saying, when I saw this old monk die and how his Dharma friends acted, they were completely happy to let him die. They were happy to let him die, and they acted at that moment in a very beneficial way to help him die in a good way. Whereas very often, when we’re involved in these clinging relationships, when it comes time to die, the other person who is also clinging to us is so immobilized. Since the Dharma has never been the center of our relationship, they’re incapable of helping us through the death process. Instead they sit there and cry and cry and grasp our hand and say, “Please don’t die. How am I ever going to make it without you? I can’t live without you!” Here you are

trying to die peacefully, and this person is clinging to you, and you're clinging to them.

I think friendships are very important. And being affectionate with other people is very important. But we really have to keep Dharma as the focus of our friendship, so that we can accept our Dharma friend's death, and we'll have the clarity of mind to be able to help each other at death time, and to encourage each other in the Dharma, to remind each other to take refuge and to make prayers and cultivate altruism and think of emptiness at the time of death. Then our friendships become really meaningful, very important, very worthwhile. We're willing to let each other go, because actually, whether we're willing or unwilling, we separate.

c. Not even our body is of any help

At the time of death, even our body doesn't help us. The body that we've been together with, since the time we were born. Sometimes we haven't been with our wealth, and we haven't always been with our friends and relatives. But our body, this body, my most cherished possession—we spend so much time taking such good care of it. We go to the gym, we work out, we get vitamins, we comb our hair, we dye our hair, we do this and that to our fingernails, toenails, and to our beard. So much attention on our body! Decorating it, glorifying it, and making it smell the right way. And what does it do at the end of the day? It dies!

It is like sand through the fingers—there's nothing to hold on to. We spend our whole life attached to this

body, creating so much negative karma to protect this body. We fight wars to protect our body, and to protect our wealth. We kill, steal and slander to protect our body, friends and relatives and our wealth, but at the end of the day, they all stay here. We go somewhere else, without any of them. So what's the use of creating all the negative karma? What's the purpose? Completely illogical.

So that attitude, especially that which clings on to this body, that doesn't want to let the body go. That attitude, that clinging to the body, is what makes death so terrifying. Because we get this tremendous fear, "If I don't have this body, who will I be? If I don't have this ego-identity, of being an American and this and that, who am I going to be?" That clinging mind is what makes death so fearful. Because at death, it's so clear we have to separate from the body. If we can work during our life to get rid of this clinging of the body, then, when we die, it's so easy and so pleasant. And also when we're alive, it's a breeze.

Really contemplate this. Sit down and ask ourselves, spend some time thinking over these three points: "How much time do I spend accumulating wealth and possessions? What kind of negative karma do I create in relationship to wealth and possessions? Can these things be of any benefit to me when I die?" And then you do the same with your friends and relatives and think about it very, very deeply. And you do the same with your body.

When I first met the Dharma, I had beautiful long hair that I spent years growing, down to my waist. It was beautiful. I was so attached to it. I couldn't think of cutting my hair. No way! Because this was my one

mark of beauty, the years I had grown my hair out. The thing that enabled me to finally cut my hair with a happy mind was thinking about death. Really thinking, “What good does a lot of long, beautiful hair do in your death?” What’s the use of it? And I had to meditate a great deal on this, because I was very attached to my hair.

But finally that was what enabled me to be able to cut it. It is actually quite freeing when we give up attachment to our looks and our body. Otherwise the mind is so involved and so tight, and we’re never satisfied with how we look. We’re always trying to look good, be healthy, be what all the models are. And of course, nobody is like that. It’s just a form of mental self-torture, I think.

So we come to see that Dharma practice is the only meaningful thing for the time we die. Because when we die, we leave everything other than our mental transformation behind. In other words, if we spend our life cultivating loving-kindness, that goes with us. We die peacefully. We have a strong imprint of loving-kindness. We get to the next life, it becomes very easy to meditate on loving-kindness again.

When we spend our life really trying to act constructively towards others, then all the imprints of those actions come with us to the next life. All that good karma, all that positive potential—that’s our wealth. That’s what makes you feel mentally, spiritually rich, and that all can come with us. And all the training, the different attitudes we try to develop, the different aspects of our mind that we try and increase and really make them blossom, all that makes it so much easier for those same attitudes to arise

again in future lives. So this mental transformation comes with us. And not only does it come with us, but it is also what makes us happy now, happy when we're dying, and happy in future lives. We can see quite directly, that if we spend our time, let's say, developing loving-kindness rather than worrying about how we look, we're going to be a lot happier now, a lot happier when we're dying and a lot happier in our future lives. Makes a lot of sense.

Conclusion: We must practice the Dharma purely.

How to meditate on the above

There's a lot of material in here for meditation. When you're doing the meditation, go through each point. That's why I gave you the outline, so that when you meditate, you have the outline in front, you know the points and the development, and then think of each point, explain it to yourself, try and understand it.

And especially think about it in terms of your own life. Think of the people you know who've died. How they've died. And if they thought they were going to die. Think of yourself getting older and approaching death. Really make it a very personal thing. Then definitely the feeling starts to arise, and you gain a lot more clarity in what you're doing in your life and why and what's valuable and what's not. And it makes it much easier to come to the conclusion to practice the Dharma, to practice it now, and to practice it purely without getting distracted by our attachment to wealth, family and relatives, and our body.

Review

So we talked about the six benefits of remembering death, that it helps us to act meaningfully now, that all of our positive actions become very powerful and effective, that remembering death is important at the *beginning* of our practice because it poses that question to us—what is the meaning of life?—and spurs us into action. It's effective in the *middle* of our practice to keep us going. We don't get lagged. We don't get Dharma-lag. It also keeps us going at the *end* of our practice as we have our strong goals in mind, so we don't get distracted. And then lastly the other benefit is that we die very happily and pleasantly because we spent our life cultivating attitudes that are helpful at death and we spent our life acting constructively so we have this whole wealth of good karma to take with us. At the bare minimum, we can die without regrets. In the middle level, we can die happily with no worries. And at a higher level, death is like going on a picnic.

One of the ways to meditate on death is the *9-point death meditation*. First of all, thinking that death is inevitable. That it comes to everybody. There's no way to stop it, just being born leads to death. That our death is constantly approaching with each moment that passes. We're closer to death now than we were when we came in here tonight. And that death can happen before we've had the time to complete our practice or whatever it is we think we want to do. Understanding this, we want to practice the Dharma, because we see it's important at death time.

Then we think about how the time of death is

indefinite, uncertain. You may feel, “We’ll live forever.” But there’s no guarantee. Why? Because there’s no fixed lifespan. Because we’re always going to be in the middle of doing something when death comes. Because there’re more causes for death than for life. We have to exert so much effort to stay alive and very little effort to die. Our body is really quite fragile and easily harmed. Understanding these helps us see that the time of death is indefinite; it could happen very quickly. Who knows? Then we get some sense of, “Oh, I want to practice the Dharma now!” There’s no longer this “should” mind. It’s not “I should practice the Dharma.” It’s “*I want to practice the Dharma.*”

And then we go on to think about what is meaningful at the time of death. We see that at death, we separate from our wealth, we separate from our friends and relatives, we separate from our body, so that spending our whole life clinging to all these things and creating so much negative karma on their behalf, just leads us to a total dead end at the time we’re dying. We want to develop a constructive attitude. We have the material possessions we need, we give the rest away. We have friends and relatives, but we make the center of our relationships our spiritual practice where we help each other grow. We have a body, but instead of pampering it indulgently, we keep it healthy and clean so that we can use it in Dharma work, we can use it for meditation. That helps us to practice Dharma purely, without getting distracted by the eight worldly concerns.

Questions & Answers

Antidote to regret

[Audience: inaudible]

Purification is the best antidote to regret, whether it's rational regret and constructive regret, or irrational regret and neurotic regret. Purification solves both of them. I think it's very healthy to just be honest with ourselves, be realistic with ourselves. There's no sense in tormenting ourselves. But the whole idea of regret is to learn. The purpose of regret is so that we can go to the future with a happy mind. Often when we regret, we get stuck in the past. But that does no good at all. So if we have regret that comes from wasting our time, or doing negative actions, really acknowledge that in the presence of Buddhas and bodhisattvas and do the purification practice, visualizing light streaming in and purifying. Or the prostrations, or whatever kind of purification practice you do. And then make a determination about the future, how you want it to be.

Accepting the death of a person who's likely to have a lower rebirth

[Audience: inaudible]

With reference to that story where the Tibetan monks accepted the death of their friend who was a good practitioner, what if the dying person is a criminal or somebody who is going to have a lower rebirth, would the friends be able to accept that person's death?

I can never say what people are going to do. But I

would say, ideally, what we would aspire to do, is do what you can to save the life. If you can't, then you do what you can to help them die peacefully. In any case, getting anxious and freaking out doesn't help us or them.

Being calm is not the same as being passive

[Audience: inaudible]

Being calm doesn't mean you are being passive. Remember we can be calm and yet be very active in saving somebody's life, or, you can be calm and be very active in trying to soothe somebody else's fears.

[Audience:] How do we help a very anxious dying person?

It is hard to give a general suggestion. I think we need so much sensitivity in each situation, to know why that person is anxious. One person might be anxious because he had a fight with his brother twenty years ago and now he has a lot of regret for it and he'd like to feel forgiven and he would like to forgive. So when you try and talk to him, you want to help him forgive, to help him recognize that the other person probably has forgiven him and that he should just let go of the negative, bad energy from the past and have a positive attitude for the future.

Somebody else might be anxious about death for a totally different reason. So we have to figure out what is going on in each person's mind and address it the best way that we can and not expect to give him the

miracle pill. We can influence to the best that we can, but we shouldn't feel like, "I am going to transform this person's death." We do our best.

Reading materials on death

[Audience: inaudible]

In each of the Lamrim text, there is usually a chapter about death. If you look into "An Anthology of Well Spoken Advice", "Taming the Monkey Mind", "Essence of Refined Gold"—most of the Dharma books have something about death. They say impermanence was the Buddha's first teaching, and also his last, that he showed by his own death.

Purpose of prolonging life

[Audience: inaudible]

I think the advantage of prolonging life, is so that the person could use his life to practice more. Besides that, there is no use in prolonging life. I remember one of my teachers was saying if a person is living their life only creating negative karma, it is no use prolonging their life. But this doesn't mean that you do not try to prolong people's life. Everybody likes to live and life is valuable, but to prolong life and then everybody just creates more and more negative karma, what is the use (from a long-term view)? From the view to ensure someone has some more happiness, yes, that's valuable, people have some more happiness. But from a long-term view, the real reason

for prolonging life is so that people can practice more.

Preparation for death

[Audience: inaudible]

So was that old man really being very kind telling his daughter where the gold was when he was dying?

That's one way to look at it, but he could have also told her beforehand so that when he was dying, he could concentrate on something that's more important.

I mean I cannot tell you in one particular instance what was going on in somebody else's mind. But it just seemed to me a tragedy that one's last thought was about gold. They said in the thought training practice, if you know you are going to die, settle all your worldly affairs. Give away what you have to give away, or write your will and be done with it so then you can just forget about that and die in peace and use your attention on something more valuable as the time of death is approaching. So I think actually the responsible thing to do would be to tell somebody beforehand.

Violent deaths

[Audience: inaudible]

So you're asking about violent deaths: can we say how somebody is going to die if the death is violent?

It is very difficult to say. Just because somebody dies a violent death doesn't mean that they are a bad

person. It means that they did create some kind of karma in the past and that karma ripened. But you know, we have negative karma that can ripen even on very high levels on the path. So you can be a very good practitioner and a very spiritual person and a very kind person and still die violently because of some karma created from fifty million eons ago that you still haven't purified.

As to how somebody's mind is going to react if they die violently, that depends very much on the individual and what they happen to be thinking about at the time, and if they can turn their mind to the Dharma right away.

Alex Berzin tells this story—one experience he had that really shocked him as he has been practicing Dharma for so long. One day he was in Dharamsala walking through the market place, and he slipped and he fell and he cracked his rib, and his first thought as this was going on was “Oh xxx!” [Laughter.] And he said that really woke him up. He had been practicing Dharma for so long but in the moment of crisis, look what happened.

On the other hand, the same thing can again happen to the same person, but in a slightly different situation, and maybe causes and conditions then are such that he can really hook into the Dharma right away. It is so hard to say. Each situation is going to be very different, but the basic thing is that the more you habituate yourself with an attitude when you are alive, the easier it is for that to arise in a crisis or at death.

Dharma friends vs ordinary friends

[Audience: inaudible]

It is causing you to feel a dilemma that Dharma friends can help you when you are dying while ordinary friends can't. Well, it's going to depend on how your ordinary friends are. If your ordinary friends have some spiritual streak in them and they can respond compassionately, and they can, even if they don't practice the Dharma, realize that that's something important to you and help you to think about this at the time when you're dying, that can help. But if your ordinary friends or relatives are just so involved in attachment and they are freaking out because you are dying and they are crying, they are sobbing, and they are hysterical and they are clinging on saying "Don't die, I can't live without you", or they are sitting there reminding you of all the past things you did together, so that you get more and more attached to this life, then it doesn't help. If a Dharma friend comes and sobs and cries, they are not really a Dharma friend.

[Audience:] Do we need help when we are dying?

It's true one may want to die alone so he can guide his own mind. But having a group of people who are helping you is much easier, because at the time of death your body is going through all these changes and your mind is dependent on your body and your mind is changing. You know how it is when you are sick. When we are sick, our body elements go out of whack and so does our mind. Now if you have somebody who is with you when you are sick who

can help steer your mind in a good direction, it can help you.

[Audience:] What would Dharma friends do to help their dying friend?

It would depend on the other person's level of practice—where they are at.

1. Basically, the important thing is help the person when they are getting ready to die to settle all of their worldly things—make offerings with their possessions, make charity—so that they free their mind from all worries about wealth and stuff like that.

2. Help them also to develop a sense of forgiveness so that if they're still carrying around hurt or pain from past relationships, or if they are still angry at other people and bearing grudges, help them to work that through and give that up and realize that past situations are long gone. That they have much greater potential than to cling on to something like that from the past.

3. Help them to create as much positive potential as possible through making offerings.

4. As death approaches, put an image of the Buddha nearby. Put a picture of their spiritual teacher. When you talk to them, talk about Dharma as much as possible if they are open and want to talk about it. Remind them of the Dharma, remind them of loving kindness, remind them of refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha and imagining the Buddha and having light come pouring into them and purifying it all.

5. Have the person also make a lot of prayers to

never be separated from the altruistic intention. Have them pray to attain precious human lives in the future or to be reborn in the pure land so that they can continue their practice in future lives. Ask them to make very strong prayers for what they want to happen in future lives and to always be able to meet pure Dharma teachers and good, conducive circumstances for practice.

6. When you are with them, you have to be sensitive to their needs and all. Don't do anything that would cause them to generate anger or attachment. Don't bring up memories or things or topics that might make them angry or attached. Try and create a very peaceful atmosphere, do a lot of mantra—that is very helpful, very peaceful for people.

7. There are also some pills. The Tibetans make these herbal pills with relic substances in them. It is very good to take them orally when one is alive. You can also, at the time they die, crush them and then mix them either with yogurt or with a little bit of honey and put that on the top of the head as the person is breathing at the end or just after they've stopped breathing. That helps the consciousness leave through the top, which is very good.

8. Make dedication prayers for a precious human life and not to be separated from the Dharma and particularly, the bodhicitta mind. This is very important.

9. If the person has any kind of tantric practice, you would remind them of their main deity. Or you could do the self-empowerment with them. You could do purification practices with the person, that's going back again to the thing of forgiveness and apologizing.

OK, let's just sit quietly for a couple of minutes to digest. Please take this material home and think about it in the coming days.

Meditations on Impermanence

Review of last session—transience of life

In the last session, we talked about the transience of life. Transience or impermanence was Buddha's first teaching and also his last. After he attained enlightenment, he went to Sarnath and taught his five friends. The first thing he taught them was impermanence or transience, the fact that everything is changing moment to moment, the fact that nothing remains stable. And he demonstrated this as his last teaching by himself leaving his body, showing that even the Buddha is impermanent.

Difference between eternal and permanent/ non-eternal and impermanent

We have to be clear here about the difference between eternal and permanent, and non-eternal and impermanent, because the words "permanent" and "impermanent" in English are a little bit different from the way we are using them in Buddhism. As I am using them, the word "eternal" means it lasts forever without end. So for example, our mind-stream is an eternal phenomenon. It goes on without end. Something that is non-eternal is like this piece of paper because it can go out of existence.

Something can be eternal and also impermanent. “Impermanent” means “changing moment to moment”, so something like our mind-stream is eternal, it lasts forever but it is also impermanent because it changes moment to moment. Just look at your own mind—it changes moment to moment. So does our body and so does everything else around us.

“Permanent” in Buddhist language means something that would not change moment to moment. An example of this would be the emptiness of inherent existence. Since emptiness is a lack of independent existence, and something that lacks this can’t change, it is therefore permanent.

Gross impermanence & subtle impermanence

Within impermanence, we can talk about gross impermanence and subtle impermanence. Gross impermanence is like when things break—I drop this glass and it shatters. That’s gross impermanence—we can see it with our eyes. We can see something change with our eyes. Or the plant grows from spring to summer, that’s gross impermanence. The plant being this big and then this huge.

Subtle impermanence is, for example, when the scientists talk about the movement of the electrons around the nucleus. Within all the atoms and molecules, everything is moving and changing all the time, and yet we can’t see it.

Gross impermanence is obviously easier to realize and understand than subtle impermanence, because we can see it. But even for gross impermanence, we have a huge mental block against it. You can see how

strongly we grasp even at the gross permanence of things because we freak out when things change. When you have an antique and it breaks, or you have a plate and your kid knocks it off the table, it is like, “Wait! That’s not supposed to happen. It is not in the nature of this antique to break. Why is it breaking?” We can’t accept even that gross impermanence!

Or when we look into the mirror and we see more gray hair and more wrinkles, we’re shocked! That is not supposed to happen, that happens to other people! Even that kind of gross impermanence, our mind is so obscured by ignorance that we reject that and we fight against that. Let alone subtle impermanence and just the fact that nothing remains the same from moment to moment to moment. There is nothing to hold onto when we look on the subtle level.

The ignorance on our mindstream obscures both the gross and subtle levels of impermanence, and we have a lot of grasping to things being permanent. Of course intellectually we say, “Yes! Yes! Everybody dies and my antiques break and the car breaks ...” We say it all intellectually but that is intellectual. We can tell what our real grasping is—we just can’t accept it when it happens. That shows that there is a big difference between intellectually knowing something and actually integrating it in our lives so that it becomes our way of relating to the world. It’s showing that intellectually knowing something doesn’t do the trick of solving our problems. We have to put it in our heart.

PURPOSE OF MEDITATING ON IMPERMANENCE

1. Bringing the intellectual understanding of impermanence into our heart

The purpose of doing this meditation on impermanence or transience is so that at least when we are talking about gross impermanence, we bring our intellectual understanding into our heart. And similarly with subtle impermanence. I think we can all intellectually understand the electrons moving and things like this, but in our hearts, we certainly don't. The purpose of this meditation is to clarify our mind so that we perceive things more accurately. If we perceive things more accurately, we are going to have fewer problems in our lives than if we perceive them inaccurately.

2. Cutting attachment

Grasping at permanence is one of the underlying things that causes the generation of attachment. If we grasp in our hearts at things being permanent and unchanging, then they seem really there and it's very easy to get attached to them.

For example, a relationship. Grasping at permanence is what we do with relationships. If we have a relationship with somebody, there would be some part in our mind that says, "This is it. This is lasting forever." Or "This person is lasting forever." In our hearts, that is the way we feel. We become very attached to it. Because it is permanent, therefore I can cling to it. It gives us the illusion that it is something stable and secure that we can rely on because it is always going to be there, it's never going to change.

That is the way it appears to our afflicted mind. And so we get attached to it. We cling on to it.

And then once we have this attachment, it sets us up for so much disappointment and pain because the thing that we think is permanent and unchanging, is actually changing moment by moment. And at some point, this gross impermanence becomes evident to us and then we go, “What? This isn’t supposed to happen. This person I love isn’t supposed to die. The relationship isn’t supposed to end.

Yes, yes, I know impermanence intellectually but believe me, this is really not supposed to happen!”

You see how this grasping at permanence causes the attachment and then because the attachment is out of sync with reality, when reality becomes evident, in other words, when the object’s or the person’s impermanent nature is evident, then we experience a lot of pain. Whereas if we can get rid of the attachment, we can still relate to the person or the object but when it changes, we won’t freak out because we haven’t been clinging on to it as being permanent and always there. So you can see that this meditation on impermanence helps us to cut the attachment.

3. Cutting anger

Also, if you meditate on impermanence, it is going to help you cut the anger because often, when the thing we’re attached to ends, we get angry! So you see, if we can get rid of the attachment, we are also getting rid of the anger, as we get angry in proportion to the amount of attachment we have for something. They

go very well together.

So it is very helpful to remember, for example, whenever we have pain, or pleasure, that it is impermanent. Especially pleasure, it is very important to remember that at some point this pleasure ends and the happiness we experience would be like the happiness we experience in last night's dream. You might have had a really nice dream last night, but when you woke up, the dream was gone.

Similarly, any kind of pleasure we experience in our lives, from another temporal point of view, is not going to be there. It is going to be over and the happiness is like last night's dream. It is just not there anymore. So if you think of the happiness you experienced as a kid, or even the happiness as a teenager, the happiness you experienced last night, none of it is existent and happening right now—it's like last night's dream. If we can remember that while we are experiencing pleasure, we won't cling on to the pleasure. We can still experience the pleasure and enjoy it, but we don't cling on to it.

Similarly, when we are experiencing pain, we can remember that it too has the nature of being transient, of arising and ceasing, arising and ceasing. Then also our mind won't get so tight and wound up. Very often when we get depressed, or when we go into crisis, it feels like, "This is lasting forever! My problem is never going to change. It is never going to go away and we're stuck there right in the middle of it." But if we can remember that this too is something that comes into existence due to causes and conditions, therefore its very nature is that it changes, and it is not going to last forever, then it helps us to relax. We

don't have so much aversion to it.

That's why for example, in the Vipassana type of meditation as taught in the Theravada tradition, let's say when your knee is hurting and your back is hurting or whatever, you focus on that area and you watch the sensation of the pain and you see that it changes! It is not the same pain each moment, it changes. And that gives you some sense of space so that you begin to realize also that problems aren't so concrete.

4. Understanding emptiness

The understanding of impermanence also helps us very much to understand emptiness. It's the preliminary for understanding emptiness. The more we see that things are changeable, the more easily we can come to understand that therefore, there is no solid essence inside them to hold on to.

HOW TO MEDITATE ON SUBTLE AND GROSS IMPERMANENCE

Spending some time thinking about both subtle impermanence and gross impermanence is very helpful.

For subtle impermanence, you can just think about the electrons moving and the moments of mind (snapping of fingers). Just think about time and how moments are just like this (snapping of fingers), they're here and they're gone! You get some feeling for subtle impermanence.

When you think about gross impermanence, that is

where this meditation on death comes in. Because we're really contemplating both the gross impermanence of our body and our lives. So this meditation on death is really a very big motivator that helps us gain energy to practice because it poses that question to us: what is the meaning of life if at the end we die? What is really valuable in our life if at the end we leave behind our body, our wealth and our friends and relatives? If none of these come with us, then what's valuable in our lives? That helps us to put into perspective how we want to live our lives, so that our lives become very meaningful, our goals are clear and we can direct our energy very readily.

Benefits and Ways of Meditating on Death

NINE-POINT DEATH MEDITATION

a. Understanding how death is definite, it's certain, it happens to everybody, it's something that's constantly approaching.

b. How the time of death is uncertain. There is no fixed lifespan in our world. We are always going to be in the middle of doing something when we die so we cannot excuse ourselves saying: "I am busy. I can't die now. Come back later!" [Laughter.]

c. How at the time of death what's really important is the Dharma practice. In other words, our own mental attitudes, how we've been able to transform our mind into the nature of loving kindness and wisdom. That is

really valuable when we die. The karmic imprints—the imprints from all the constructive actions we’ve done—are also very important when we die. Those are the things that would influence what happens to us at death, during the intermediate stage and after that.

IMAGINE OTHERS’ DEATH

Another way to meditate on death is to imagine our own death. This is a very beneficial meditation. If you find it difficult to imagine your own death, you might even start thinking about the death of people whom you care a great deal about. This isn’t being morbid. We are not wishing these people dead but we are trying to be realistic. Especially with those people we are very attached to, I think it is really helpful to our mind to recognize that they are going to die and to imagine them dying and to imagine them being dead. Because some time or another they will be and if we have thought about it beforehand and looked at our emotional reactions and worked through some of those attachment issues or jealousy or anger, then when the person does die, we’re going to be able to handle it.

Especially when we are in very close relationships with people and we think about the fact that they might die or we might die, it might also help us to relate to that person in a much healthier way, recognizing that some of the games and tricks we get into really aren’t worthwhile. They are a waste of time. So it might help us to actually open up to the people and say what we want to say from our heart. And it might help us also recognize how important it is

to forgive people who have harmed us, because some day we're going to die and we don't want to die with all that anger. It may help us also recognize the need to apologize to some of the people we have harmed, or forgive somebody who has apologized to us. Thinking about theirs or our death can really help us overcome the pride that impedes apologizing and forgiving.

So imagining our death or other people's death helps us to keep our relationships with people very clean. We don't tend to stockpile all kinds of twisted emotions because we see that any of us could die at any moment, so what's the use of having this whole storehouse of confused, conflicting emotions and mixed-up communication?

And consider that unless we die first, we will be around when the people we care about die. If we can be mentally prepared for that, then we'll be in a situation of being able to help them when they are dying. If we aren't mentally prepared for their death, then when they are dying, we are going to freak out and we are going to be the one at their bedside crying and saying, "I can't live without you. Don't die!" Like I was saying the last time, when we're dying, the last thing we want is to have somebody around our bed crying. Unless we get some mental stability about the death of the people we are close to, we are going to be acting like that when they die. And if we do, it is going to be completely counter-productive because if it's somebody we care about, we want to be able to help them when they're dying, not hinder them.

If we can think about other people's death to get our own emotions level and stable, give up some of

the attachment and the clinging, or the anger and the resentment, then when that person is dying, we can really be with them. We won't be all tangled up in our own emotional mishmash and we'll be able to see where they're at and help them in the death process. And when they die, we'll be in some mental state to do some prayers for them and also be able to help all the other people around who are falling apart. So in that light, I think it's helpful thinking about people we are close to being dead or dying.

IMAGINE OUR OWN DEATH

It's also important to think about ourselves and imagine our own death because it is going to happen. And if it is something that we have thought about, and we have rehearsed in our mind, it is going to be much easier than if we go in cold. That's not to say that we are necessarily going to die in the same way we imagine it in our meditation, but just the fact of imagining it in our meditation will help us prepare and it will also help us cut a lot of attachment in our lives. By cutting attachment, actually that leaves us more open to enjoy our lives. When we are attached, we have a lot of fear of losing that which we are attached to. If we cut the attachment, we can still be with the person, still be with the object but there is no clinging fear that it is going to disappear, because we recognize that it is going to disappear. Our mind is relaxed about that and our mind accepts that.

HOW TO MEDITATE ON ONE'S OWN DEATH

In imagining our own death, we can do this meditation many times with different scenarios. You can, for example, imagine yourself getting cancer. Hearing that we have cancer, and then begin to think about “Well, if I know I am going to die, what do I need to clean up in my life? What emotions do I want to work out? What relationships do I want to clear up? What possessions do I want to give away?” This would help us begin to loosen the grasping at all these things.

So in your meditation, you can imagine just dying of cancer and go to the very day of your death and imagining your body losing strength. Or you can imagine your body losing strength all along the whole process. But especially towards the end, when you’re losing strength and you can’t get out of bed, really think, “Is there anything in my life that I have remorse over?” If you play this video now—“I’m going to die soon, what do I have remorse over?”, then after we end the meditation session or even in the meditation session, we can start to do something to counteract the remorse and the regret. We get some energy to do purification practices, for example. Or we get some energy to forgive somebody, or to apologize. Or we get some energy to give away things that we definitely don’t need and imagine when you are dying, giving away the things that you do need now.

We have so much wealth in America but let alone give away the things we do need, we can’t even give away the things we don’t need. Our house is stuffed with junk and yet we can’t bring ourselves to give it away! So this kind of meditation is at least going to get us going and giving away the things we don’t need

and then at least imagining giving away the things that we do need.

Different dying experience of two students; mind frame of a third student

First Student

I had one student in Singapore. I met him because we had a mutual friend. I met him because he was dying. He had cancer. He was thirty-one and had a bachelor's degree from the National University of Singapore. He had just been accepted to an American university to do his Ph.D. program. He was going to leave for the university when he realized he had cancer. He had to cancel the trip and had to undergo the various treatments.

My friend took me to see him and we talked about it. He was more in the denial stage at that point and then later on, he got really angry and upset and suicidal. He was just saying, "My life is completely useless. Here I am, I can't do anything. There are all these people working and I can't do anything at all. I should just kill myself."

I said, "First of all, that doesn't solve the problem. Second of all, from the Buddhist point of view, in one way you can make your life much more meaningful than all those people who are running around the city. Because all the people who were "successful" in the world running around making all that money, they are doing so with the motivation of attachment. Just running around filling their lives with distraction. But you, even though you are sick, you have the chance

to practice the Dharma because you can just lie on this bed and make your mind virtuous and create incredible merit and transform your mind.”

Slowly we worked through the depression and suicidal thing. I really admired him. I think his dying was one of the most precious things somebody has ever shared with me. It was an incredible experience. At one point he was very clear about his death. His books were his most priceless possession given that he was intellectual. When he realized he was dying, he began to give his books away as he recognized that his generosity would create a lot of merit, make other people happy and also free him from the attachment.

One Sunday afternoon, he called all of us together. He was living with his sister. He called his sister, his brother-in-law and me and our friend together, and also the mortician because he wanted to talk about his funeral. We sat down and we discussed what was going to happen at his funeral. He was very clear. He said to his family, “If you are going to cry when I’m dying, you do it in the living room. I don’t want you in my room going hysterical.” He was really straight with them, he was incredible.

We had it all planned out and I knew that they would call me when it was happening, I would come as quickly as possible and I would be giving him blessed pills and saying mantras. We had it all planned out. With the mortician, we talked about the funeral, the kind of casket, he wanted Buddhists things here and not Taoist things, he wanted prayers said by different people. And at one point he was so cute. He wanted our Dharma group to come and do Chenrezig mantra around him, and he said, “Then you’ll all

stand around me and I can just lie there and enjoy hearing it.” [Laughter.] It is really quite incredible.

Then of course there was one false alarm. I remember I was going to teach and all of a sudden the phone rang and his sister said he was dying. So I excused myself from the teaching and I went out there. We gave him the pills. I was saying mantra and the family was standing in the back all nervous. They weren't crying. We were going on and we put the Prajnaparamita text on his crown. This kind of went on for a while, and then he said, “I want to get up.” So he didn't die that night, but he could barely move. He was just totally skin and bones.

I was visiting him every day. On some days he was conscious and some days he was barely conscious because by that time, he was taking liquid morphine for the pain. Then one day when I went to his house to visit him and found the door locked, I said to my friend Jan who had driven me up there, “Jan, let's go to the hospital. I don't know why this door is locked but it shouldn't be locked and my guess is he had gone to the hospital.” And sure enough, he had woken up that morning and said to his sister, “Take me to the hospital otherwise I am going to die today.” It was interesting, even with so much preparation and talking we had about his death, at the very end he was afraid, he didn't want to die.

They took him to the hospital and they put him on the drip. I came into the hospital room and the doctor was leaning over his bed and Mai Heng (that was his name) was saying (weakly), “Don't confuse me. Don't confuse me.” I knew instantly what was happening, because Singapore is full of well-meaning

Christians who want to convert people. I knew that was what was going on. As I approached the bed and the doctor saw me, he just said to Mai Heng, “You are an intelligent person. You decide.” And then the doctor left. I had to spend some time calming Mai Heng down. He was upset, so we talked. And then I went to talk to the doctor. [Laughter.]

I kind of amaze myself sometimes. I don’t get like this very often. I had a very calm and peaceful tone of voice but I looked him straight in the eyes. I told him that his role was to take care of the patient’s body and we were not talking religion here, we were talking about the benefit of the patient and death time was not the time to convert anybody. Anyway, that’s an aside.

I went back to Mai Heng at that point, who was choking in bed and having great difficulty breathing. He called his sister over and I couldn’t hear what he said to his sister. His sister told me later, and this was the last thing Mai Heng said, that he reminded her to give away all his remaining money. I thought that was so incredible. His last thought was just “Give what I have to other people so that they can benefit.”

Then his breathing got shorter and he stopped breathing and I stayed for a while and put the pill on his head. Like I told you last time, there are these pills that we can grind and put with honey or yogurt, and put the pill on his head. We had that all planned out, we were expecting him to die in his house. As there was no honey and no yogurt in the hospital, we used the Mars bar that Jan had. [Laughter.] You make do with what you have. We put this on his crown and we said some mantra. And because it was a hospital, I

tried to shoo the doctor away for as long as I could. I explained to the doctor. But then eventually the doctor had to come so he pronounced him dead and then the morticians came.

And then the funeral. In the Chinese culture, they usually bring the body home. He lived in one of these big apartment blocks so they had the funeral downstairs. It's incredible in Chinese funerals. They have all the families come. The body sits there for like two or three days and all the families come and the people play mahjong, they hang out and talk and they eat. It is incredible. Some people are really sitting there trying to work emotionally through what is going on. And then other people are just kind of there, it's so incredible ... We're so ignorant that even in the face of death, we block out the fact that we are going to die. If all those people who come to the funeral realize that they are going to be lying in the casket one day too, then what's the use of hanging around playing mahjong?

Anyway, I spent a good deal of time with the family then. He had one sister who was Christian. We talked for a bit. Then our Dharma group came up a few times and we all stood around and we did the Chenrezig mantra and the practice was very, very powerful. After a few days, they took the body to the crematorium. Singapore is such a small island that there is no room for burial. So the body was cremated and then you come back a few hours later and you pick through the bones with chopsticks, to take out the big pieces of bones and then put them in urns. It is an incredible thing to pick through your friend's bones. I mean it really brings home, "Yes! This is

impermanence. This person is no longer here.” Because you are picking up the remnants of their charred bones and dentures and whatever it is. It is quite powerful. Anyway, like I said, I think that’s one of the most treasured experiences I had with another human being because we were able to be quite direct and honest with each other.

Second Student

At the same time, there was another student of mine who was dying, also a young man. He was twenty-five and had a brain tumor. His family was doing the exact opposite—complete denial all along. The family did not tell him he had cancer; only that he had a tumor. They could not mention the word “cancer” to him.

While he was still healthy, I had written to my teacher to get some Dharma practices because there are some very, very potent Dharma practices that can help cure people who are very ill, even with cancer. I got the practice for him and asked him to come over so I could teach it to him, but he was too busy. One day when we were taking the eight precepts on Buddha’s birthday, his company was also going on an outing and he went on the outing with his company, because he said that his colleagues would be very upset if he didn’t go.

He was so caught up with his feeling of having to be a good worker and to have a good reputation. The reason he couldn’t come learn the practices was because he was working overtime in his job. Even though he had had surgery for this tumor, when he went back to work, he was a workaholic and he just

kept doing it. So it was very difficult because here, even though there's a method to help him while he is recovering from the surgery, while there is still a chance, he doesn't have time even to take the eight precepts which are so incredibly virtuous for twenty-four hours. He didn't have the time.

He was an incredibly nice person. You can't believe it, he is so kind and gentle. He went out of his way to help me with many, many things. One time I was leaving for India and he had to drive and get all these things, he was incredibly nice. Just incredible. To help, he would go out of his way. To do Dharma practice, no.

And there's a practice in Buddhism of liberating animals because they say that if we can prolong others' lives, then that karmically creates the cause for our own lives to be prolonged. Of course if I asked him to go and liberate animals, he wouldn't do it, he didn't have the time. If I told him to go and do it for his own benefit, he would say, "I don't have time." So I had to say, "I want to liberate animals, will you help me?" Then he did it. It's incredible, you know! So on several occasions we would go down to the market. We would buy different animals, insects and fish and we would go and liberate them in ponds and parks and we would make prayers and say mantras. I had to do it this way to get him to do some practice. Because otherwise he wouldn't.

Then, at one point he started feeling very dizzy and the headaches were coming back and he had to stop working. He said to me, "Oh! Well I can't work now maybe I'll go to Malaysia on vacation. I haven't been able to do that yet." I was sitting there thinking,

“You’re in no state to go to Malaysia!” He was getting out of touch with what’s going on. The brain tumor just kept getting worse and worse and he was hospitalized for a few weeks. I would go to see him. It was so touching. His whole face was swollen, he couldn’t get up or do anything. I would come in to do mantras and then talk with him. He didn’t have much control over his hands. But he would be kind of lying there and when I started to do the mantras he would kind of go like this [pay respect with his hands]. It almost made me cry.

That went on for a while and then one day he died. Before he died, while his mind was still clear (before he was hospitalized), I said to the family, “We have to tell him he’s going to die. We have to tell him that the cancer is there and that it doesn’t look too good, there is always a chance of recovery but it doesn’t look too good”. The family said, “No. The doctor said we shouldn’t tell him.” What they really meant was, “We can’t face it.” So he never had the opportunity to straighten out any of his affairs. And I couldn’t go beyond what the parents wanted. At the end, right before he died, by the time his mind was really gone, his mother came and said to me, “We should have told him.” But at that point, it was useless.

So, we see how different people react to death and how death becomes a very different experience based on whether one is willing to face it and acknowledge it or not.

Third Student

And at the same time that all these were going on,

there was one young man who was in the Buddhist society in the university. We had become very good friends and he was talking about taking refuge and wanted me to do the refuge ceremony. I explained that when we take refuge, we automatically take the precept not to kill because the whole foundation of Buddhism is non-violence. He thought about it and he came back and said, “No. I can’t do that because there’re cockroaches that come into our kitchen and my mother will be very upset if I don’t kill them.”

It was so incredible for me because here we have two other young men dying due to previously created karma, which probably has something to do with killing or harming or torturing others’ bodies, and experiencing the karmic result of their own previous lives’ harm. And here’s somebody else who’s healthy now, who has the possibility to take the precept to abandon that negative action and he can’t. Mentally his mind won’t let him because he feels obliged to kill the cockroaches. These are the layers of ignorance on sentient beings’ minds. Thinking about all of these and trying to imagine their experience as being ours and seeing how we are going to react, I think it can really help us in our own meditation on death and our own contemplation on how to make best use of our lives.

Let’s take some time now and do some meditation on this. Let’s spend ten to fifteen minutes doing this meditation of envisioning our own death. If you want just to spend some time thinking about the stories I told you, you could do that and then move on to imagining the scenario of your own death, what it feels like, how the people you are close to are

reacting, how your own mind is reacting, check up the kind of work or things that you would like to clear up before you die, so that we can start to make preparation. OK? Is that clear, on what to do?

Questions and answers

Eternal and permanent

[Audience: inaudible]

The question is about “eternal” and “permanent”. Once one has become a Buddha, that is eternal, one is always a Buddha, you never fall back to not being a Buddha. But one’s mind is still impermanent, one’s mind changes moment by moment. The empty nature of the Buddha’s mind, the lack of inherent existence of the Buddha’s mind is permanent and is also eternal.

Bodies of the Buddha—permanent/ impermanent/ eternal/ not eternal

[Audience: inaudible]

When we talk about the Buddha, sometimes we talk about the different bodies of the Buddha. That doesn’t mean physical bodies of the Buddha. When we talk about the Buddha’s wisdom consciousness, that’s called the wisdom Dharmakaya, the mind that’s full of compassion and wisdom. That mind is eternally a Buddha from the time that person attains enlightenment. From then on, that person is eternally a Buddha. But his/her mindstream is changing

moment by moment. This is because a Buddha perceives different things every moment, so of course the mindstream that perceives them is impermanent, changing moment by moment. That's what they call the wisdom Dharmakaya.

Sometimes we talk about the nature Dharmakaya, the nature body of the Buddha. That refers to the lack of inherent existence of the Buddha's mind. That is a permanent phenomenon. It doesn't change. It doesn't go in and out of existence and doesn't change moment by moment.

The different manifestation bodies of the Buddha are also impermanent. The bodies, either what they call the enjoyment body or the emanation body, are the different physical forms in which a Buddha can appear in. The emanation body particularly is not eternal. For example, if we look at the Buddha, from the point of view of him having been enlightened before manifesting the appearance of Shakyamuni twenty-five hundred years ago, that body of the Buddha appearing as that historical figure, is not eternal. And also the body changed moment by moment, and so it is impermanent.

Types of Buddha nature—permanent/ impermanent

[Audience: inaudible]

There're two kinds of Buddha nature. One kind is permanent. One kind is impermanent. The empty nature of our own mind is permanent; the clear and knowing nature of our mind is impermanent. The clear

and knowing nature is just our ability to perceive objects—for objects to arise and for us to engage in them—the thing that makes that process happen. This is impermanent, because each moment of mind is clear and knowing and yet each moment is different from the previous moment.

Understanding impermanence leads to understanding emptiness

[Audience: inaudible]

Emptiness means the lack of some solid, existing, independent something. Currently, that's how everything appears to us. Like there is a real solid thing that's "me" and there is a real solid something in here that's the watch, and there is a real solid something in here that's glass, that's completely independent of everything else. Actually, nothing exists as solid, independent entities. That's what we mean by inherent existence—solid, independent entities that exist in and of themselves, completely independent of influence from any other thing. That's how things appear to us. That's how we grasp them to exist but it is a complete hallucination that we are grasping at.

Now if we understand impermanence, then we begin to understand that everything changes moment by moment. So if we start to look at a thing and we recognize that this thing is made up of all these atoms and molecules with the electrons spinning, then we begin to get this feeling, "Hold on! Maybe there is nothing solid in here to grasp onto as existing in and

of itself because it's just all these parts that are together, and all these parts are changing." So it helps us get some sense of insubstantiality.

So if we kind of sit and think about that for a while in terms of our body, the fact that you have all these particles whirling around, giving the illusion of something solid but it's actually just a little bit of material substance and a lot of space. Then we also come to have a different feeling about our body. It doesn't seem like there's this thing made of lead anymore.

Let's dedicate. Please do this meditation at home.

CHAPTER 3

The Lower Realms

Summary of previous talks

We are now in the middle of this series of teachings, on how to go from confusion to enlightenment, starting off from where we are, which isn't the end of the path, but the beginning. We talked about our precious human life and the opportunity that it affords, all the good qualities it has and how difficult it is to attain. We talked about the purpose of our life, that we can really make use of this opportunity to tap into our Buddha potential, to reveal it, to make our lives meaningful for others. And yet this life doesn't last so long: it goes by very, very quickly.

I remember when I was little, one year seemed like forever, from one birthday to the next, those presents just didn't come in fast enough. But now as an adult, the years go very quickly. Death is the inevitable result of having taken birth, so death is something we will have to face someday. Everybody faces it, there's no way around it. But if we can prepare for it, then death need not be a frightening thing. It can actually be a blissful thing.

Last week I told you about one monk in Dharamsala who died; how he was able to relax and transform the whole process into a way of understanding emptiness and generating the altruistic intention. He died very wonderfully. We have to look

at our own life and see if we have created the cause to die in a similar way because everything that happens in life doesn't happen accidentally. Things don't just happen out of nowhere; they happen due to causes. This is a very scientific thing—things happen due to causes. So we have to examine the causes we've created as an indication of what kinds of things are likely to happen in the future.

At death time, what happens is that our consciousness starts to separate from this body. Life starts when the consciousness and this body are joined together. Dying is when they are starting to separate and death is when that separation is complete and the consciousness goes on to take some other body influenced, of course, by previous actions.

This shows that we are not our body. This is a big thing especially for us Westerners because we are so attached to the body. So much of our ego identity is wrapped up in this body and yet we aren't our body. Our body changes moment to moment. When we think back about being a little kid, it's hard to even imagine what it was like having an infant body. And it would be equally hard to imagine having a body that's ninety-five years old and a mind that's senile. And yet that's perfectly within the realm of possibility. We aren't our body, though the consciousness changes a lot depending on the body. Similarly after death, when it takes another body, we'll be influenced by the physical structure of that body as well. What body we take in our future lives depends on the causes that we've created before—in the previous lives or this lifetime.

Ripening of Karma at Death Time

What karma ripens at the time of death that will throw us into another body depends also on causes. At death time, it is not that the sum total of positive and negative actions are put on a scale and somebody says, “OK! Well, you are a bit on the heavy side, you go down.” There’s nobody judging, there’s nobody determining; nobody’s running the show and punishing people. Things just happen due to causes and conditions. So likewise, the karma isn’t added up but rather, in one lifetime we have many, many different kinds of karmic seeds.

Take today: so many different thoughts, so many different actions and so many resulting imprints. Throughout the day, we are constantly acting mentally, physically, verbally, constantly leaving energy traces or imprints on our mindstream. All the different actions we’ve done. Which of those are going to manifest and ripen at that time? Not all of them can. Certain ones will, and these are the ones, by their seeds growing, that will propel our consciousness into a certain kind of body in a future lifetime.

The first kind of imprints that are very likely to ripen at death are from *very powerful actions*. If we’ve done some very, very powerful actions even one time, for example, the five extremely negative actions (killing one’s father or mother, or causing schism in the Sangha community, etc), these are the ones that manifest first, because they’re so heavy, they’re so weighty, they’re so potent. Similarly, if one does a very powerful positive action, for example,

actions done with very, very strong altruism or in relationship to the Triple Gem, it has a good opportunity of being the foremost one to manifest or ripen at the time of death.

Now, if there are no outstandingly powerful actions at death time, then the ones that are very likely to ripen are the ones that are *more habitual*. Because just by the force of doing something habitually, it builds up a real weight in the mind. You can see it with any habit you have now in this life. Very small habits, by the fact of our doing them over and over again, become very strong and difficult to break, for example, habitually getting angry or lying or habitually making offering or being kind.

And what conditions a lot of the ripening of karma at death time is the *thoughts that we have* while we're dying. This is a very, very important thing. You can see that even now when we're awake, if our mind is calm and peaceful, things go better in our environment and our experience, than when our mind is turbulent. Similarly, at death time, if the mind is filled with clinging and attachment—not wanting to leave this life, clinging to relatives, clinging to the body; or if the mind is filled with anger—anger at dying, anger at things that happen years ago; if the mind is disturbed in that kind of way at the time of death, then that acts like the fertilizer so that the negative karmic seeds can grow.

That's why we say when somebody is dying or when we're dying, to try and keep the room really peaceful and calm, not to generate attachment or aversion or anxiety in a person when they're dying.

And so our Dharma practice is especially important

at death time. Because if the mind is able to be in a very positive state, for example, we can remember our teacher or the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha at the time we die, we can generate loving kindness. If we can think of emptiness, then the mind is in a very positive state, and that also is the fertilizer which encourages the ripening of previously created positive actions.

Squarely Facing the Possibility of Rebirth in the Lower Realms

The next point we go into here in this sequence, is the meditation on the lower realms. We talked about the preciousness of life, the inevitability of death and how to make our life meaningful. Then we have to consider what kind of rebirth we can have after we die, either an upper one or a lower one.

Of course, we would all much rather like to think about upper rebirths, pleasure etc. But it's also good to be realistic and ask what happens if things don't go so well. If we really look at the karma we've created in this lifetime and if we're *very honest with ourselves*—has the amount of positive karma exceeded the amount of negative karma? Which do you have more of? Which is more likely to ripen? If we really look and think about the different destructive actions, which ones we've done, and which ones we've actually succeeded in abandoning, we might come to realize that because cause and effect works, there is a chance that we will take an unpleasant rebirth simply because we've created the cause for it.

We all like to think of things that are beautiful and wonderful. We tend to block out things we consider disagreeable. In other words, if something is nice, then I like to think about it and I believe it; but if it makes me feel uneasy inside, then I don't believe it. In other words, we are using whether we like it or not as the criteria for what we believe or don't believe. That's not a real wise criteria to use to evaluate what exists and doesn't exist. That just shows our personal preferences, our mental blocks and our biases. So you have to have a little bit of a courageous mind to examine the possibility of lower realms.

When we listen to descriptions of lower realms and rebirth, we have to try and free ourselves from our Judeo-Christian upbringing. I find that in teaching Westerners, that often is one of the biggest blocks people have because we tend to look at Buddhism and project Christian meaning onto it and then we sometimes get quite confused. So, it's important to remember when we are talking about this, that lower rebirth is not a punishment. Nobody else sends us there, and it's not taught in order to make us afraid or intimidated.

So the question may come, why did the Buddha teach about unfortunate states of rebirth? People often say maybe he is just doing it to try and scare us into being good. And you can see very clearly how this is our Christian upbringing—scare tactic to make us be good because we are naughty little kids. The Buddha didn't need to teach us things to make us fearful and terrified. There are enough fearful and terrifying things in our lives. The Buddha didn't need to teach about it. That's not why the Buddha taught

about lower realms and rebirth. There's no purpose in our becoming terrified. Absolutely no purpose at all.

Rather the Buddha taught this out of compassion, out of his care for us. Because he was able to see that within our mindstreams, there may exist the cause to take that kind of rebirth, and if we can learn about it beforehand, then we can purify that cause and we can stop creating more causes for it. It's like if there is a bomb in your car and you don't know it, somebody may come and tell you about it and if you say, "Oh, he is telling me that to make me afraid," I don't know what will happen next. Whereas if you realize this person is warning you about something serious because they care, then you will take action to do something about it.

And it's important also, in order to develop genuine love and compassion for all beings, which is something we really want to do in our hearts, to be able to reflect on their sufferings and miseries, for example, the misery they experience being born in unfortunate realms. How can we be in touch with their misery of being born there if we don't even want to think about the existence of those realms or even acknowledge our own possibility of being born there? So in order to tap into the pain that others experience so that we can generate genuine compassion for them, we have to also be willing to contemplate our own problems and sufferings. Otherwise, love and compassion is just Pollyanna goody-goody smiling things but we don't have any guts when it comes to looking at anything unpleasant. If we have a weak mind like that, how can we possibly benefit others?

Types of Lower Realms

People often have a lot of doubt too about the existence of lower realms and rebirths because we generally talk about three unfortunate kinds of rebirth.

One is as an *animal*. We can see them with our eyes and we can't deny their existence. We can of course think, "How can I, being a human be born as an animal?" But again, we have to tap into the fact we aren't our body and just think of all the different shapes your body has been in since conception until ninety-five years old. And then we come to see we really aren't our body. We can see that animals have consciousness and mind, they experience pain and pleasure and so they are living beings just like us. It is just that the consciousness is born in that kind of body. Likewise, our consciousness can take that kind of rebirth. This is a little bit easier to understand because at least we can see animals.

The other two unfortunate realms we don't often see. The next one is *hungry ghosts*, or *preta* in Sanskrit and this realm consists of beings who experience extreme hunger and thirst and they also include spirits. When people do channeling, they sometimes channel spirits from this unfortunate realm.

The third lower realm is the one of extreme pain and suffering. Sometimes it's called the *hellish realm* or *hell realm* and is characterized by extreme heat or cold, very much physical agony in that realm.

When we hear the descriptions of these, we sometimes say "Okay, animals exist, but the hungry ghosts and the hell realm?"

Understanding existence: types of phenomena

Now, we have to remember here that there are three different kinds of phenomena:

1. Manifest phenomena

Those are the ones we can contact directly with our senses, like the table is a manifest phenomenon; the carpet or the lights, something like that. Animals are manifest phenomena, we can see that.

2. Hidden phenomena

Then there's one that's called hidden phenomena. These are things that we understand through inference. For example, emptiness or lack of inherent existence comes under this category, because we understand emptiness initially through logic or inference, and only later do we realize it with direct perception.

3. Extremely hidden phenomena

The third is called extremely hidden phenomena. These are things that we come to understand through accepting somebody else's word on it because that person is very knowledgeable and has no reason at all to deceive us.

So you can see that there are different kinds of things that we know in different ways. The table, we know from direct perception. The lack of inherent

existence, we first have to use logic and then go to direct perception. And then other things, let's say, the realms of the hungry ghosts or the hell beings, those might be manifest phenomena for the beings living inside of them. But for us, they are the extremely hidden kind and we have to rely on the word of somebody else to understand them and then keep checking it out to see if it makes sense for us.

If the Buddha has touched your heart in some way and some of his words have seemed true to you, then that gives a little bit more space in the mind to begin to consider, let's say, the existence of lower realms that we can't see. We might try and think about, or provisionally accept them because the Buddha described them and we can see he tends to know what he's talking about and he tends also to have a good motivation and he won't try and deceive us.

Getting back to this thing of we always want to hear very positive things. Somebody might say, "Maybe it was not the Buddha's intention to terrify us by explaining these unfortunate realms of rebirth. But still, couldn't we get the same motivation to purify and to develop our good qualities if he just explained the positive things to us? If we got positive reinforcement rather than negative ones, wouldn't that work?" In some ways, yes it does work. For example, when we hear about the qualities of the Buddha and we get some inspiration, "Oh yeah, I can become like that. That's nice to think about. I can do it, I want to do it."

But then let's think about some other situations in which we hear about the positive effects but that still doesn't work to motivate us very well.

Like somebody who is very overweight, they go to the doctor and if the doctor says, “You’ll feel so much better if you lose weight.” They say, “Yes, yes,” and they go home and have a piece of chocolate cake. They know, “Yeah, I’ll feel better,” and that’s the positive kind of motivation, but somehow, it doesn’t move them to actually lose the weight. Whereas, if the doctor says, “Look, you’re going to get a heart attack if you don’t lose some weight.” Then the person becomes a bit apprehensive and they go home and they go on a diet.

So sometimes hearing about the negative consequences can motivate us in ways that just hearing about the positive consequences can’t. That’s why it is important to think about these kinds of rebirth. Because let’s face it, sometimes we get very, very lazy in our practice and we rationalize and procrastinate.

Sometimes something like this—thinking about the possibility of a lower rebirth—can be like cold water on the face and thereafter makes it extremely easy to practice. The mind is very motivated and we don’t have that internal civil war going on anymore.

Lower Realms: Creation of the Mind?

Now, these different realms of existence, they are things that are dependently arising. They come into existence because the causes for them exist. Buddha did not create the lower realms. God did not create the lower realms. Nobody went, “I think this would be something good to have in Seattle.” But rather the

lower realms come into existence because the cause for them exists. And the cause is negative action. So, our own personal negative action is what creates our rebirth inside the hell realm. So you can see the hell realm, in some ways, is definitely created by the mind. Our actions are what propel us to take that kind of rebirth.

There's an interesting quote from Shantideva, a great Indian sage who said, "By whom were they zealously forged, these weapons of hell? Who made the burning iron ground and whence did the conflagration come?" And then he answered, "The sage (meaning the Buddha) has taught that everything like that is from the evil mind, there's nothing to be feared in the three realms apart from the mind."

In other words, it's our own mind that creates our existence in the lower realm. How does that happen? How does that arise? How can we get some kind of feeling that it's possible to take that kind of rebirth? What I find very helpful is if you can remember a time when you were really paranoid and very fearful, terrified, so freaked out and frightened, and due to your fear, there was a lot of anger as well, because we can see fear and anger really go hand-in-hand. And if you can remember a time in your life when you were like that, and then imagine that mental state, imagine getting stuck in that mental state. So stuck in that fearful, paranoid, angry mental state, that everything you saw, you saw through that filter. So stuck in that mental state that if that mental state began to manifest externally, as your environment and as your body, that would be what the hellish realm is like.

That experience is just so intensified that that's

how everything appears to you. We can see this even in the case of people in a human body. If somebody has a very disturbed mind, even though nobody else is trying to harm them, they see harm. Even though there's no danger, they're terrified—we can see that very clearly, can't we? Just imagine that mind getting so exaggerated, so huge that it really did turn into the environment and the body. So that even if somebody took you out of that environment and put you in another one, you'd still see things exactly the same way, because the mind is so stuck.

Or, remember a time in your life when you had so much craving and clinging and wanted something so badly, but you didn't have it—how your mind was completely obsessed. You couldn't function because your mind was so totally stuck.

Like sometimes when relationships break up, how the mind is just completely stuck on the other person and you can't think about anything. There's so much clinging, attachment and frustration. Now again, imagine that mental state, getting stuck in it, and it grew so huge, that that became your environment and became your body, so that your whole life experience was one of this clinging that was continuously frustrating. Everything you wanted evaded you, and your mind was just obsessed—that is the realm of the hungry ghosts.

Or if you've ever had a time when your mind was really, really foggy, like when you had a hangover or when you've been anaesthetized, when you knew you could think better but you couldn't do it, ever had that feeling? Your mind just can't get it together, you just can't put two and two together. It's just totally fogged

up so that you can't think clearly, you can't make decisions, you can't act appropriately. Again, take that confused, very obscured state of mind and turn it into the environment, turn it into your body, turn it into your life experience, and that's basically what the animal realm is like—a kind of fogged-up thinking.

If you really sit and think about it, what would it be like to be a fish? What does a fish think about all day? Here is this mindstream that has the Buddha potential, that has the complete ability to become a fully enlightened being, yet it's so obscured, so fogged-up, what can it do? Or a cow. When you look in a cow's eyes. It's just incredible. I get a sense of like there's this being locked in that body, it wants to think but it can't think, all it can think about is hay, that's about it.

If we think in that way about mental states and their relationships to our environment and our body, we might begin to get a feeling of how it's possible for our mindstream to take that kind of rebirth. It isn't really that far out. It really isn't such an impossible thing. I remember His Holiness was teaching us one time and he said, "I really wish there weren't lower realms, I really wish these things didn't exist and I didn't have to teach about them."

Why Think About the Lower Realms?

Increase mindfulness to stop destructive behavior patterns

But that's not really the point—what we wish existed

or didn't exist. It is what is helpful for us to think about and learn so that we can take this knowledge and use it in a wise way, so that we make our lives meaningful right now. By understanding these kinds of sufferings and other types of rebirths, it gives us tremendous impetus to purify and not to keep following our continual destructive behavior patterns. It's especially effective when you see yourself starting to act out another "here's another one of my tell-everybody-what-I-think-of-them days" or "here's another one of my cheat-everybody-days". When we start to get into our old behavior patterns, remember that this is leaving an imprint on our mindstream that could ripen into that kind of rebirth. Do I want that result? If I don't want that result, maybe I should think twice about telling this person off and losing my temper. Maybe I should think twice about cheating somebody in business.

So, it's very helpful to think about the lower realms. It helps us break those kinds of things that we really don't like in ourselves anyway. Nobody really likes to lose their temper and tell people off, and yet we find it such a hard habit to break. If we could remember the effects that this will have on our future lives, it gives us a lot more self-control and energy not to act that kind of stuff out and to do some kind of purification practice for any kind of behavior we've done in the past. So, thinking about this can have a very beneficial, very strong effect on the mind.

Protect ourselves from sufferings in future lives

Just as we try and protect ourselves from even the

slightest suffering now in this life, we should try and protect ourselves from the possibility of future sufferings in other lives. If we sit down and meditate in a place where it's too cold, for example, if you go into the Cascades, in an unheated cabin and you try and meditate, can you do it? No way! Or, if you have to sit on top of a wood stove and meditate, can you do it? Again no, we can't stand the pain. There's no possibility to concentrate because the physical pain is too intense. Or, if we didn't eat for one day, is it easy to meditate? Is it easy to concentrate? Very difficult. If it is difficult in this life to do virtuous things when we're too hungry or too tired or too hot or too cold, then in future lives, if our whole life gets stuck in that environment, how can we practice?

So, if we have the possibility now to eliminate the causes for that, then it is well worth our while to be cautious, rather than be proud or arrogant, "Well, that stuff is just to make you afraid, so I don't believe in it!" But to take it to heart because it can really invigorate our practice. If we try and prevent even a small suffering that we might experience tomorrow, why don't we try and prevent a larger suffering that we could also experience tomorrow—in case we happen to die between today and tomorrow. Who knows?

We could! It makes sense to do that.

Transform our minds

Another way to think about the existence of the lower realms, is that you can think about your mind. This is if we do have some faith that we have the Buddha

potential and that if we practice well, our mental state can get better and better. That is, if we develop our loving-kindness, develop our patience, our generosity, our wisdom, our mind can get better and better, it can get happier and happier. What happens if we don't do that and instead, we develop our anger, our jealousy, our pride and our attachment? Well, in a similar way, our mental state will just degenerate.

It would be really illogical to think, "Oh yes, yes, my mind can become a Buddha but it can't become an animal or it can't become a hungry ghost." Because we can see what we become is completely dependent on our mental states, on our mental habits, on what kind of things we cultivate. We can cultivate the good qualities or we can just let bad qualities run the show. It's completely up to us, our whole experience that follows is a result of our own mental states.

Our mental states do affect our body, even in this body. People who have ulcers and high blood pressure, it's related to the mental state, isn't it? It's very wise in this way to see the connection between the body and the mind. And that if we just let the mind go in whichever direction, our body in this life will also go in the corresponding direction, and so will our body next life. If we take the time to develop loving-kindness and patience, our body will be affected in this life. They have all sorts of statistics in the medical profession about how people are healed from diseases much more rapidly if they have a good mental state. So one's mental state does affect one's body this life, it does affect the body in future lives. There is a relationship between body and mind.

Lower Realms: Mental State? Physical State? Illusion?

There are different explanations. Some people say, “Well, maybe the different realms are just mental states, they are not really physical places.” Often people wonder about that. Well, the animal realm is definitely a physical realm, we can see that. The one about hungry ghosts and spirits, again it’s quite interesting depending on what culture you live in. Because if you go to Asia, so many people have stories about spirits, it’s not a big thing to people in Asia to believe in spirits. So many people had experiences with spirits. Maybe in the West we don’t call it spirits, we label it something else, or attribute its cause to something else.

There is some discussion on whether these are actual physical places or not. Some people say they are actually physical places, like the hungry ghost realm, the hell realm. Maybe they are physical places but are they real or not real? Well, is this life real or not real? So in one way you could say, “Well, maybe it is as real as this karmically created life, because what we are perceiving in this life is also a creation of our karma. So maybe the environment is as real as the environment we are experiencing now.”

Other Lamas say that the hell realm, for example, is purely karmically created, it’s illusory. In other words, it’s not a real physical place but it appears that way so strongly, so vibrantly because of one’s karma. Like, when one has a hallucination or when you’re dreaming, you are completely convinced this is reality. So hallucinations and dreams, they are illusory but we

experience them as real. But the point is, they are also due to our mental states, aren't they? They are dependent on the mind. That's why Shantideva said there's nothing to fear in the three realms apart from the negative mind, because that is the thing that creates our environment and creates our whole perception of it. Let me pause here to see how you are doing so far.

Questions and answers

[Audience:] Why are some phenomena extremely hidden?

Extremely hidden phenomena are extremely hidden because our minds are obscured, not because something is covering the phenomena, but because the mirror is dirty and it can't reflect what is out there. What is it that dirties the mirror? It's what we call the afflicted obscurations and cognitive obscurations. If we understand the emptiness of inherent existence, that cuts the ignorance which then helps us to remove the afflicted obscurations. As we meditate more and more on emptiness and on dependent arising, we are able to also clear away the subtle stains of the mind, the obscurations to knowing, and then it's like you have a completely clear mirror that just naturally reflects whatever it is that exists.

[Audience: inaudible]

The Buddha would be able to perceive the hell realm directly, not that he or she would be in the hell realm

experiencing pain, but he or she would be able to perceive the existence of that as something that was created by sentient beings' karma.

[Audience:] How can we get out of the lower realms?

First of all, getting the life we have now, the precious human life, is like half the battle won. Just to get this life is so fortunate. Compared to what it took us to get out of the lower realms to get here, getting from here to Buddhahood is almost the same thing.

Another way of looking at it, let's say you have a human being who creates all different kinds of karma, different actions, so that there are different seeds on their mindstream. Let's say when they die, their mind is really upset and angry because the hospital is charging them too much and they are all upset because they don't want their relatives to have to pay all the hospital bills after they die. So they die in that kind of mental state, a negative karmic imprint ripens, they get born in the lower realm. They stay in that lower realm only as long as the causal (karmic) energy is there.

So the lower realms aren't permanent. They are not eternal, in the same way that our present life ends when the karmic energy for it runs out. Any kind of rebirth within cyclic existence ends at some point because the causal energy, the karmic cause, runs out.

Putting good imprints on our minds and also those of animals

Yet those persons, even though they are experiencing

a lower rebirth, still have on their mindstreams the imprints from positive actions they did when they were human beings. So that is why very often if animals are dying, we say mantras on them. It puts a good imprint on their mind. If they have some good imprint already there, it can act as a fertilizer to make a good karmic imprint ripen at the time of their death. So people eventually will come out of the lower realms because they still have the good karmic imprints on their mindstreams and these can ripen later and give them a rebirth that is a god or a demi-god or as a human being.

Similarly, very often, you will see, like in the Tibetan community, people go on circumambulations around the different buildings or monuments. It's considered a very good thing to do, so they'll take their animals with them too.

When I lived in Dharamsala, I used to go out in the evenings and walk around the library. There was one puppy that came and walked around the stupa with me every evening. And I thought, compared to other dogs, at least this dog had the possibility to somehow contact this building with all the holy objects in it as well as people around who said lots of mantra to it. It's possible to put good imprints on animals' minds. So for those of you who have pets, say mantras to your dog, your cat.

I remember one year in summer, Lama Zopa actually had a few of us nuns say prayers to his dogs every day after dinner. And there was one nun who was in charge of taking care of the puppies and she brought them to initiations—I think those dogs went to more initiations than I did—because Rinpoche was

very concerned about putting good karmic imprints in their minds even though they couldn't understand anything at all.

[Audience:] How not to get stuck in a relationship?

Look at that person more objectively.

If the mind gets stuck in a relationship and can't let go, well, one thing is to try and look at that person more objectively and to recognize this is a person whose mind is obscured by afflictions and karma. What is so remarkable about this person? If we look at their minds, they get angry, they get attached, their minds aren't controlled, they are also controlled by their afflictions and karma. What's there to be attached to in a mind that can generate non-virtuous thoughts like that? Similarly, if we look at the person's body, what's there to be attached to? If we look at the inside of the body—it's pus and blood and guts and all sorts of different things there. There is nothing to gain by being attached to this person's body and mind because neither of them is particularly enlightening.

But this reflection is not to be done in our usual negative way. For example, often when we are very attached to somebody and the relationship goes bad, then we get angry. But we're angry and we're attached at the same time. Our mind is picking faults but it's simply because our feelings are hurt. This isn't like that. There's no sense to angrily picking faults at people. Rather, it's a matter of just trying to understand the nature of sentient beings. If we look, here's this sentient being who gets born, gets old and sick and dies—how can we take refuge in somebody

like that? They are under the same influences that we are.

Stop thinking about him/her and switch to more constructive things

Instead of the mind getting really stuck, “Oh! I want to be with (that person) ...”, and saying that “mantra”—“I want to be with them, why don’t they love me, I want to be with them, why don’t they love me”. Switch it to “Om Mani Padme Hum, Om Mani Padme Hum ...” Switch your attention to something more constructive because you know the other thing is totally fruitless. Focus your mind on this mantra instead.

[Audience:] What kind of karmic imprints would ripen at the time of death?

It is basically in this order at the time of death: first, if there are very powerful actions they would ripen. In their absence, the habitual ones, and thirdly, the condition that is prevailing at the time of death. But I think just by our attitude at the time of death, it is going to have a strong influence, regardless. Because if you have a very negative mind at the time of death, even though you may have created a lot of positive karma, it is going to have a hard time ripening. Some people think, “It is very easy to generate positive mental states, so I’ll just live my life the way I want and then at the time of death, I’ll just think about the Buddha and it will all be okay because I can generate love and compassion when I die.” Sounds good?

Cultivating positive mental states while alive

The difficulty is, there's a hitch here. If we have a hard time generating constructive thoughts while we are alive and have so many good, calm, nice conditions around us, what makes us think it's going to be so easy to do when we're dying and our bodily elements are all out of balance and our mind is experiencing this whole new situation? Isn't it a little bit arrogant to think that we can do at death-time, in a confusing situation, what we can't even do now, when we sit in a nice, quiet room on our meditation cushion?

We do die pretty much as we have lived. Now it is always possible for good thoughts to arise at death time nevertheless, so we do always try. Let's say we are with somebody who doesn't know anything about Dharma practice. We still try very much to encourage them to have a positive state of mind. But it would be a lot easier to do that if the person has created the cause for good thoughts to arise previously.

[Audience:] What happens if there's a sudden death or somebody is in a coma before they die?

Well, in a sudden death, I think there is still the opportunity for some flash of something going on. You see you are going to crash and your mind does have some thoughts, it does generate different things. You can see that even when you are startled—something happened and you jumped—there is a thought there, there is a reaction. So there is something going on.

In the case of a coma, I'm not completely

convinced that people are totally out of it, because I have heard accounts, I have talked to people who have been in coma and they remember being quite conscious in coma. It is just that they could not communicate outward with everybody else. I talked to one woman. She said she was aware, she wanted to talk and say something and everybody was just standing around and saying, “Oh, look at her, she is in a coma.” And yet she did have some connection. So I think something does go in. Or, even if the coma is so deep that they just have a very, very fuzzy awareness of what’s going on outside, still, I think something does go in according to the environment. We can influence people who are dying in coma, or if we are in coma ourselves, to try as much as possible to control the mind.

[Audience:] What happens to people who commit suicide?

Well, usually when people commit suicide, they aren’t very happy. And an unhappy mind is very fertile ground for the ripening of negative karma. Also, although suicide isn’t a complete action of killing, it is some form of taking life. So just the act of suicide itself puts a negative tendency, plus that mental state is one in which a person is often quite tortured mentally—difficult to have a positive attitude. So that’s why in Buddhism, we usually say that suicide is a great tragedy. Because somehow, somebody’s life could still be made meaningful if they could somehow find a way and a method to use, or if they could somehow pull themselves out of that hole where their

mind's gotten stuck in and turn their mind to something else.

Considering suicide as the only honorable exit to save the family name is something completely created by the mind. Probably a function of affliction. That belief is totally a creation of human society and the human mind. Totally created by our conception. It might seem, in a particular culture, like that's what you do to save the family name, but from the Buddhist view, it would be considered a tragic action done out of ignorance.

[In response to question from audience:] I can't remember. Maybe the Buddha allowed an exception. He allowed arhats with terminal illness to commit suicide. So, become an arhat. [Laughter.] The reason an arhat could do that kind of thing is because their mind is free from the cycle of rebirth and because they don't have negative attitudes. They wouldn't be doing it out of afflictions, and they wouldn't have the karma to throw them back into cyclic existence again.

[Audience:] What is the Buddhist view on euthanasia?

This is rather difficult to say. They usually say try and preserve life at all cost. But I remember when His Holiness is being asked about it, particularly regarding all the expense and everything that is involved, he says it's a difficult decision to make. It's a very difficult one, I don't think I can give a hundred percent clear answer.

My personal opinion is, if somebody is a Dharma

practitioner, to try and create an environment whereby either they can have an extended life so that they can try and create more good karma, or to have a way of dying peacefully so that they can have clarity at the time of death. To have clarity at death time is very important if one is a practitioner. If somebody isn't a practitioner, then if the life can be extended and if somebody says mantras and does something to put good imprints on their mind, that could be very beneficial for that person also. For the person who's just going to be hooked up to the machine and in a coma and no prayers, no mantras, no nothing, that may just be putting off the next rebirth, whatever that next rebirth is going to be.

Quite difficult, especially when you get into the subject. It costs thousands of dollars a day to keep somebody alive on a respirator, couldn't the money be used to do something more for other sentient beings? I think the real key to that is in terms of government policy or social policy. That rather than put so much money in one direction and create all that possibility, maybe better from the beginning to put it in other directions, and have better prenatal care, better education, schooling and things like that.

[Audience:] What happens if we die with an indifferent or a cynical state of mind?

I think it would be much better to die with an indifferent state of mind than one full of attachment or anger. That way you wouldn't have so many obstacles. But still, an indifferent mind can be very, very obscured; it's hard to say exactly what kind of

karma will grow in there.

Cynicism is a form of anger and belligerence, and it's also a form of pride, kind of a mixture of those two. That's a painful state of mind.

[Audience:] Do dreams have something to do with our past lives?

Could our dreams be actually memories of previous lives? Hell realms? I think that could very well happen. Especially kids who have a lot of nightmares from the time they are very young. I often wonder if maybe, they have just been born out of the hell realm. They have just finished that karma but there is some residual energy left that causes the nightmare. It's very possible.

Relationship Between Karmic Actions and Lower Realms

Okay. Let me continue. There is actually quite a long explanation in the text, many pages about the hell realms, just what your want to hear, huh? [Laughter.] There're the eight hot hells, the eight cold hells, the four neighboring hells, and so on. I don't think I'll go into them in detail right now. [Laughter.]

[In response to question from audience:] In the different god realms, each one of their days is like 500 of our years. And in the hell realms, each one of their days is like I don't know how many eons of our time. It can be a very long time being born in those realms.

I think it has to do with how one perceives time, though. Because we can see time isn't an externally existent thing, it's really a perception of the mind.

1. THE HELL REALM

In talking about the different kinds of hells, you can begin to get a feeling of how actions relate to the results.

a. The eight hot hells

i. Reviving hell

There's a burning iron ground and everybody that you share this environment with has weapons, and the people just fight and kill one another all day. Their bodies get chopped up. Even when their bodies fall apart in all these different pieces, each piece is still experiencing pain as they die. And then even after falling apart, their bodies join together again, they come alive and they start the trip all over again. This is like the ultimate dysfunctional relationship. Except it's a never ending war because you kill each other, but you don't really die. All the pieces continue to experience pain and then the pieces join together and you go at each other's throat again.

So, what kind of beings are born in this kind of hell? Soldiers. It's like war. Being a soldier creates the karma to be born in that kind of hell. Or butchers. You can see, hacking apart others' bodies, or torturing others in any kind of way. You can see the linkage between that action and what kind of karmic

appearance one gets later on.

ii. Black thread hell

The beings in this hell, their tongues are taken out and stretched and then ploughed. It's the result of lying. So you can begin to feel how cause and result go together in this kind of thing.

iii. Crushing hell

There's another one, it's called the crushing hell, where they are chased into very narrow valleys and then they are crushed. They are crushed by things falling on them. This is for people who hunt animals or fish or smash insects. You can see the relationship between the action and the karmic appearance somebody has as a result of that action.

iv. Howling hell

You're chased into a house made of burning metal that then starts to close in on oneself and you get squished in the middle. That's the result of taking intoxicants, alcohol and narcotic drugs, and things like that. The mind getting squished, isn't it?

v. Loud howling hell

vi. Heating hell

vii. Intense heating hell

People are boiled in cauldrons filled with molten copper. They are boiled alive and speared at the same time. That's a result of throwing animals in hot, boiling water. I remember on my 21st birthday, we all went out for lobster. We picked our lobsters and boiled them alive and I thought it was great. This is incredible because they talk about having bad friends and how bad friends aren't people with horns on their heads. They are often people who really wish you well, but they don't know about karma. So, there are all the different types of hells like these in which one experiences the karmic vision related to the actions one has done previously.

viii. Hell of unrelenting pain

b. The eight cold hells

They say the cause for rebirth in the cold hells is the frozen attitude of close-mindedness, stubbornly clinging on to wrong views. Like when our mind gets stuck in a cynical attitude, or a really skeptical attitude; our minds are just stuck and frozen in our own wrong views, so it creates the karma to be born in the frozen hell.

c. The four neighboring hells

After you escape from the hot hells, after your karma for the hot hell is used up, there're four surrounding or neighboring hells that you have to go through to get out. In one of these neighboring hells, there's a tree, and the blades of the tree are knives. You hear one of

your dear ones, somebody you are very attached to, calling out to you from the top of the tree. You are trying desperately to climb up this tree, and the leaves that are made of knives and facing down, plunge into you. Thorns on the bark stick into you. When you finally get up there, of course it's a complete hallucination. Then you hear their voice down at the bottom of the tree. Again, chasing after the object of attachment, you start going down and all the knife-leaves turn and the blades face up, so you get impaled as you go down.

This is attachment. Wherever you try and go, when your mind is stuck in attachment, you get cut—external karmic reflection of what is going on internally.

2. THE HUNGRY GHOST REALM

In the hungry ghost realm, there is a wide variety of hungry ghosts and some of them are helpful spirits, some of them are harmful spirits, some of them are beings who are completely tortured by supreme hunger and thirst their whole lives.

a. Attachment

Whereas anger is one of the chief motivating things to cause one to be born in the hell realm because you can see the hell realm is so violent, in the hungry ghost realm, which is characterized by clinging and its consequent frustration, it is attachment that's the main cause of being born there. Again, the mind that just gets stuck. Here, it's so stuck that the body is one with

a huge enormous stomach, a very long thin neck that is tied in knots and the being is continually hungry and thirsty.

This kind of rebirth shows us how karma can obscure our mind and we can't see what's in front of our nose. Even if a hungry ghost stands in front of Green Lake, they can't see water. Or even if they have a vision of water in the distance and they run for it because they are so desperate, as soon as they get there, it appears to their mind as pus and blood. Because the *karmic obscuration* is so strong that the mind can't see.

We can see that, too, in our own lives. I'm sure we've all had experiences in which we have conceived of a situation one way and only years later did we look back and say, "Well, I put myself in so much misery looking at it like that." You think of times in your life when our frame of reference, our karmic obscuration was so strong that we created our own suffering. We can't even see what's there. Like somebody is trying to be kind to us, and all we see is somebody interfering with our lives. This is what the hungry ghost realm is like. This particular hungry ghost that suffers from hunger and thirst—not all of them do—they run, they can't even see the water. Or if they see the water and they get there, it becomes pus and blood. Or even if they are able to get some water and put it in their mouth, they can't get it down the throat because the throat is so thin and is tied in knots. And even if it goes down into the stomach, it bursts into flames somehow. It doesn't satisfy or quench them.

You can see how this realm is exactly what it's like

when we are stuck in attachment, isn't it? When our minds are fixated with attachment, we can't see what's there. Always feeling frustration because we can't get what we want. Whatever we get, it isn't sufficient. Like one drop of water. Or somehow we get it, and we twist it, again it makes us miserable. Like the drop of water going in and then becoming flames.

So, being stuck in attachment is the chief cause for being born in the hungry ghost realm. And of course refusing food to people, being stingy, hoarding food, and other similar actions can cause that kind of rebirth.

b. Miserliness

Miserliness is another one of the chief causes, for example, miserliness of material things or miserliness of the Dharma or our learning. In other words, if somebody wants to learn something from us, we don't want to share what we've learnt. Or we don't want to share the Dharma with somebody who is interested. We are miserly, we are threatened by somebody else knowing as much as we do. That also creates the cause for rebirth as a hungry ghost. They also say that knowing the Dharma intellectually but ignoring cause and effect can be a cause for rebirth in the hungry ghost realm. They even say that some of the spirits born in hungry ghost realm can be excellent debaters. They can even know all the Dharma vocabulary.

I remember one time, somebody went to a channeler and the spirit that was getting channeled was talking about Dharma. Our teacher went and

wanted to meet that spirit, but I think the spirit might have been afraid to come at that time. But this would be a classic example of maybe somebody who memorized the Dharma, knew all the words, but didn't practice, didn't put it into effect. So, it's all very intellectual. The imprint is all there, but because of having lived out a life of attachment, that person had a lower rebirth.

That's why they always emphasize practice and good motivation.

3. THE ANIMAL REALM

The general sufferings of animals are the suffering of heat and cold, getting eaten by each other, getting tortured and getting hunted by human beings. Animals experience all sorts of different things. If human beings experience some of those things, they would go to the government and protest for their human rights, but animals can't do that. Look at some of the ways the laboratory animals are treated. Look at the farm animals, the chickens and the cows, and how they are treated. We certainly wouldn't want to give up our body to feed somebody else, and yet the animals do that and they are given no choice about it. So, it's really quite an unfortunate rebirth. They have very little control over their own destiny, they have to work and be completely dependent on others.

The general cause for an animal rebirth is the foggy mind and close-minded bewilderment. Specifically things like lacking respect for spiritual mentors or religious objects—Dharma books and things like that. In other words, out of our ignorance, mistreating or

ignoring the virtues of other things, or having an aversion to the Dharma. Again, you can see how that is a very ignorant mind—the Dharma is here and the person runs the other way.

Another possible cause for an animal rebirth is blind indulgence and very animal-like behavior. You can see that some human beings act worse than animals. If we have a hard time imagining human beings being born as animals, just look at how some human beings act although they have a human body. Some of them really act worse than animals, so it doesn't seem like that big of a jump to get a body that matches their mental state, does it?

Reflections on the Lower Realms

Break bad habits

I think it's very helpful to spend some time thinking about this. It might not be so pleasant but it's very sobering and it can add a big impetus to our practice; to get us to think, again, about where we are going in our life and what the purpose or function of our life is. It can be a very strong motivator to break some of our bad habits.

Generate compassion

By thinking about this, it can also help us to generate compassion for all the other living beings who are experiencing this or who are creating the cause to experience this. Sometimes we see people doing

horrendous, harmful actions and we get angry at them. We get angry at Adolf Hitler for killing so many people. If we understand karma and if we look at Adolf Hitler's life and the karma he was creating and the suffering that will result from that, then, even though we can't condone what he was doing, we can get a sense of compassion for those who are so confused that they create suffering for themselves and others thinking that they are doing something good.

If we understand these kinds of things, it helps us to prevent getting angry at people who act negatively because we understand how they are creating their own suffering. By having some compassionate feeling for them, we will care for them and maybe intervene a little bit to try and help them to stop.

Energize us to practice

It's very valuable to think about this kind of thing, not just once but repeatedly of course. You can use this a lot as you are going through the day. I do that when I take walks along Green Lake. When I run into all these geese and ducks, I sit there and I look at them and I think what would it be like to be born like that? What can you do with your mind? You really think of the suffering condition. Of course they get all sorts of delicious bread to eat. But to me, it's terrifying to think of my mind being so obscured, not able to think, being so dulled over like that. To me, that is a very frightening thing.

By remembering that, it gives us some energy to really use the human mind, while we have it now, for something constructive instead of watching TV. When

you run into animals, instead of going “aren’t you sweet”, try and put yourself in the animal’s ‘paws’, so to speak. Think of what it would be like to have that rebirth. Again it helps us to generate compassion for that being and it helps us appreciate deeply our present potential and possibility.

Seek refuge

From thinking about the sufferings of the lower realms, we do get quite an uncomfortable feeling. Often the feeling comes inside of us also when we start to look at the karma we’ve created our whole life, when we start to think of the consequences of it. We get a very uncomfortable feeling and we want to do something about it. We want a method to follow so that we can purify, so that we can stop creating that karma. We want some guidance and practice. And so that’s why the meditation on refuge comes next, because when we begin to see that we aren’t in a nice, stable, secure position, we could die at any time and we do have negative imprints in our mind, then we start to seek refuge and we begin to search out those who can guide us. And so we start thinking about why Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are reliable refuge and how they can guide us and how we can follow them.

We shouldn’t just think about the sufferings of the lower realm and then sit there with this horrible feeling in the bottom of our stomach. Instead, we use that to take refuge with a mind of strong confidence in the ability of the Triple Gem to guide us; turn to them. That makes our practice quite strong at that point. And it cuts away a lot of our pride. Pride is a big

hindrance on the path.

We'll start getting into the whole subject of refuge next time. It's quite an interesting subject, quite a long one, discussing why we take refuge and how to relate to the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha; what are the advantages of taking refuge and what are the qualities of the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, so we would start to understand what they are and how to relate to them.

Purify

If you remember, in the Prayer of the Benefits of Nyung Nay, it talks about:

- if one experiences heat or cold or fatigue, it purifies the cause to be reborn in the hell realm;
- if one experiences hunger and thirst, it purifies the hungry ghost karma;
- if the mind is really bewildered and difficult to concentrate during Nyung Nay, that purifies the animal karma.

You can again see the relationship between the kind of rebirth and the present mental state, and you can begin to understand how purification practice works. Because, sometimes when you do a heavy purification practice like this, some karma that would have manifested in the environment and in our body for a long, long period of time, due to the power of the purification practice and our sincere motivation, it manifests in a similar kind of mental state or physical experience, but it lasts only a few hours or one day. You can see the benefit of doing intense practices like

Nyung Nay because even though one may experience some hunger or thirst, or it's difficult to concentrate or one gets very tired, it's really the burning up of so much karma. People who did Nyung Nay really have a big cause to rejoice.

And it's also helpful to think, actually, whenever we experience any kind of difficulties, instead of getting stuck in whatever our difficulty is—"Poor me, poor me! Why is this happening?"—to think this is a result of my negative karma and by the power of my practice and my thinking like this, this could be the ripening of that karma, that if it hadn't ripened like this, it would have ripened over fifteen million eons in the hell realm. So it is very good that it is coming out now. If we think like that, then it helps us get through painful situations.

Try and think over what you heard, draw some conclusions, think about the main points, so that you have something to take with you and you have something you can use in your daily life. We will meditate for about five minutes.

CHAPTER 4

Taking Refuge

We've talked about the possibility of rebirth in the states of tremendous suffering or tremendous limitations. If we think deeply about this possibility, we want to find some way out, some way to prevent it from happening. We want some medicine to take before the disease strikes, some Dharma vitamins so we don't get sick. That's why sometimes "Dharma" is translated as "preventive measures." That's Dr. Alex Berzin's translation, the idea being that Dharma consists of measures you take and apply to your mind that protect you or prevent you from experiencing difficult situations.

What Refuge Is

Because we have a sense of dread about the future, a sense of concern about what will happen after death, and because we seek some direction, some security in an insecure world, we look for refuge. Now, refuge is a tricky word in English. It can be misunderstood. Sometimes it's translated as "taking a safe and sound direction in life," and that's very much what it is.

Taking a direction

The problem with the word "refuge" is that sometimes

it gives us the idea of hiding away from something. Like when you're a little kid, you take refuge behind your mom and then the big bad bully next door can't get at you. That's not the kind of relationship we have with the Triple Gem. We don't hide behind our mother or the Triple Gem. Taking refuge here is in the sense of saying, "It's pouring rain out and we're getting soaking wet and we're going to get a cold if we stay out in the rain." So we want to go to a place that offers protection, and that place is the Dharma realizations. That's the real refuge, the real thing that we're going to.

It's not a question of hiding behind the Dharma, or hiding behind the Buddha and the Sangha and saying "Buddha and Sangha, you go out and you clear away my problems." That's not the meaning of refuge. It's rather taking a safe and sound direction in our lives, knowing that the real refuge is the transformed state of our own minds.

And so this section is called "The Methods for Benefiting our Future Lives." When we thought about death and the lower realms, it gave us some concern about our future lives. Given that we have this concern, we now come to the two stages in the path that constitute the method to do something, to act. The two things that we are going to do are take refuge and then observe karma.

So this is the part where we are in the outline. Do you know where we are? Do you see how it's fitting together with what came before and what's going to come now? And the reason I'm going over this is—and this is really important—the more global a view you have about the outline and the different steps, the

more everything makes sense.

Thinking about precious human life gave us the ability to see our potential. Then, after we've seen our potential, we become persuaded to make use of it. The first way to make use of it is to prepare for our future lives. In order to prepare for future lives, we have to have some concern about them. So we think about death and the possibility of being born in the lower realms. Now we're looking for a method to prevent that, so we have the subject of refuge and then after that the subject of cause and effect, or karma and its results. This—teaching these subjects in this order—is a really skillful way for the Buddha to activate us.

Refuge is a very important part of the path because it is the gateway to the Dharma. They usually say that refuge is the gateway to entering into the Buddha's teachings; that bodhicitta, the altruistic intention, is the gateway to entering into the Mahayana teachings; and taking empowerment is the gateway for entering into the Tantric teachings. Refuge is really the foundation of the whole thing—it's making a decision about the path that we're taking, the direction we're going. It's a very important point, a very fundamental decision in our life.

If you look on the outline, there are several main headings under refuge. We talk first about the reasons for taking refuge, second about which objects to take refuge in, third about measuring the extent to which we have taken refuge, fourth about the benefits of having taken refuge, and then fifth about points for training after we've taken refuge. This is where we're going to be going in the next few talks, through these

five things.

The Causes for Taking Refuge

THE FIRST CAUSE FOR TAKING REFUGE

Let's go back to the first point, the reasons for taking refuge. "Why take refuge?" "Why enter into the Buddha's teachings?" It's usually talked about in terms of two and sometimes three reasons for taking refuge. It's important to understand the reasons, especially since we take refuge every day. We took refuge here before we did the teachings, and you do the prayer for refuge every day before you do the meditation sessions. It's important to understand the reasons for refuge and to think about them before you say the prayer. That helps to make the prayer something meaningful and worthwhile, because you know what you're doing and why you're doing it.

Refuge is something that grows with time, so the more we have these two causes in our mindstream, the deeper our refuge is going to be. Of course, at the beginning the causes aren't going to be very strong, so our refuge isn't going to be very strong. But as we continually cultivate the causes and put effort into that, then the refuge becomes much, much stronger and you start to see it changing your mind. None of the meditations we've been doing are on-and-off light switches: they're the dimmer or brighter kind, which you hopefully turn towards the brighter.

The first reason for taking refuge is a sense of dread and caution concerning rebirth in unfortunate

realms, or even in the whole cycle of existence, but at least some sense of dread in taking rebirth in the lower realms. This is a call for us to look beyond the scope of this life. Of course people can come and listen to teachings and benefit a great deal without believing in rebirth. One doesn't need to believe in rebirth to benefit from Buddha's teachings. But, just by the placement of this point we can see that to really go deeply and taste the nectar in the teachings, the more conviction we have in rebirth, the more the whole framework of what's going on in the Dharma is going to make sense to us.

Don't feel bad if you don't believe in rebirth and you've put it on the back burner. But remember to take it off the back burner from time to time, re-examine what you believe in, and try and understand rebirth, because that really does change the whole perspective with which we look at our lives and our relationship to Buddhism. It does make a difference.

You can see that, if we only believe in this life, and we come upon a problem, what do we take refuge in? We take refuge in whatever is going to relieve the misery of this life. If we don't believe in past and future lives, then we're only thinking in terms of what's going to cure our problem now. When we're hungry we take refuge in food. When we're lonely, we take refuge in friends. When we're tired, we take refuge in our bed. If we only think in terms of this life, all we need to take refuge in is sense pleasure, because that's the thing that is going to do something to remove the pain.

But I think all of us are here because we've realized, to one extent or another, that sense pleasure

isn't the be-all and end-all and it's not going to cure our problems. If we have some feeling for past and future lives, we can see how limited sense pleasures are in curing our problems. When we have concern for what happens to us at death and afterwards, we're going to seek a much broader source of happiness than just something that fills our stomachs and makes us happy for the moment.

There is benefit to the feeling that who we are is not just limited to this body but is a continuum—our mindstream is a continuum. It inhabits this body for a while, then it goes on to another body. This mindstream can even go on to become a Buddha. You can see that belief in future lives is important because if we don't believe in future lives, then we can say, "Well, I've got to become a Buddha now or there's nothing, because after I die there's just complete darkness." Well, if all there is, is just nothingness after I die, that sounds like a good cessation of my problems. So why practice the Dharma? Why try and become a Buddha? I'll just wait until I die. Maybe I'll hurry it along a little bit, because that will end my problems. Do you understand what I'm saying? That if we're just looking at only this life, we run into some problems about what our aims in life are. Why aim for Buddhahood if at death it's just all nothing and your problems are going to end anyway? Really, what's the use? You could be home watching TV tonight. Maybe you're here because I'm more interesting, I don't know. [Laughter.] Don't think so. I think sitcoms probably make you laugh more. [Laughter.]

If who we are doesn't end with this life, if something continues onwards, then there is a reason

to be concerned about what happens after death. And because cause and effect works, because what we are going to be after we die depends on what we're doing now, then this life becomes very meaningful. And we realize we can do something. We have some power to change things in this lifetime and those changes will influence what happens later. But if we don't think that anything happens later, then nothing has much meaning. This sense of caution, of an awareness of danger that could happen if we continue the way we are, can be a very strong motivating force for practicing Dharma.

We discussed last time how the lower realms are dependent arising. They arise simply because the cause exists. If the cause didn't exist for lower realms of rebirth, there wouldn't be any lower realms. So the cause exists.

Now, what is the cause for the lower realms? It's our own contaminated actions and afflictions. In our lives, we have to check up: "Do I have afflictions? Do I have contaminated actions?" We check up further: "Yes, I get angry and I have a lot of clinging and I'm very jealous. I'm lazy and belligerent and stubborn—I have the whole bag of afflictions." And then, "Are my actions motivated by these attitudes? Well, yes, because today somebody at work bugged me and I put him down. And I was very proud and haughty to another person. And then there was someone else whom I kind of manipulated."

When we look at our lives and the state of our minds and the kind of actions that we've done, and we weigh the possibility of our taking a lower rebirth, we get quite concerned. We realize that if the cause is

there, it's very easy for the result to come. It's only a matter of time. That sense of concern is going to motivate us to practice. It's going to motivate us to seek an alternative so that we don't keep on acting out the same bad habits. I think we come to the Dharma because we're sick of some of our bad habits. We're fed up with the mind that gets angry uncontrollably. One part of our mind gets a buzz off of being angry and another part of us is saying, "Gosh I wish I didn't do this all the time. I certainly would be more peaceful if I didn't get so irritated and annoyed." We're trying to seek some liberation, some guidance, away from our harmful actions and the afflictions that cause them because we realize they cause us problems, not only now but they're going to cause us big problems after death. And, we cause problems to other people when we're under their influence.

This is one of the motivating factors that's going to make us seek some guidance, some method, some path, some example or role model for what we can do to get out of the "banana mind." Or, as Lama Yeshe used to call it, the "monkey mind." Because our mind is like a monkey. A monkey picks up every interesting object it comes across. It's completely scattered and undirected. So, having some concern about where the "monkey mind" will take us, we want to seek a mind-tamer, a "monkey mind" tamer. That's the first motivation—what's going to happen at death and afterwards.

Then, if we're even more advanced, we're going to be concerned not just with the lower rebirths, but the upper realms as well. When we realize that that

happiness is also temporary, we're going to seek liberation from all of cyclic existence. The dread can be either directed to the lower realms or to all of cyclic existence. But we start with where we are: if we're sitting in the fire, let's at least get into the frying pan and then take the next step.

THE SECOND CAUSE FOR TAKING REFUGE

The second cause for taking refuge is what's called faith, or confidence, or conviction. It's a sense of confidence that the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha have the ability to show us a correct method to not only prevent lower rebirth, but also prevent all of the pain in all of samsara. Thus we're not just going away from a bad situation, but we're going towards a better one. We have confidence that there's a path, that there's someone to lead us along that path, and that we have some friends to travel it with.

To develop deep confidence in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, we have to know their qualities. A lot of this section on refuge is going to be talking about just that. If we know what their qualities are, we develop respect and admiration for the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. We also develop some conviction that they have the ability to lead us out of the mess that we're in.

THE THIRD CAUSE FOR TAKING REFUGE

The third reason for taking refuge has to do with the Mahayana, the vehicle of mind that is concerned with

the problems and difficulties of all beings. If we want to take a safe and sound direction in our lives not just because we're concerned with our own possible rebirth, and not just because we're concerned with our own cycling in cyclic existence, but because we have compassion for all sentient beings, then we take the Mahayana refuge. It's a vaster way of taking refuge.

You can see how refuge is going to grow. First we start out with dread of our own lower rebirth, then we increase that dread to include the dread of being born anywhere in cyclic existence, and then we increase it beyond that by saying, "Well, not only me but anybody, any sentient being, anywhere, who is born in cyclic existence. I dread that. I'm concerned with that." That can be a strong motivating factor for taking refuge.

When we have concern for the welfare of all beings—a truly compassionate attitude—then our refuge becomes very powerful. We're not concerned just with ourselves, but we feel the force of concern for limitless beings. In this way you can make your refuge stronger.

Questions and answers

[Audience: inaudible]

I'm teaching here according to the traditional Tibetan outline that Lama Tsongkhapa designed and so we get into a lot of deep stuff. A lot of it is definitely going to cause conflict in our mind. It's going to push some buttons—our emotional buttons and our intellectual

buttons. It's quite natural. If it didn't, then what's the use? If you came here and everything I said just reinforced everything you already believed in, then I wouldn't be helping you at all to get unstuck from the anger, the attachment, the ignorance and the contaminated actions. I'd just be reinforcing them.

As soon as Dharma starts making our ego feel very comfortable, then we know something's wrong.

[Audience: inaudible]

It does get better. It does get better. The beginning's particularly difficult, I think, because we encounter so many new ideas—rebirth, lower realms, Buddha. Who in the world was Buddha? We come in contact with so many new things in the beginning that sometimes it makes us feel overwhelmed. But if you can get through that initial shock and start looking for answers to the myriad questions that come up, and if you start to examine the resistance in your own mind to some of the new ideas, then slowly, slowly some awareness comes in.

But it takes time. Don't expect everything to be crystal clear and neon signs to flash. My experience wasn't like that. Maybe some people who have incredibly strong imprints from previous lives can be born in the West and then they walk into a Dharma talk and go "Hallelujah". But I've met very few people like that. [Laughter.] So it takes some time and energy. But bear with it. It bears fruit.

CHAPTER 5

The Objects of Refuge

Now we're going to go to the second section, which covers what objects to take refuge in. If we're seeking a safe and sound direction, then first we want to recognize the proper objects to take refuge in and then understand the reasons why they're suitable objects of refuge.

So we have the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. They are divided into the Ultimate Buddha Jewel and Conventional Buddha Jewel, Ultimate Dharma Jewel and Conventional Dharma Jewel, Ultimate Sangha Jewel and Conventional Sangha Jewel. Now we're going to get into a bit of technical information here and it's going to lead to a few new words. Don't freak out, it's OK. [Laughter.] It might seem very confusing at first as we go through these different categories of Ultimate and Conventional Three Jewels. But if you can begin to understand this, it will help you understand what Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are, so that then when you say "Namo Buddhaya Namo Dharmaya Namo Sanghaya" and "I take refuge until I'm enlightened in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha," you have a much better understanding of what you're saying. It will help you understand the prayers and generate that feeling in a much stronger way.

Taking refuge in the Buddha

Let's start with the Buddha. The Buddha is someone who has, on the one hand, completely purified his mind of all defilements and stains, and, on the other hand, has completely developed all of the good qualities to the fullest extent. So if somebody ever asks you "What's a Buddha?" you don't need to say "Some guy wearing saffron robes sitting on a lotus." Because then people don't understand. They don't get it. But if you say "This is what a Buddha is: any person who has completely purified his or her mind of all the defilements and stains, so that they never get angry again, they never get attached, they never get jealous or proud or lazy or whatever. And they have also taken all of the good qualities that we have at present and developed them to their complete fullest extent."

If we understand that as being what a Buddha is, then it becomes completely possible that we can become one. Why? Because we have the defilements and we can cleanse them. And we have the seeds of the good qualities and we can develop them. There's no huge gap between us and the Buddha. It's just a question of the balance of defilement and the balance of good qualities. If we can diminish one and increase the other, then our mindstream very quickly becomes the mindstream of a Buddha. It's not something mystical and magical. Maybe it might feel like that when you're having the realizations, but you see it's actually some kind of scientific process that we're going through.

The Buddha Jewel: the Dharmakaya and the Rupakaya

You might have heard the word “kaya,” a Sanskrit word. It means body; not body in the sense of the physical body, but body in the sense of corpus or collection or group. Sometimes we talk about three kayas, or bodies, of the Buddha and sometimes this can be divided into four kayas of the Buddha.

And sometimes it’s only divided into two kayas of the Buddha. It does make sense.

If we take the division into two kayas—two groups or collections or corpuses of qualities of the Buddha—one is called the dharmakaya, meaning the truth body and the other one is called the rupakaya, meaning the form body. With this division, the dharmakaya or the truth body is referring to the mind of the Buddha and the rupakaya or form body is referring to the form or the physical manifestation of the Buddha.

The Rupakaya

If we go into a little more depth, the rupakaya can be split into two. Of the two kinds of rupakaya, one is called the sambhogakaya, often translated as the enjoyment body, and the other one is called the nirmanakaya, or the emanation body. These are two different physical aspects of a Buddha. When a fully enlightened one appears in a body made of light in a pure land, teaching the bodhisattvas, teaching the Mahayana teachings, and has all the 32 signs and 80 marks, that is called a sambhogakaya or enjoyment

body. This is a rather mystical or ethereal physical appearance of a Buddha in a body of light, residing in a pure land, teaching the bodhisattvas. The sambhogakaya has all the physical signs of a fully enlightened being, such as the crown protrusion on the head and the curl and the eyes in the palms of the hand and the Dharma wheels on the feet and the long ear lobes.

The emanation body, or the nirmanakaya, refers to a grosser physical appearance of a fully enlightened being. An example would be Shakyamuni Buddha, who lived 2500 years ago.

The division of the rupakaya, the physical aspect, into the enjoyment body and the emanation body, represents the different ways a fully enlightened being can appear in the world in order to benefit others. One way they can benefit others is to appear in a pure land and teach the high-level bodhisattvas. But we don't have access to a pure land, we haven't created that positive potential, so out of compassion the Buddhas appear in an emanation body, which is a much grosser physical appearance, so that we in our form can communicate with them. The form body of a Buddha is acting for the purpose of others in an active form of compassion. When you have the compassion that wants to liberate others from their suffering, you want to appear in a physical form, and thus you get these two physical appearances.

The Dharmakaya

So when we take the truth body and the enjoyment body and the emanation body, we get three kayas or

three bodies of the Buddha. Now if we want to get four bodies, then we take the dharmakaya or truth body and we subdivide it into two also. So you see how we're doing this. We're just getting more subdivisions. Sounds like a housing development doesn't it? The dharmakaya can be subdivided into the jhana-dharmakaya, which is translated as the wisdom truth body, and the second one is the svabhavakaya or the nature body of the Buddha.

When we talk about dharmakaya as one thing, the truth body, it refers more to the mind of the Buddha. When we subdivide the dharmakaya, we're going to get a little more technical. When we talk about the wisdom truth body, we're talking about the consciousness of the Buddha, the mind of the Buddha, the wisdom of the Buddha. When we talk about the nature body, we're talking about emptiness of that mind and the true cessations of that mind.

[Audience: inaudible]

No, the nature body is the nature truth body. The nature body is a subdivision of the dharmakaya. When you divide the dharmakaya into two, one is the wisdom dharmakaya and one is the nature dharmakaya.

The nature body refers to the emptiness of the Buddha's mind, the lack of inherent existence of the Buddha's mind. The nature body also refers to the cessations on a Buddha's mindstream—the cessations of suffering and the cessations of the afflictions and karma. While the wisdom truth body is a consciousness, the nature body is an absence of

inherent existence and an absence of suffering and afflictions.

Consciousnesses are impermanent phenomena; they change moment by moment. The nature body, being emptiness and cessations, is a permanent phenomenon. It doesn't change. Why? Because it is a negative phenomenon. It is a lack of something, an absence of something.

If you don't understand it, that's OK. We go slowly. If you hear it now, then later when you hear more and you start understanding deeper the difference between permanent and impermanent, this will become clear. But it's good just to hear it now and think about it.

So what we're emphasizing here with the dharmakaya is the mind of the Buddha, the wisdom mind of the Buddha, and then the fact that that mind is empty of inherent existence.

It's said that the dharmakaya, the truth body, fulfills one's own purpose. Because of having a truth body, because of one's mind being a Buddha's mind, one no longer suffers. One no longer has problems and confusion. But because a Buddha also has very strong compassion and wants to work for the benefit of others, a Buddha is obliged by his compassion to appear in physical forms that can communicate with sentient beings, because sentient beings cannot communicate directly with the Buddha's mind. We don't have the clairvoyant powers; our minds are too obscured to communicate directly with the truth body of the Buddha. Therefore the Buddhas appear in the form bodies, they appear as emanation bodies for very obscured beings like us. They appear as enjoyment

bodies for the high level bodhisattvas who are much less obscured than us. Is this making some sense?

[Audience: inaudible]

The Buddha is all four kayas. A Buddha has all four.

[Audience: inaudible]

No, because a Buddha cannot do without the rupakaya. Why? Because the whole purpose of becoming a Buddha is to benefit others. If you don't want to benefit others, it's useless to become a Buddha. The whole reason to become a Buddha is to benefit others, and the only way to benefit others is to appear in physical forms that can communicate with them. Once somebody has become a Buddha, they are not going to hang around in their own nice nirvana and enjoy it because that wasn't their aim and their purpose to start with. Any Buddha that exists is going to have all four of these.

[Audience:] Does it mean that all Buddhas are bodhisattvas?

No, a Buddha and a bodhisattva aren't the same. A bodhisattva is somebody who is going to become a Buddha. A Buddha is a bodhisattva who has completed the whole path and is no longer a bodhisattva.

The Ultimate Buddha Jewel and the Conventional Buddha Jewel

The Ultimate Buddha Jewel is the dharmakaya, which has two subdivisions: the nature body and the wisdom dharmakaya. The nature body is the emptiness of the Buddhas' minds and their true cessations. The wisdom body is the Buddhas' omniscient minds.

The Conventional Buddha Jewel is the rupakaya, which is the enjoyment body and the emanation body. The more we understand this, the more we realize how it relates to many other things.

Our Two Buddha Natures

When we talk about our Buddha nature, our Buddha potential, we can talk about our Buddha nature in two ways, too. We can talk about the emptiness of inherent existence of our current mindstream. We can also talk about the clear and knowing nature as well as all the different impermanent factors of our mindstream. We have those two kinds of Buddha nature.

The evolutionary Buddha nature is the clear and knowing nature of our mind, all the different impermanent factors of our mind, like the little bit of compassion we have now, the little bit of wisdom, the little bit of concentration, all these different factors. This evolutionary Buddha nature that we have at the present can develop over time to become the wisdom dharmakaya. There's a connection between where we are now and the wisdom dharmakaya—what we're going to become when we are a Buddha.

At the present our mind is also empty of inherent existence, but because we don't have a Buddha's mind, that emptiness is not like that of a Buddha's

mind because the thing it depends on—our mind—is obscured, whereas the Buddha’s mind isn’t. When our present mind becomes a Buddha’s mind, then the emptiness of inherent existence of that mind is called the nature body. However, its very nature of being empty doesn’t change.

The progression of our two Buddha natures to enlightenment is like a railway track. A railway track has two bars on it. This is a very rough analogy. The analogy has its limitations, but we can think about one bar of the railway as being the clear and knowing nature of our mind and all the factors that we have now such as the little bit of wisdom, little bit of compassion, little bit of love, little bit of concentration, little bit of patience, all those factors that we have now at the present.

So one bar of the railway is the clear and knowing nature of our mind, the fact that our mind is a consciousness. Right now that’s obscured, limited, isn’t it? But it has potential. As we start to practice the path, what we’re going to develop are those good qualities that we have now and we’re going to purify the clear and knowing nature of our mind till eventually that becomes the wisdom truth body of the Buddha.

Now, let’s talk about the other bar of the railway track. Right now our mind is also empty of inherent existence. In other words, right now we don’t have a solid concrete permanent identity. We think we do—that’s our problem—but we don’t. We don’t have this solid, concrete, independent, inherently existent personality. Neither our mind nor our body nor anything is inherently existent. That lack of inherent

existence doesn't change. But when our mind, the clear and knowing nature of our mind, becomes a Buddha's mind, then automatically we call our lack of inherent existence by a different name—we call it the emptiness of the Buddha's mind. We call it the cessations on a Buddha's mind. We call it the nature body.

When we're going towards enlightenment, we're not destroying a person, we're not destroying inherent existence, because a solid concrete personality never existed to start with. What we're destroying is our wrong idea that there is one. That's what's getting abandoned.

Right now, our mind is equally as empty of solid, concrete inherent existence, as any other phenomenon, including a Buddha's mind. Because of that we have the potential to become a Buddha. Because you see, if things did have solid concrete independent entities, then there's no way we could change because I am what I am, and I can't change. But we do change, don't we? Whether we want to or not. So, that in and of itself shows that there's no solid concrete entity there.

[Audience:] Is this thing of having a nature body, or saying that we're empty of inherent existence, something that's separating us off from other phenomena that don't have mindstreams?

No, because everything is equally empty of inherent existence. If we take the clock here, it's not that the clock has some real inherent existence. It's not like you can find some real clock inside of this mass of

different parts. Similarly we're a mass of body and mind and there is no inherently existent personality in that.

The fact that we have a mind and the clock doesn't, means we're different from a clock. But that's on a relative level. On a deeper level, the mode of existence, the way we exist, neither the clock nor us has any concrete findable entity inside of it, that you can pinpoint and say "Ah, that's it".

[Audience: inaudible]

But the clock wouldn't have a nature body, because to call the emptiness of something a nature body, you have to have the wisdom truth body there too. That's why we don't call our emptiness of inherent existence a nature body—it's because our conventional mind is not a wisdom truth body. In other words, our emptiness of inherent existence doesn't get that name [nature body] until our mind transforms.

[Audience: inaudible]

We don't have the cessations of the afflictions on our mindstreams right now. We don't have the cessation of anger on our mindstream. We have the opposite.

[Audience:] If sentient beings are not inherently existent, then who are we developing compassion for?

This is a question that even the great Lamas ask in the debating texts. [Laughter.] They say if sentient beings

are not inherently existent, then who are we developing compassion for?

Here we have to understand that there is a difference between not being inherently existent and not existing to start with. There is a difference. If we take the example of a clock, it might be easier to understand. It might not be, but it might be.

If we look at the clock, we see a clock here, it functions, we can read the time, right? When we're not analyzing, when we're not looking closely, when we're not trying to pinpoint anything, we all look and say "Oh yes, there's a clock and it functions to read time."

But if ask, "What is the clock? There's got to be something that I can find that is the clock, that I can isolate as being the clock." Then what are we going to isolate as being the clock? Is it going to be this part? Is it going to be this part? Is it the front? Is it the back? Is it the gears? Is it the battery? Is it the numbers on the side? Is it the buttons?

When you start taking it apart and laying it all out on the table, can you find anything that is the clock? You can't find anything. When you analyze you can't find anything that is the clock. Here we're looking for the deeper nature of something, trying to pinpoint it, and whenever we try and do that, we always wind up with nothing. We can't find anything.

But that doesn't mean that things are totally non-existent. Because there is something here. There's something here and we can use it.

It's the same with sentient beings. There are sentient beings. We're all sitting here in this room. I think we would all agree? There's Sandy and me

sitting here in this room. But then we try and find concrete personalities, and we look and we ask, “Who is Lillian?” Is her body Lillian? Is her mind Lillian? If we start taking it apart, what are you going to find that is Lillian? You can’t find anything in the body and the mind that you can isolate and say “Ah, got her, this is what she is. I can draw a circle around this. This is what she is. This is all she’s going to be. This is everything and it’s permanent and solid and concrete.”

We can’t find anything that we can identify as that person. But when we don’t analyze, we see the body and the mind, and we give it the label “person”. The sentient beings we’re working for are those sentient beings whom we’re developing compassion for.

[Audience:] So what you’re saying is that it is our language that is giving us this idea of identity.

Part of the problem is our language but that’s not the only thing. It is not really a problem of language because Buddhas also use language. The problem is our making our concepts really, really solid and thinking that our language is solid. Making everything solid. That’s our problem.

[Audience:] Defining things?

Not just defining things, but thinking that things are their definitions. We have to define things to function in the world. But if we think that that makes them something that’s solid and concrete, that that’s all they ever can be, and we concretize phenomena,

that's what the problem is.

[Audience: inaudible]

Yes, the clock is dependent. It's made up of non-clock things. It's dependent on things that aren't clocks. Because if you search everything that is in this clock, all you're going to come up with is a bunch of parts, none of which is the clock. So it's dependent on causes, it's dependent on parts. And clock is something that exists by being labeled on top of that whole dependently accumulated thing.

[Audience:] Is the mindstream dependent?

Is our mindstream dependent? I sure hope so.

[Audience:] What is our mindstream dependent on?

What is our mindstream dependent on? First of all, our mindstream is dependent on the previous moment of mind. Isn't it?

[Audience:] What would it mean to say that the mindstream is inherently existent?

Inherent existence would mean, in relationship to the mindstream, that you can look at the mindstream and you can say "This is the mind. Here I got it". But what are we going to label is the mindstream? This moment [snap of finger], this moment [snap of finger], this moment [snap of finger], this moment [snap of finger]? What are we going to label? Our eye

consciousness, our ear consciousness, our nose consciousness, our tongue consciousness, our mental consciousness? Which consciousness are you going to label as the mindstream? So again it comes down to the fact that the mindstream has many parts in it and the mindstream also depends on something that existed prior to it. It depends on causes.

It's the fact that things are so dependent that enables our mind to be transformed into a Buddha's mind. Because if our mind weren't dependent, if it were independent, then nothing at all could affect it. Nothing could make it change. It would exist independently without any relation to the rest of the universe. And that clearly isn't the case.

[Audience:] What's the difference between going from moment to moment to moment and what we call death?

Death is just one of those going from moment to moment that we've marked off as a gross change. But actually, since we were conceived, we've been in the process of dying, and death is just when the body and mind separate. So it's like we have a river and the river's changing all the time and at some point we put in the county line. This is King County and that is the next county.

[Audience:] If death is just another moment, then what about all the bardos?

That's just more moments also. That's just our mind existing in that state.

[Audience:] But death is just one moment, while the bardo consists of many moments?

Yes. When you cross the county line you have the point of crossing the county line. But the counties are both quite large. So life takes up a lot of time and bardo takes up some time. And death is just the line between the two of them.

Taking refuge in the Dharma

Let's get back to Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. Now we're going to look at the Dharma, in particular the Dharma Jewel.

When we talk about the Ultimate Dharma Jewel, we're talking about the true cessation and the true path on the mindstream of an arya. Now you're going to say "What's a true cessation, what's a true path and what's an arya?" I got the "and" and the "on" but what do the other words mean? [Laughter.]

I'll explain what an arya is, and we'll get into this again later when we talk about the Sangha. In the Mahayana path, once somebody has generated the altruistic intention, then there are five levels of practice that they do in which their mind progresses to become a Buddha. When they're on the third level of that path, they have direct insight into emptiness and they see the lack of inherent existence as clearly as we see the palm of our hand. That's what an arya is: someone who has direct perception of reality.

"True paths on an arya's mindstream" refers to the realizations of that arya's mindstream. When I say

realization, it's a consciousness. Paths are all consciousnesses. A path isn't something external; a path is a consciousness. A path on the mindstream of an arya emphasizes the wisdom that realizes emptiness directly.

[Audience:] Did you define an arya as ...

Someone who has direct perception of emptiness. A path is defined as a certain level of understanding, a certain level of realization, a consciousness. For example, a path is an arya's wisdom realizing emptiness. Now when you get these path consciousnesses, such as if you've understood emptiness directly, then that enables you to start cleaning your mindstream in such a way that the defilements, the afflictions, never can come back again.

Right now, for example, we may not be angry, but our anger can come back again. When we get to the level of being an arya, due to having the wisdom that understands emptiness directly, due to having that true path in our mindstream, then what is called the artificial level of anger, or the artificial level of ignorance, never arises again on the mind. It has ceased, and we have the cessation of that level of defilement. We have the stopping or the absence of that. That is what is meant by cessation.

There are many paths; there are many cessations. There are many paths because there are many consciousnesses, even in one person. All the different realizations of any particular arya can be considered a path. Then there are many different cessations: the

cessation of anger, the cessation of attachment, the cessation of the artificial levels, the cessation of the innate levels of the defilements.

This is what is meant by Dharma. That's the Ultimate Dharma Refuge. And why is that called the Ultimate Dharma Refuge? Because when somebody has that on their mindstream, they're free. You don't have to worry about all this junk coming back. The Ultimate Refuge is not something external to grab on to. The Ultimate Refuge is this transformed state of our own mind. And here, before we've transformed our own mind, we take refuge in the transformed state of other people's minds because those mindstreams have the qualities that we want to develop. And those people can show us how to do it.

The Conventional Dharma Jewel is what is called the 84,000 Dharma teachings. And when it says the scriptures, it doesn't mean the books. It means the teachings; the oral teachings. The teaching itself. Not the paper and ink of the book.

The Conventional Dharma Jewel is a symbolic representation of the Dharma Jewel. The real Ultimate Dharma Jewel, the real deepest level thing to get, is the cessation and the path on the mindstream. As a way of communicating that to us, we have all the different teachings. Initially the Buddha gave the teachings and they were passed down orally, and then later they were written down. So when it says scriptures, don't think of books: it just means the teaching in general. They are what point the way for us to understand the deeper level—the Ultimate Dharma.

[Audience:] Have ordinary people attained any paths in their mindstreams?

You mean us right now at our level? Ordinary people don't have any paths. Because a path is a wisdom understanding emptiness directly. It's a consciousness that is conjoined in some way with that wisdom. That is the path. So only the aryas have those path consciousnesses. We just have regular consciousness. But it can transform into one.

Taking refuge in the Sangha

And then we have the Sangha. You're all going to roll your eyeballs here. And I don't blame you because every time I hear this, I roll my eyeballs too. I completely sympathize.

The Ultimate Sangha Jewel is the same thing as the Ultimate Dharma Jewel. It's the arya's knowledge and liberation. In other words, their true paths and their true cessations. Although 'sangha' usually means 'community', here in the sense of the ultimate community it's referring to the community or the gathering of paths and cessations. It's not a community of persons, but it is a community of realizations and cessations.

The Conventional Sangha Jewel is any individual arya, meaning an individual person who has realized emptiness or an assembly of ordained beings. The assembly of ordained beings are a symbolic representation of the Conventional Sangha Jewel. The real Conventional Sangha Jewel is any one particular

arya.

Now the reason why an individual arya is the Sangha Jewel is because that person has the direct realization of reality. That person can be a monk or a nun or a lay person: it doesn't matter. It's an individual who has understood reality and it doesn't matter whether they're ordained or not ordained. As a symbolic representation of that, we have the Sangha community of ordained monks and nuns, at least four of them together in one place. That is a representation, or a symbol, of the Conventional Sangha Jewel. It's not the real Sangha Jewel. I know this is a bit confusing.

[Audience:] When we find in prayers the word Sangha, how do we know what level to take it at?

You have to know about the context. For example, when we say "Namo Sanghaya" or "I take refuge in the Sangha," here it's referring to the true paths and true cessations, and it's referring to any individual who has those on his or her mindstream. That person is going to be a valid object of refuge because they've perceived reality. When we say "I take refuge in the Sangha," it doesn't mean "I take refuge in some monk or nun who has no realizations." We don't take our deepest refuge in them. But that person can symbolize to us an arya being, which is the real thing we take refuge in for the Sangha.

[Audience: inaudible]

An arya being has realized emptiness directly. An

ordinary monk or nun hasn't necessarily. They may have, they may not have, but they do symbolize that realization. Even though they may not have those realizations, they can symbolize that, and so the advantage is that if we're around them, we can think "Oh, these people are showing me, these people are guiding me on that path, so I can get there myself."

You see, the word 'sangha' is particularly confusing because in America they've started calling everybody 'sangha'. Some people use the word 'sangha' to mean anybody who is a Buddhist, or even people who aren't Buddhists. I personally don't use the term 'sangha' in that way. I would prefer just to call that the Buddhist community. In Asia, the word 'sangha', when it's said in the sense of a community, usually refers to ordained monks and nuns. But when we say we take refuge in the Sangha, then we're taking refuge in any particular being that has direct perception of emptiness, whether or not they're a monk or a nun or not. It doesn't really matter. There are many lay people who are actually the arya Sangha, who have that realization.

[Audience:] What's the difference between an arya Sangha and a Buddha?

An arya Sangha has some of the paths and some of the cessations, and the Buddha has all of them. There are five paths, and the arya Sangha is on the third and the fourth. The fifth is Buddhahood. While you're on the third and the fourth, you're in the gradual process of removing the defilements and developing the qualities. Buddhahood doesn't come instantaneously

upon realizing emptiness. It's like when you've realized emptiness, now you have the Windex, and you start squirting it on the mirror and cleaning the mirror. But it's going to take time to do that. And that's what goes on the third path and fourth path. Those beings are the arya Sanghas.

[Audience: inaudible]

On the first two paths, if we talk of the Theravada path, a person enters the first path when they have a total determination to be free of cyclic existence. In other words, day and night, they spontaneously want to get out of cyclic existence and attain liberation. That's for somebody on a more modest vehicle. For somebody who is on the vast vehicle, the Mahayana path, then you enter that first path when you spontaneously have, day and night, the wish to become a Buddha in order to liberate all others. Combined with that altruism, you also have the determination to be free yourself. But just because you have either the determination to be free or the altruistic intention, it doesn't yet mean that you've realized emptiness. You may have, you may not have.

[Audience:] Could you elaborate on the different vehicles?

We have a presentation of different vehicles and we're going to get into this more later on in the outline when we start talking about the qualities of the Sangha. What we have is the Hearer's Vehicle, the Pratyeka Buddha or Solitary Realizer's Vehicle, and

the Bodhisattva's Vehicle.

In the Hearer's Vehicle and the Pratyeka Buddha or Solitary Realizer's Vehicle, the first path is entered when you spontaneously have the determination to be free from cyclic existence day and night. The end product of that is arahatship. You've gotten yourself out of cyclic existence, you've removed what's called the afflicted obscurations from the mind.

But the subtle obscurations, called the cognitive obscurations, are still on the mind. That's what prevents the arhat from becoming a Buddha, though he or she is out of cyclic existence. When you talk about the bodhisattva's path, they enter the first path when they spontaneously have the altruistic intention to become a Buddha for the benefit of all. And when they complete that path, they wind up at Buddhahood and at that point they have not only freed themselves from cyclic existence, they've not only gotten rid of the afflicted obscurations, they've also gotten rid of the cognitive obscurations. So it's a higher level of realization. Somebody might start as a hearer and they go on to become an arhat. Somebody else might start as a bodhisattva and go on to become a Buddha.

Purpose of Learning these Terms

It all appears like a mass of confusing names at the beginning. It does get clearer, don't worry. If you have the patience to stick it out and learn this, then later when you hear other teachings, they will make a lot more sense to you, because you'll have a perspective to put them in.

Part of your mind might say "What do I care about

paths and realizations and all this kind of gobbledygook?” Well, the reason why is because if we want to attain the happiness of a Buddha, these are the things that we want to actualize on our own mindstream. They aren’t intellectual gobbledygook. These are the directions and the things that we want to learn about.

It’s like if you’re in first grade, you might have this idea, “Ooh, I’d like to be a doctor.” And you’re still in first grade but you learn about grammar school, you learn about junior high, you learn about high school, you learn about undergrad work, you learn about medical school, you learn about residency. You know all the different things you have to do. And learning all those different things, it gives you a lot more confidence in the people who have done it. So it gives you a better understanding of where you’re going because you can see exactly how much has to be learnt to do that. It also gives you a better idea of where you’re going to go, and a better idea of what your own inner potential is. That we too can get those realizations.

It’s not just learning terms and categories, but it’s learning what our mind can become. It’s also giving us a deeper appreciation of those who are guiding us on the path, because when we say we take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, we’re getting a deeper idea of exactly what they are and what their qualities are and what they’ve done. In that way our confidence in them grows.

At the beginning it all seems terribly confusing, and how do these things all fit together? After you’ve learned it more and you become more familiar with

the terms, it's actually quite inspiring. It makes the mind very happy to think about it because, "Wow, think about somebody who has altruism day and night spontaneously in the same way that I get angry day and night spontaneously. Wow, what an incredible way to be! There are people like that who exist. That's marvelous and what's even more astounding is that I can become like that. And that there's an actual way to do it. And that's just the first path. So not only do I have the potential to become that, but I have the potential actually to realize emptiness and then to cleanse my mind completely."

When we understand that, it pulls us out of this little rut of "I'm just little old me who goes to work and comes home and can't do anything right." It completely cancels that very fixed conception of ourselves because we get a whole new vision of what we can become.

Role of Mindfulness

[Audience:] Where does breathing meditation and all the mindfulness teachings fit into all of this?

The breathing meditation can serve a few functions. First of all it can help us develop concentration, which is a necessary thing, because if we're going to gain any of these realizations we have to be able to hold them in our mind. We have to be able to concentrate.

Also, as we learn to be more mindful of all the different parts of the breathing meditation, we become more mindful of everything that's going on, and we can develop an understanding of

impermanence. We can develop some understanding of selflessness and that can aid us in developing wisdom along the path too.

Also, mindfulness is used in our daily lives, to try and be mindful, to be aware, not just of our breath, but when you're driving—please be mindful. We have to be mindful of the cars, we have to be mindful of what we're saying, thinking and doing so that we don't let our energy wander off in a destructive direction. We want to be mindful and aware of the positive things that we want to do. And steer our energy towards that.

So the mindfulness practice is very much a key practice in helping us develop all these different realizations along the path.

[Audience: inaudible]

Right, when you get into the deep levels of the mindfulness practice, then you notice the moment-by-moment change that's going on with the breath. Then you also notice that there's no self-sufficient person who's breathing. So you can go on many different layers with the mind from this practice.

OK, let's sit for a few minutes, digest, breathe, relax. Like I said it's not going to stick in your mind all at once. But you can go home and read through the things, try and remember them, try and make sense of them and most importantly try and think about them, how they relate to yourself and your own Buddha nature, your own potential, what you can become.

Review

Taking refuge is the natural consequence of having contemplated what our future could be like after death. If we continue messing around and don't purify our minds, if we create a lot of negative karma, then at the time of our death, that karma could ripen and we could fall to an unfortunate rebirth. We get concerned about that possibility, and that acts as a motivation for us to seek some refuge, to seek a method and a guide to free us from that threat.

The other cause of our taking refuge is our confidence in the Triple Gem—the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha—and their ability to guide us. As we get deeper into the explanation about refuge, and we start understanding more what Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha are all about, then the confidence increases because we've come to know what their qualities are.

The last time we started to identify the qualities of the Triple Gem, everybody got this incredible, puzzled look on their face. It was interesting. I was looking through some of the Lamrim texts that are out on the market now such as *Path to Bliss* and *Essence of Refined Gold* and they all go very quickly through this part. I could do that too, but I'm not going to. [Laughter.] But I won't go too slowly either.

The three jewels of refuge are terms that come up as you get deeper into the Dharma and I think it's good that you get exposed to them now because at some time or another you're going to have to understand them. Well, you don't have to, but they will come up, and so it's helpful to have a little bit of information about them now.

The Ultimate and Conventional Refuge

Let's do a quick review of what we talked about before. When we talk about the Buddha, we are referring to the ultimate and conventional Buddha Jewel. The truth body or the dharmakaya refers to the mental aspect of the Buddha, while the form body or the rupakaya refers to the physical manifestations. When somebody becomes a Buddha, they get both of them at the same time. Everything is achieved at the exact same time, because when you make that passage from being a sentient being to a Buddha, everything changes, and it changes all at the same time.

The truth body is the ultimate Buddha Jewel, while the form body is the conventional or the relative Buddha Jewel. The truth body has two branches: the nature body, which refers to the emptiness of inherent existence of a Buddha's mind and the cessations of all the defilements on a Buddha's mind. The other branch is called the wisdom truth body, which refers to the omniscience of the Buddha's mind—the Buddha's compassion, wisdom, and consciousness that perceives both relative truths and ultimate truths simultaneously.

Because we cannot communicate directly with the Buddha's mind—with the dharmakaya—the Buddhas, out of their compassion, manifest a physical aspect in a form body so that we can communicate with them. There are two kinds of form bodies that they manifest in according to the grossness or subtlety of our mind states and what we can communicate with. When we gain high-level realizations, when we become arya bodhisattvas, very high on the path to enlightenment, then the Buddhas manifest in what's called the

enjoyment body, the subtle body of the Buddha made of light that abides in the pure lands. The pure lands are created out of the collection of positive potential of the Buddhas.

For grosser level beings like us who can't even understand impermanence, let alone realize bodhicitta, the Buddhas appear in even grosser aspects called emanation bodies, of which there are several kinds. One is the supreme emanation body, an example of which is Shakyamuni Buddha as he appeared on the earth. Another is an emanation body as an artisan, which is the way that the Buddha manifested to subdue different people's minds. Yet another way is as a personage such as Maitreya Buddha, who is now in Tushita pure land, waiting for the time to come to our universe to teach the Dharma.

True Path and True Cessation

Another way of looking at the two parts of the truth body is to say that the nature body is the ultimate true cessation, and the wisdom truth body is the ultimate true path.

The ultimate Dharma Jewel is the true path and the true cessation on an arya's mental continuum. The conventional Dharma Jewel is the teachings, the pronouncements, and the instructions of the Buddha that teach us how to attain the true cessation and the true path. We also come upon the true cessation and true path when we look at the Four Noble Truths.

When the Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths—this was the basic and first teaching that he gave at Sarnath—he first pointed out the truth of undesirable

experiences, often called the truth of suffering, in our lives. The second thing he said was that this whole unsatisfactory situation has causes, the causes being our ignorance, anger, and attachment. The third truth was that it's possible to cease the first two. In other words, it's possible to get rid of all the undesirable experiences and all of their causes, so that third truth is the true cessation, which is the stopping, the absence, and the elimination of the undesirable experiences and their causes. The fourth truth is that there's a path to follow. There are consciousnesses—remember that paths really mean consciousnesses—to develop within ourselves that can bring about the cessation of these undesirable experiences and their causes.

In the Four Noble Truths, true cessation and true path are the last two. Those are the two qualities that we want to develop. (If you look at the robes of a monastic, you'll see two pleats at the back, which represent the true suffering and true causes that are to be put behind one, and there are two pleats on the front that are the true path and true cessation that we want to go towards.)

There are different levels of true path and true cessation. When you attain direct perception of emptiness, you aren't yet a Buddha or an arhat: at that point you are an arya or a noble being or a superior being. When you have the consciousness that perceives emptiness directly, you're able to cease the artificial forms of all the defilements. Then, as you progress along the path, you begin to eliminate the innate forms of the defilements. You develop the true paths in the mind that then serve to eliminate the

defilements, or the causes of the sufferings, and consequently the sufferings themselves. Each degree of elimination is called the true cessation. Those are the ultimate Dharma Jewel and also the ultimate Sangha Jewel, which together are the ultimate refuge. Those are the things that are the true protection.

When we develop the true path and true cessation in our own mind, then that's real security. If you're looking for security, that's security, because at that point, the sufferings, the problems, no longer come, because the causes have been eliminated. Up until that point, we never have real security. That's why they say the Dharma is the ultimate refuge.

The conventional Sangha Jewel is any being who has attained direct perception of emptiness. The symbolic Sangha is a community of four monks or nuns.

All this is to give you a little more of an idea of what it is we're taking refuge in, so when you say, "I take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha," you have more information and your contemplation becomes more complete. You know more about what you're doing. It becomes less of a rote thing and more something that's felt. It's done with knowledge and with understanding.

The Four Bodies of a Buddha

When we talk about the Buddha's four bodies, we should remember that the word "body" doesn't just mean physical body, it means corpus, or collection of qualities. Form bodies are achieved spontaneously and simultaneously with the truth bodies. All the

grosser forms that the Buddhas take in order to communicate with us come about spontaneously. In other words, when you become a Buddha, you don't have to think about how to benefit others, but rather, because of your great accumulation of positive potential and the purity of your mind, you instinctively know how to benefit others and you can manifest in different forms that can communicate with different beings according to their different needs.

When you really think about this, it's quite remarkable. Compare it to how we are right now. To do anything, we have to sit down and think about it, and generate a motivation, and consider all the options, and go through this whole thing of planning and getting ourselves enthused, and then we finally go ahead and do it. And, when we meet obstacles, we fall apart.

It's actually possible for any of us to become a fully enlightened being, somebody who just knows spontaneously and instinctively how to benefit others and who has the ability, without thinking about it and without trying, to appear in whatever physical form is conducive to guiding someone else. It's truly remarkable that we have the ability to attain those kinds of qualities and that there are beings alive who can do that kind of thing. We may be limited, but let's try not to have too much skepticism and doubt about the qualities that we can attain.

When somebody becomes a Buddha, their body, speech and mind are not three separate entities. Right now, our body, speech and mind are three different things: our body is here, our mind is at the shopping center, and our speech is mumbling commercial tunes.

They're three completely different things. When one becomes a Buddha, those things all become one entity. The Buddha's form body is just an appearance of his mind. The mind is the mental side and the form body is the other side of the coin—the physical appearance of that mind. When someone is a Buddha, he or she can appear in countless different physical appearances in order to benefit us. Their bodies are reflections of their mental states, reflections that karmically correspond to what we're capable of benefiting from. The Buddhas' appearances are very much in tune with our karma and yet they're directly manifested from their own pure states of mind.

Although you may not have thought about this kind of thing before, and it might seem a little bit odd, I think it's good to stretch our minds and pull ourselves out of our narrow little boxes, because sometimes we get really stuck. All we know is our experience, so we think that's all there is. A person in an underdeveloped country, when they see a plane fly, might say, that can't happen, people can't fly in the sky, people can't land on the moon, that's completely impossible. Why? Because I've never experienced it.

Just that reason—that I've never experienced it, that I've never heard about it or thought about it—is not a good reason for tuning things out and saying that since I'll never understand them, well, they can't exist. It's good to try and expand our attitude and see the qualities that the holy beings have attained. Then we can gain some idea about what our own capabilities are, and we don't lock ourselves into our own little prison of who we think we are. We think we know who we are, and then we limit ourselves

because of that thought.

Causal refuge and resultant refuge

There's another way to talk about the objects of refuge, one that has two parts to it: the causal refuge and the resultant refuge. The causal refuge refers to other beings, people outside of ourselves, who have already done what we want to do. It refers to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha that already exist—all the different beings who are Buddhas, all the Dharma, the different realizations and cessations on their mind, all the beings who are already arya bodhisattvas with direct perception of emptiness. Because these beings have attained what we want to develop, they become reliable guides to show us the way.

If you want to go to Delhi, it's good to talk to somebody who's been there, because they know exactly how to get there, what planes to catch, how to do it and what things you're going to bump into along the way. Because they've done it, we can really rely on them. So in the same way, the causal refuge are those who've already done what we want to do, who are instructing us through their own experience, and who are very reliable. At the beginning of your prayers, when you're doing the refuge—"I take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha"—you can think in this way: all those beings, all the Dharma, and all the Sangha who are already there.

Another way of taking refuge is thinking about the resultant refuge. In other words, when we take refuge, we think of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha that we

will become. We take our future Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha and we project it outside of us and we take refuge in that. The Buddha becomes the omniscient mind that we're going to attain, the continuity of our own present mind stream in its fully enlightened form. The Dharma becomes the true paths and true cessations that we're going to have on our mind stream when we follow the path and develop them. And the Sangha becomes the being that we will become who has direct perception of emptiness.

When we think about the resultant refuge, we're thinking about what we can become and really imagining it already there. That's our real refuge. With the resultant refuge, we're really taking refuge in our own ability, in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha that we will become.

It's very helpful, before you do refuge in the morning, to just sit and think about it in both these ways—the causal refuge and the resultant refuge. It makes your understanding much richer and deeper and it gives you enthusiasm for practicing the path. When you take refuge in the beings who've done it, it gives you inspiration, because you think if they can do it, I can do it. And when you take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha that you're going to become, you understand that these resultant beings are just me, further along on my mental continuum.

[Audience: inaudible]

Right, right. When you say “I take refuge in my own mind stream,” it doesn't mean my present mind stream, but the resultant one. Our own Buddha

potential and the state of full enlightenment exist on a continuum. There's not this irrevocable gap between them. What we are today can purify and develop and become the truth body of the Buddha. As we gain some confidence in this thought and begin to look at our own feelings about ourselves, we realize how we put ourselves down and how we badmouth ourselves all the time. We think, "I'm just little old me. I can't do anything." But when you really start thinking about our mind and the truth body on the same continuum, and about the resultant refuge and that it is us, it becomes evident that we imprison ourselves by our own way of thinking, by our own self-image.

In tantra, we imagine ourselves as the Buddha, we dissolve ourselves into emptiness, we get rid of all our conceptions of who we are, and then we imagine ourselves appearing in the form of a Buddha. You begin to understand why this is a very profound method in the tantrayana. It completely cuts off all the badmouthing and the poor quality views that we have about ourselves, and we really imagine ourselves as the resultant refuge. When you're a little kid and you dress up in mom and dad's clothes and you pretend to be all these different things you pretend to be as a kid, then that puts the imprints in your mind to actually become like that. You gain the confidence to become like that, because you're sitting there playing, rehearsing it. That's the same kind of thing that happens in the Vajrayana practice.

So you see, all these different things on the path come up in different situations. When you understand them, you can bring them all together and arrive at a global view of how everything fits together.

Why the Buddha is a suitable object of refuge

This section, where we talk about why the Buddha is a good object of refuge, is much less intellectual, and there are a lot of stories in it. Let's hope I can get the stories right, because I usually bungle them up. There are four qualities that make the Buddha a good object of refuge, a reliable object. It's important to choose a reliable object of refuge because we see what happens when people choose unreliable objects of refuge, the classic case being Jim Jones. By knowing the qualities of the Buddha and knowing why he's reliable, we gain confidence that we can really trust in what's happening.

1. THE BUDDHAS ARE FREE FROM ALL FEARS

The first quality is that the Buddhas are free from all fears. This gives them the ability to help others overcome their fears. Now, what kind of fears are the Buddhas free of? There are two kinds of fears: the fear of samsara and the fear of nirvana. Now you're going to say, "Ok, samsara is cyclic existence, is all these constantly recurring problems, and I can understand being afraid of that. But how can I be afraid of nirvana? What do you mean—afraid of nirvana?" The fear of nirvana doesn't mean that you're terrified of nirvana itself. What it's referring to is the state of someone like an arhat, who has liberated his mind from cyclic existence and has a state of peace and calm that comes through wisdom, but is not yet a fully enlightened being. He hasn't yet

generated the altruistic intention. He hasn't yet purified the subtle stains on the mind, so he is still limited in his ability to benefit others. A Buddha doesn't have any fear of getting caught in that state of self-complacent peace because a Buddha has the great compassion that motivates sentient beings to purify their minds and develop their qualities completely.

Self-complacent peace, or the peace of nirvana, isn't bad, because an arhat certainly has infinitely more good qualities than we ordinary beings do. But it is a limited state of realization. A Buddha isn't bound by that limitation, nor are the Buddhas caught in the cycle of existence. And that's important. If we're drowning, we want someone on dry land who can save us. If we're drowning, and the guy next to us is drowning, he can't help at all—he can't even save himself.

Similarly, if the guides we take refuge in aren't free of cyclic existence, how can they possibly show us the way? How can they really guide us? It's one drowning person trying to save another one. When you say the Buddha is free of the fear of samsara or nirvana, it means he's the person on dry land, the person who has crossed over to the other shore, who has that internal stability and security of spiritual realizations so that he can really help.

When we think about this, it gives us some confidence in the Buddha and we see also why it's necessary to have attained full enlightenment to be best able to benefit others. If we haven't gotten ourselves out of cyclic existence, we can't help ourselves, let alone help others. If we've only attained

nirvana for ourselves alone, then we are still limited and can't help others.

2. THE BUDDHAS HAVE SKILLFUL AND EFFECTIVE MEANS TO FREE OTHERS FROM ALL FEAR

The second quality of the Buddhas is that they have skillful and effective means to free others from all fear. Amchog Rinpoche told us that, even if you have wisdom and compassion, you still need to know the right method and technique to help others. The Buddhas have that. And, to use these techniques properly, the Buddhas have full knowledge of our karma and our dispositions. Because different beings have different dispositions, different beings are attracted to different things. Different people will respond better to different kinds of meditations. The Buddhas are able to tune in to that and to prescribe in a skillful way the techniques that are needed for that particular person. Without that skill, the Buddhas can't guide all other beings in accordance with those beings' own karmic tendencies and their own mental inclinations and dispositions.

In this line, there are stories in the scriptures about how the Buddha used his skill to guide different beings. I think these stories are effective antidotes for those times that we feel hopeless and sorry for ourselves. We can compare ourselves to these other beings, beings that the Buddha did really manage to lead to liberation, and we begin to think, "Oh, I'm not quite that bad, there's some hope for me."

Helping someone who is ignorant

There's a story about someone whose name was "Little Path," whose brother was named "Big Path." Little Path was really dumb. He just couldn't remember anything. His teacher would try and teach him the two syllables "Om Bam," and when he remembered "Om," he forgot "Bam," and when he remembered "Bam," he forgot "Om." His teacher eventually threw him out because he couldn't learn anything. His parents took care of him for a while, but eventually they died. And so he went to live with his older brother, who tried to teach him but couldn't get through to him at all. So his brother kicked him out.

He was sitting on the monastery steps crying because his teacher had kicked him out, his parents had died, and now his brother had kicked him out. He didn't know what to do. And the Buddha comes along, and Little Path explains the situation to the Buddha, and the Buddha says, "Don't worry. I'll help you."

So the Buddha gave him a broom and had him sweep the monks' shoes to clean them off. And he told him to say, "Remove dirt, remove stain." Slowly, by just cleaning the shoes, he purified his mind so that he could remember "Remove dirt, remove stain." Then the Buddha enlarged the scope of Little Path's cleaning job to include the whole courtyard and as he swept one side of the courtyard, he said "Clean the dirt, clean the stain," and then he swept the other side, still repeating the words the Buddha had taught him. When he got done sweeping that side, the first side was dirty again, so he went back to sweep the first

side. When that was done, the second side was dirty again. He spent years going back and forth, cleaning the two sides of the courtyard, constantly saying “Clean the dirt, clean the stain.”

Eventually, through offering service in this way, through the power of offering service and generating confidence in the Buddha, he began to realize that “clean the dirt” meant eliminate all of the ignorance, anger and attachment from the mind, eliminate all of the contaminated karma from the mind. And “clean the stain” meant eliminate all the subtle stains on the mind, eliminate the appearance of true existence, the subtle obscurations on the mind. And he began to realize what “clean the dirt, clean the stain” meant. By contemplating this more and more, he eventually attained liberation.

The Buddha had incredible skill to be able to lead somebody who is so dumb that he couldn’t remember “Om Bam” to become an arhat. Now that gives me great confidence, because I can remember “Om Bam”: I’m a little bit more advanced than this guy. There’s some hope for me. And the Buddha has the skillful means to be able to do this.

Helping someone who is angry

There’s another story, about a man named Angulimala. Talk about meeting up with wrong gurus! Angulimala started following a spiritual master who told him to go out and kill a thousand people and to take their thumb-bones and string them on a necklace. If he did that, said the master, he would attain liberation. So Angulimala started killing people, and

he kept generating more and more anger and being terribly savage, and everybody was terrified of him. Eventually he killed 999 people. He needed one more. He was going to kill his own mother.

At this point, the Buddha stepped in. Angulimala saw him and said, “Ok, I’ll kill this guy instead of my mother.” He started walking after the Buddha, but the Buddha stayed just ahead of him. Soon Angulimala was running. The Buddha was still leisurely walking, yet Angulimala could not catch up with him. He shouted out to the Buddha, “Stop!” He didn’t say, “I want to kill you,” but “Stop!” The Buddha said, “I have stopped.” And Angulimala asked, “What are you talking about?” The Buddha explained, “Well, I have stopped all my anger, attachment and ignorance. I’m free from the defilements and the suffering.” In that way, the Buddha made Angulimala reflect on whether what he was doing was really the path to liberation or not, and he was able to subdue Angulimala’s wrong conceptions and his great anger. After that, Angulimala did an intense purification practice and he eventually became an arhat.

If methods exist for somebody like Angulimala, then methods also exist to help us, who haven’t killed 999 people.

Helping someone who is very attached

So far we’ve had an example of somebody who’s ignorant and somebody who’s angry. There’s also an example of somebody who was very attached—the Buddha’s own brother, Nanda. This is not Ananda, one of his chief disciples who took care of him. This is

Nanda, his brother. Nanda was incredibly attached to his wife. Talk about a co-dependent relationship: this was really it. He couldn't stand to be away from his wife for even a second because he was so enamored of her beauty, so taken with it.

Nanda's mind was so overwhelmed by craving desire, there was no room for the Dharma. The Buddha, with his skillful method, took Nanda and showed him the upper realms—the god realms—full of beautiful goddesses, even more beautiful than his wife. Nanda wanted to know, “How can I get born in those realms?” And so the Buddha explained to him about the value of doing positive actions and creating good karma. Next the Buddha showed him a hell realm, and of course Nanda freaked out. “I don't want to be born here! What's the cause of being born here?” he cried. And the Buddha explained: great attachment. Then Nanda got the idea, and in that way he began to eliminate his attachment and he too eventually attained high realizations. So there is hope for us.

Helping someone with low self-esteem

There's another story about an orphan, an ugly and abandoned child who wandered around begging. He was so ugly that nobody could stand to look at him or be around him. Talk about low self-esteem: this was really it. The Buddha, using his skillful method, manifested as somebody who was even uglier. When the orphan saw this other person who was even uglier than him, he began to feel a little bit better. You know how we are when we see somebody worse off than

ourselves ... he began to feel better about himself. And the Buddha, still in this very ugly form, continued to hang around and they became good friends. The Buddha made him understand that the reason for being born like this was due to negative actions. In that way, he began to teach him about purification, about the Four Noble Truths, about nirvana, and so forth. And he too eventually practiced the path and gained realizations.

The Buddha has great skill in being able to know people's different dispositions and how to teach them. Understanding this gives us confidence in the Buddha as a reliable source of refuge. It also makes us think about how we can be skillful with other people, about what qualities we need to develop to be able to tune in to other people and help them according to their needs.

3. THE BUDDHAS HAVE EQUAL COMPASSION FOR EVERYBODY

The third quality of the Buddhas is that they have equal compassion for everybody. They don't consider some beings close and others distant. This is something to think about: just look at our minds. We have close friends whom we want to be around. These are the people we want to help: they are easy to help. Then there are all the other people—people who we think are distant—so who cares about them! Look at the partiality in our own mind: we help the people who are close, and we have warm feelings about them, and everybody else we just ignore and dismiss.

The Buddha is free from that kind of lopsided

compassion. The Buddha has impartial compassion for every living being, no matter whether they're related to him or not, no matter whether they have faith in him or not. This quality makes the Buddha a reliable source of refuge. The Buddha won't play favorites. We don't want a spiritual guide that's going to play favorites, because if the spiritual teacher plays favorites, chances are we could get left out.

There's a story about Buddha's cousin, Devadatta. You think you have bad relatives; the Buddha had one, too. Devadatta was always out to kill Buddha, and he formed an alliance with one of the princes at that time, whose father, the king, was a follower of the Buddha. Both Devadatta and the prince wanted to eliminate anyone who had power over them and take that power for themselves.

Devadatta would roll a stone down a hill to try and crush the Buddha. Or he would release a mad elephant to charge the Buddha. The mad elephant, by the way, charged the Buddha, but by the power of Buddha's loving kindness, the elephant was completely overwhelmed and fell to its knees and bowed before the Buddha. The scene has been depicted in many pictures.

The point here is that the Buddha, from his side, had no ill feelings towards Devadatta. He wanted to help Devadatta attain enlightenment just as much as he wanted to help Shariputra and Moggallana, his two chief disciples. There was no favoritism. There was no "I'll help you because you're nice to me. But Devadatta, you're a creep. Get away!"

Through this story, we can also see that, although a Buddha might have equal compassion toward

everyone and might try and help others equally, different beings have different abilities to take in the Buddha's teachings. Receiving guidance from the Buddha isn't just a question of the Buddha giving it. It's also a question of us receiving it. Even though the Buddha was trying to help Devadatta, Devadatta, by the power of his wrong conceptions, by the power of his closed-mindedness, was completely blocking out that positive influence. This is why we have to do a lot of purification: to remove what obscures us from being able to open up and receive the Buddha's influence. Having confidence in the Buddha's qualities helps us open up to receive their influence. It's important to generate faith or confidence. It makes us have an open state of mind that allows us to receive the Buddha's energy.

When we talk about receiving the blessings of the Buddha, rather than the word "blessing", it's better to use the word "inspiration." Receiving the blessings or the inspiration and having our mind be transformed depends not only on the Buddha, but also on us. When our minds are closed and shut down, nothing goes in. We can see that so clearly, can't we? When our own minds are peaceful and open, when there's a feeling of faith and reverence, then we're much more open and susceptible to other people's positive influence.

Our minds can be like upside-down pots. The sun might be shining everywhere, but the pot is upside down, so the plant underneath the pot doesn't get any light. From the sun's side, it's shining equally. From the plant's side, it's covered; it can't receive the light. In the same way, when we surround ourselves with

negative actions, with our skepticism and hostility, with all of our wrong conceptions, with our poor self-image—when we have a pot over our head—we aren't letting the Buddha's influence get through to us. Understanding this gives us energy for purifying and for understanding why confidence is so important.

The Buddhas, from their side, they don't need our faith. Buddha, from his side, doesn't care whether we have faith in him or not. If you're a Buddha, you don't need anybody else to have faith in you. But the faith, the confidence, is something that benefits us in receiving the Buddha's influence.

4. THE BUDDHAS FULFILL THE AIMS OF ALL BEINGS, WHETHER OR NOT THOSE BEINGS HAVE HELPED HIM

The last quality that makes a Buddha a suitable guide is that the Buddha is able to fulfill the aims of all beings, whether or not those beings have helped him. There is no favoritism: whether we make offerings or not, whether we have faith or not, whether we're of a high and noble rank, or whether we're just a lousy nobody, it doesn't really matter. From the Buddha's side, how we act to him, whether we have good connections or not, whether he can use us to do something for him or not, has no bearing upon a Buddha's ability to guide us.

The Buddha does not lack the patience to stick with it. He does not teach us only if we are nice to him and then kick us out as soon as we become obnoxious. This is an important quality for us to look for in the guides we take. We can also see it's an

important quality for us to develop in ourselves so that we become able to help others.

The three kinds of confidence

As we think about these different qualities of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, we want to try and develop a sense of confidence. The word “confidence”—“day-pa” in Tibetan—is sometimes translated as “faith,” but that word suggests the quality of blind faith, and that’s not what we are talking about here. A sense of confidence in the holy beings means something different. There are three kinds of confidence to develop.

The first kind of confidence is called pure confidence, or admirational confidence. We gain admirational confidence for the holy beings when we start studying the qualities of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and start understanding what they can do. We admire those qualities and, by admiring others’ qualities, we create happiness in our own minds. Our minds become more receptive to their advice and their instructions.

The second type of faith is called aspirational confidence. We not only admire the qualities of the holy beings, but we aspire to become like them. Our minds are enthusiastic—we see our potential and want to develop that potential. It’s an open and joyful state of mind that makes us willing to learn and willing to practice.

The third kind of confidence comes from conviction. This happens when we’ve really understood something and so have conviction in it.

The more we have conviction in something, the more we have confidence in it. For example, the more we understand the Four Noble Truths and how they operate, the more we have conviction in them. We also have more conviction that we can, through developing the true path, attain the true cessations and become a Buddha. Another example is that, if we think about karma, we develop conviction that gives us the energy and the confidence to abandon negative actions. Similarly, if we develop conviction in emptiness, we can begin to see how it's possible to purify our own minds of stains. We gain confidence that there are beings that are Buddhas and Sangha and we also gain confidence that we can become like that. This convictional confidence comes from understanding, from knowing something and then thinking about it.

Faith, or confidence, is not something that is diametrically opposed to knowledge and understanding. In fact, they go hand-in-hand. The more you know about something, the more you admire it, the more you aspire to be like that, the more you're convinced about it. Being convinced, you have more faith or confidence in it. When you have more confidence, your mind is more open and subtle: you can understand things easier. In turn, your wisdom, your knowledge, and your understanding increase.

Review

A short review of today's topics is in order. We talked about the two causes of refuge, the first of which is the sense of caution about the lower realms and the

sense of caution about being born in cyclic existence. The second cause of refuge is confidence in the ability of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha to guide us. The more we generate those causes, the deeper our refuge is.

We also talked about the objects of refuge: the Three Jewels, and the ultimate and conventional Buddha Jewel, Dharma Jewel, and Sangha Jewel. We talked about the different bodies or kayas of the Buddha, which led us into some discussion of what a Buddha is and what a Buddha's ability is. A Buddha's body, speech, and mind aren't separate: the body is a reflection or manifestation of the wisdom consciousness. The Buddhas manifest these different bodies spontaneously and effortlessly, without a lot of thought, because of the purity of their mind and their compassion.

We talked about causal and resultant refuge, the causal refuge being the Buddhas, Dharma and Sangha who've already done what we want to do, and therefore can guide us. The resultant refuge is the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha that we will become, which is our real refuge. When we do the refuge visualization at the beginning of our sessions, spend some time and think about this.

We also talked about the four qualities of a Buddha and why a Buddha is a reliable guide. The first quality is that the Buddhas are free from all fears of cyclic existence as well as self-complacent nirvana. Because they're out of the ocean, on the shore, they can throw us the life raft. They aren't just sleeping on the beach, being safe in their self-complacency, but they are there ready to throw the life raft.

The second quality is that they have the skill that's necessary to help us. There are stories about people overcome by attachment, anger, ignorance and low self-esteem, and how the Buddha managed to lead all of those beings to full enlightenment. Why? Because he has the skills, he has the tools, and he also has the ability to know the different karmic predispositions of people, and so can teach accordingly.

The third quality is that a Buddha has equal compassion towards everybody. A Buddha doesn't help somebody who is close and harm everybody else. A Buddha helps everyone whether or not that person has confidence or faith in the Buddha: that makes him a reliable guide.

The fourth quality is that the Buddhas don't show favoritism, and that they help us whether we help them or not. We don't have to bribe the Buddha in order to help us, but we do have to open our minds. We do have to take the pot off the plant so that the sunshine can come in. Gaining understanding of the path and freeing our minds from wrong conceptions are ways of opening ourselves up to the positive influence of the Buddha. That's what receiving the Buddha's blessing or inspiration means.

We also just talked briefly about the three different kinds of faith. The first one is pure confidence or admirational confidence, which implies that when we know the qualities of the holy beings, we admire them and our mind is happy. The second is aspiring confidence: when we aspire to become like them. The next is convictional confidence: when we really understand the path, we understand how it's possible to gain those qualities, and we're convinced through

our own understanding and reasoning that we can attain those.

Question and Answer

[Audience:] It seems like we want to get rid of fantasized ways of existing. Imagining ourselves as a Buddha is a fantasy. So why are we doing it?

Is that a fantasy? Although we aren't Buddhas now, are we completely lacking in the ability to become one?

[Audience: inaudible]

Even if somebody is not a Buddha yet, that person can be along the path to Buddhahood. They have been generating the qualities of a Buddha, although those qualities aren't fully developed yet. So is it such a hallucination to imagine them being fully developed if they have developed part of them now?

[Audience: inaudible]

Right, right. When you sit there and you think, "I'm so dumb. I'm so stupid. I messed up everything." That's a fantasy. But we believe that one is true. When we sit there and we get angry, or we get depressed, and we say, "I can't do anything about this. This is my character. This is my nature. I can't pull myself out of this mood." That's a hallucination. We tell ourselves that all the time. And we believe it.

[Audience: inaudible]

Well, it affects our actions. So we're having an unrealistic hallucination that is affecting us detrimentally. And the effects it's producing are quite real even though it's a fantasy.

So here, when we're imagining ourselves as a Buddha, that's a very realistic possibility that we can become. Imagining that—taking refuge in the Buddha that we will become—affects us positively.

It doesn't mean everything we imagine is true. There has to be a realistic basis of imputation for our imagination. If you imagine yourself as Meryl Streep, there's no basis of imputation there. If you imagine that you can become a photographer or if you imagine that you can become a Buddha, there's definitely a basis for that.

[Audience: inaudible]

Exactly. You're right, it's a negative aspiration, and that definitely pulls us down, and we become like that.

[Audience: inaudible]

Right. So let's choose to reinforce what's realistic and what's constructive. When I was teaching grade school, there was a little boy, his name was Tyron. He was convinced he couldn't learn how to read. I knew he could learn how to read. He didn't think so. He couldn't read because he didn't think he could learn how to read. You can see how those self-images

influence what we become.

As you're going through this material, I really encourage you to express your doubts and say what you think. I think this kind of discussion and debate, and airing the things that are confusing, is quite beneficial. Please go home and think about everything. Please try and start, or continue, your daily practice, doing the prayers and some breathing meditation, and then thinking about the different teachings you've gotten so they go into the mind. When you think about them, sometimes more questions arise, and your questions lead you to deeper investigation, which leads you to deeper understanding.

CHAPTER 6

How to Take Refuge

So we've been talking about refuge. We've talked about the causes of refuge; we've talked about the objects of refuge; now we're on the third section called 'Measuring the Extent to which We've Taken Refuge', or in other words, 'How to Take Refuge'. One way to take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha is by knowing their qualities, so we get into the whole subject of what their qualities are.

Now, this whole subject of refuge touches something very sensitive in us, because it touches on the whole thing of faith. We all come from different religious backgrounds. We all have different attitudes towards the subject of faith, or as I explained the last time, I prefer to call it 'confidence'. We all come with our own preconceptions or whatever, and people just within a small group have very different dispositions. Some people listening to all the teachings about refuge say, "Wow, this is incredible! My mind is so happy hearing this." Other people listen to it, and they get completely angry. So we have all come to teachings with different karma, with different dispositions, and we can hear things quite differently.

I remember one time when I was in Nepal (this was in the early years), a lama whom I had met came up to me and said, "When you go back to the West, you should tell everybody about the Buddha's qualities, and as soon as they hear of all these marvelous

qualities, they'll surely become Buddhists." And I thought, "No way!" For the Tibetans who had grown up hearing the terms 'Buddha', 'Dharma' and 'Sangha' since they were children, when they hear these teachings about all the incredible, magnificent qualities of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, they go "Wow! I never knew this before, this is wonderful!", whereas a lot of us are still wrestling with the question: "Does Buddha exist? Forget about Buddha's qualities—does Buddha exist? Let's get down to the basics here!"

Three Kinds of Confidence

So there's a lot that we have to hash through in working with this subject. And like I explained last time, there're different kinds of confidence that we can generate when we approach it. One is when we hear the qualities of the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, we have a feeling of admiration. We have a confidence that is admirational in nature. We admire those qualities. Some people may hear the same qualities and be very skeptical—"How do I know that exists?" We're all different.

The second kind of faith is that of aspiration: when we hear the qualities, we think, "Wow! I'd like to become like that." And we have a feeling, "Hmm ... it's possible to become like that. I'd like to do that." By contrast, other people listening to the whole thing may say, "I can't become like that. I'm just me."

Then there's another kind of confidence that's based on conviction, and this is when we've understood things. This is a confidence that arises

from learning the teachings, and understanding them, and applying them. And in some way, I think this kind of confidence comes a little bit easier to us because we were brought up in the rational tradition. When we approach subjects, we want a logical understanding; and after we have understood them, we believe them. So we might go to teachings on the Four Noble Truths and we think about it and we say, “That seems reasonable. I believe. I want to follow that because it makes sense.” Or we might hear some other teachings, let’s say, about how to deal with anger, and we put those into practice and we think about them and we see they do make some change in our life, and so we gain some confidence based on conviction through having looked at it, examined it and having some experience. And that kind of confidence is probably the most stable one because it comes from experience.

Now all these kinds of confidence or faith are not the ‘on-and-off light-switch’ thing, but rather, the ‘dimmer-brighter’ one. At the beginning, our confidence might be almost non-existent. As time goes on, we get more experienced, and we also do purification practice so we remove a lot of the karmic obstacles in our mind. Then a lot of things may make sense, and the mind gets lighter and it’s easier to have confidence and faith. So our level of confidence will change as time goes on. We might go one step back and two steps forward: this might happen from time to time as everything is impermanent in samsara, and so is our confidence. But the thing is that as we practice more and more, and get something grounded and get a deeper understanding, things will slowly start to

become more stable.

How Different Traditions View Buddha and Buddhahood

You might be interested to know too, because we're now getting to the subject of the Buddha's qualities, that how the Buddha is viewed differs very much, let's say from the Theravada school to the Mahayana school.

WAS THE BUDDHA AN ORDINARY BEING BEFORE HE ATTAINED ENLIGHTENMENT?

The Theravada viewpoint

In the Theravada school, it's very much seen that the Buddha was an ordinary human being who was not enlightened when he was born as a prince in Kapilavastu twenty-five hundred years ago. He was just an ordinary being. He left his life of luxury, became a meditator, gained the realizations, became a Buddha, taught, and then passed away. And when he passed away, because he had attained nirvana and all the attachment, anger and ignorance on his mind stream had ceased, they say that once he left the gross contaminated body, his consciousness also just kind of ceased since there was no longer any attachment to push it on. From the Theravada viewpoint, the Buddha's consciousness went into extinction after he passed away, and that's called attaining parinirvana. So the Buddhas don't appear in the world anymore.

Shakyamuni doesn't appear in the world anymore; all that remains is his teachings.

And they say that the next Buddha that comes will be Maitreya, and he will also be an ordinary being when he's first born, then gain the realizations of Buddhahood and teach, etc. The Theravada view is that the Buddha was ordinary like us and nothing extraordinary (before he attained enlightenment), and then he became a Buddha, and after he passed away, his consciousness went into extinction.

The Mahayana viewpoint

In the Mahayana tradition, the Buddha is seen quite differently. Here, the Buddha is seen as an omniscient mind, and a mind that has completely removed all defilements, completely developed all the potentials, and then acts for the benefit of others out of compassion. Instead of just acting as Shakyamuni Buddha, the Buddha is seen in a more global way, with Shakyamuni being just one manifestation of that Buddha. So from the Mahayana viewpoint, they would say that Shakyamuni was enlightened a long time before he appeared as a prince in Kapilavastu. When he was born in Kapilavastu, he was already enlightened. He did this whole thing of leading a kingdom, following the path, meditating and all, as a way of skillfully demonstrating to us an example of the qualities that we need to develop in our own mind.

So you can see, just in looking at the historical Buddha, there's a big difference in the Theravada approach and the Mahayana approach. The Theravada view is that he was an ordinary being who

became enlightened. The Mahayana view is he was already enlightened; this is an appearance, this is a manifestation.

DOES CONSCIOUSNESS CEASE AFTER NIRVANA/ ENLIGHTENMENT?

Also from the Mahayana viewpoint, when Shakyamuni passed away at the age of 81, his consciousness didn't just go into extinction. They say a Buddha's consciousness continues because all consciousnesses continue, but it continues in a purified state, and because of the Buddha's great compassion, he can spontaneously manifest in many different forms in order to guide beings. Therefore the Mahayana talks about many different kinds of Buddhas, and talks about Buddhas appearing on our earth right now. That doesn't mean that somebody is going to appear in Seattle, or in Washington D.C. and go, "Dah, dah, dah, dah! [music]", because that wouldn't necessarily be the most skillful way! CIA would probably get on him real quick! But the idea is that a Buddha can appear in different forms according to a being's karma, and that Buddhas appear in skillful ways. They don't announce themselves. But they can act in very subtle ways to influence other people, so that those people begin to create good karma, they begin to get an idea of ethics, they begin to practice bodhicitta and so on. They say that a Buddha can appear as one of our friends, as a dog or as a cat, or in any other form, so long as they can help us. Once again, these aren't announced and they often come and go, so we don't even recognize them.

[Audience:] Are the Buddhas' manifestations temporary or do they last a lifetime?

I suppose it could be either. Take for example, His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Many people view him as a Buddha. He was born from his mother's womb and he left Tibet and so on. And so it appears as a whole lifetime. I think probably there're other circumstances where it's a more temporary manifestation. It's hard to say. But from the Mahayana viewpoint, then, there's very much the feeling of the Buddha being something very imminent. In other words, the Buddhas have omniscient minds, they're here, they know what's going on, and they manifest when they have the opportunity. It's like they're really taking care of us and looking over us.

Buddha's power and the power of our karma

Now of course, a Buddha's power cannot override our karma. They say that a Buddha's power and the power of our karma are about equal. So it's not that the Buddha can overpower our karma. It's not like when we're about to swear at somebody, the Buddha steps in and pushes some buttons, and then we don't swear. If we have that habit and that energy and it's going forward, what can the Buddha do? But the Buddhas have influence. They may influence us by making us think, "Oh, but do I really want to lash out at this person or not?" So it's a much more subtle way of doing things. And they also say that the Buddha's chief way of influencing us is by teaching, is by showing the path to enlightenment. Of course they

may appear in other ways, but the chief way, the most beneficial way is by teaching us the Dharma. Like Amchog Rinpoche was saying last week, even if Shakyamuni walked in here, what is he going to do? He's just going to teach us the Dharma. Why? Because that's the best thing he can do for us. They can't crawl inside of our minds. No Buddha can crawl inside of our minds. But by influencing us through the teachings, we can do something with our own minds.

POSSIBILITY OF ATTAINING BUDDHAHOOD

The Theravada viewpoint

Also from the Mahayana viewpoint, there're many, many Buddhas. The Theravada too say that there are many Buddhas. But they say that in this one particular eon, there's going to be 1000 Buddhas. Because of the karma created by different beings, only a thousand people have the necessary karma to attain full Enlightenment in this eon. So from the Theravada viewpoint, not everybody can attain Enlightenment. Everybody else, except those thousand Buddhas, can become arhats. In other words, they can free their own minds from cyclic existence, but they don't reach the complete degree of purification. They don't have the same great love and great compassion of a fully enlightened Buddha.

The Mahayana viewpoint

Now in the Mahayana tradition, it's different. They say everybody has the potential to become a Buddha.

There're 1000 Buddhas in this eon who will appear and turn the Dharma wheel. In other words, they will appear and they will be recognized as Buddhas, and they will start the teachings in a world where previously, the teachings hadn't existed. You can see this with Shakyamuni Buddha, who's said to be the fourth of these 1000 in this particular eon: he appeared in India, where the Buddha's teachings hadn't existed there before, and he turned the Wheel of Dharma in the sense that he then started the whole doctrine of Buddhism on this particular earth. Of course, it had existed a long time before, but he started it on our earth. So they say, "Yes, there're 1000 Buddhas, but from the Mahayana viewpoint, there're a lot more Buddhas too ..."

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

... that even within this eon, there are many beings who will attain full enlightenment. It is said that everyone has the potential to become a Buddha. There are many Buddhas around; many people since the time of Shakyamuni have attained enlightenment; these beings continue to manifest, and not only on our planet. We can't be so self-centered—there are ten million, zillion, trillion other places for Buddhas to manifest and help sentient beings!

HANDLING THE DIFFERENT APPROACHES

So that's just to give you a little bit of information that there are different ways to see the Buddha. You don't need to get into this thing of "Well, which way is

correct? Was he enlightened when he was born, or wasn't he? I want to know the answer—there can only be one answer. And did his consciousness go into extinction, or didn't it? I want to know the answer!" I don't think we need to lock ourselves into that. I think what we can do instead is to take the approach that we can look at it either way, according to which way is going to be most inspiring for us.

Seeing the Buddha in the Theravada way

Sometimes we can look at Buddha in the Theravada way: that the Buddha was an ordinary being when he was born, but he managed to overcome all the obstacles. He overcame the pain in his knees, the pain in his back, all the mosquito bites ... He was able to deal with difficulties. This gives us some confidence that since he was once an ordinary person like I am now, I can do it too. This way [of thinking] is very helpful; when we think about the Buddha this way, it really invigorates our practice.

Seeing the Buddha in the Mahayana way

At some other time in our practice, it might be helpful to think of the Buddha in a more global sense, and get this feeling of there being many beings who are Buddhas possessing omniscient minds, who are able to just appear and influence us quite directly. That can generate a feeling of confidence, hope and inspiration in the path because then we don't feel so far away from the Buddha. We don't feel deserted in the middle of samsara with no help, because we see that

there is actually a lot of help available. It might come in subtle ways, and not in ways that are totally obvious to us, but it's there.

There is no need to insist on one right answer

So what I am getting at is that we don't need to get into this black and white mind of "which is it?" Instead, we can play with the different approaches; think about it in different ways and see how it affects our mind; and see what it does to our inner heart, so that we get more inspiration to practice.

In Malaysia, there are both Theravada and Mahayana teachers. The teachings of both traditions are basically the same, except for some differences. For example, in the Theravada tradition, it is said that as soon as a person leaves his body, he is reborn in the next moment; there is no intermediate state. The Mahayana tradition says, "No, there is an intermediate state of 49 days. A person is not a spirit then, but neither is he reborn in a gross body yet."

The Chinese are terribly concerned about death and spirits, and all these things. So I remember when the people in Malaysia heard these two teachings, they would sometimes get so upset: "What is it? Is there rebirth immediately after death, or not? There's got to be one answer! It can't be both!" I would try to explain that maybe the Buddha taught in different ways to different disciples because it is a skillful way of teaching. I would say, "I think those of you who have tried to teach know that it involves some skill, and you don't necessarily say everything all at once—you lead people." But when I said that, it made them

even angrier: “Well OK, he taught two different ways to two different disciples, but which one’s the right way?!” And I said, “Maybe the Buddha taught both ways to get us to think”. “Oh no! You mean I have to think about something? I don’t want to think. Just tell me which one is right!”

So really the teachings are not always that straightforward. It is not like going to college classes where you get a syllabus and a test and everything is supposed to make sense, even though it doesn’t. The Buddha taught different things to different disciples because people have different inclinations. Also it gives us a chance to check, “Why would he teach this to one person, and that to another person? What’s the real meaning behind these kinds of things? And how can expressing it this or that way affect somebody’s mind? And which way? If I see it from different aspects, can both be true?” It opens up this whole field of creative thinking to us, instead of giving us black and white answers. I think a lot of times when we approach things like these, we have to approach them with that kind of attitude.

It may also be that after you practice and investigate, you’ll find one way more correct than the other. But that does not mean that the first way is wrong, because the first way might be correct up to a certain extent, and it might be beneficial up to that extent as well. So we have to remember that the Buddha speaks in ways that are beneficial, and gives as much information as somebody can handle at a particular time.

Are the stories we hear to be taken literally?

Many things are there just to stretch our mind, to help us develop a softer approach to the teaching, like the many stories we hear in the teachings. When I started telling stories the last time, there might be people who listened to them and said, “I really like these.” But there might be others who got quite upset listening to them. And so we have to ask ourselves, “Are the stories to be taken literally, or not?”

I remember Serkong Rinpoche told a student not to call them ‘stories’, but to call them ‘accounts’, because they are true; they happened. But then when we get into many of those stories about karma, they may be ‘accounts’, but it’s not very skillful to say that to Westerners. When you talk about the lady who laid 32 eggs, and the elephant that had golden excrement, Westerners get totally upset!

I think the stories I told last time were a little bit milder. But some people might still have a lot of doubts about them. That’s OK. But what you can do is to think, “Do I have to take these literally, or is there some other way of interpreting them?” In other words, what do these stories mean to me? There is the story about Little Path who had a very poor memory; but he remembered “Clean the dirt, clean the stain” as he swept the floor, and by doing that, he became an arhat. If you think about it, what really are they trying to get across with this story? Is this something literal, that that’s all there is to it? Or is it trying to express something else? Like, perhaps, showing how ignorance can be gradually cleansed away? Or how things like sweeping the floor can be transformed into the path to enlightenment if we think in a certain way? There are many ways to look at these stories. I

don't think we need to always get so tied up about it, like "Did this really happen? I want a historical account. What year was Little Path born in? Why did his parents name him 'Little Path'? Where's the birth certificate?" We're just chasing ourselves in circles if we do this.

The Good Qualities of a Buddha

I want to talk a little bit tonight about the qualities of a Buddha. And again try and listen to this based on the faith that you already have. In other words, take whatever confidence you have in the Buddha's teachings, and what you know about the Buddha so far, and see this as extra information about the Buddha. Don't see it as "Here's all this stuff that's coming from the top that you have to believe is the way it is." Instead, take it from the point of view of where you are, what feels comfortable, and then use this as additional information that can help you expand your mind.

This section on the qualities of the Buddha is like getting information on someone whom you have met, and is impressed by, but whom you don't know very well. You are thinking of making a relationship with him, a business or romantic relationship, or whatever. You are impressed, but you want some more information about him. So you do some research and you call other people. And other people say "Oh yes, he's great, he's really good, he's honest, he's this and that ..." Hearing good reports from other people who know this person's qualities better enables us to have

more confidence in him. In the same way, we know a little bit about the Buddha right now, but the great masters added all these other teachings explaining his qualities, so as to give us a little bit more information than we might normally have just from our own direct encounter with the teachings. So it's kind of like you might gossip about somebody to get more information. This is similar to that, OK?

When we talk about the Buddha's qualities, we are really talking about the qualities of Buddha's body, speech and mind. And when I say "Buddha", it might often sound like I am referring to Shakyamuni Buddha, and I might use the pronoun "his" because I am thinking of Shakyamuni Buddha, but actually what is being said applies to any Buddha. And Buddhas are quite beyond being male or female. Especially if you look at it from the Mahayana perspective where a Buddha's body is just a manifestation to guide others, it becomes very clear that the Buddhas are not male or female, but they manifest different bodies in order to show skillful means to sentient beings. The Buddha's mind is not male or female; and the Buddha does not have any permanent concrete body. Try and pull yourself out of any kind of sexist way of looking at all of this.

QUALITIES AND SKILLS OF A BUDDHA'S BODY

Manifests infinite forms

One of the qualities of a Buddha's body is that he can manifest simultaneously an infinite number of forms.

“What? Manifest simultaneously? How do you do it?” Well, follow the path and you’ll find out. Then you’ll be able to do it yourself. There’s a cookbook recipe. If you want to know how to do it, follow the cookbook. Train yourself in the six perfections or far-reaching attitudes, then you can do it too. It is clearly stated how to do it.

When a mindstream is completely purified, when one gets rid of all of one’s “garbage” totally, there is so much energy at one’s disposal to use for the benefit of others. Right now, our energy gets totally bound up in “Who dented my car?” And “Why didn’t this guy show up on time for the meeting?” Our energies just get stuck in these little bitty things. When you are completely enlightened, your energy doesn’t get stuck. There is so much energy to use for the benefit of sentient beings. With this mental energy (as we say, “Mind over body”), your mind has the ability to effect different physical manifestations. It can affect the environment because it is no longer tied up in these little trivial things.

You can start to see this to some extent in your own life. For example, the energy that you had tied up with your vow to not speak to somebody for the rest of your life. If you start to release that, you’re going to have a lot more energy to do other things. So similarly, a fully enlightened being has the kind of energy to make different manifestations simultaneously and also effortlessly. We have to sit and think about everything and generate a good motivation. Why? Because our energies are all tied up in our self-centeredness. When you’re a Buddha, your energy isn’t tied up in thinking “Poor me, poor me,

how can I protect myself from this situation?”

So I think we can get some sense of how this can happen just by looking on a smaller scale at how we can do it in our own life, by releasing tied-up stuff.

Influences others positively

The qualities of the Buddha's body also show their inner mental state. One of the qualities of a Buddha's body is that it gives people energy. You look at a statue of the Buddha, and the Buddha's just sitting there so peacefully. Even the statue, even a piece of bronze made in the form of a Buddha, can make you very peaceful all of a sudden. Or sometimes you look at the paintings of the different Buddhas, and I don't know about you, but with me, I look at the long, narrow eyes and it's like "Wow! Those eyes seem to be saying something!" And that's just a picture. So somehow the physical forms of the Buddha reflect their inner mental states which can directly benefit others in a very positive way, just like our inner mental states now are shown on a physical level and that affects other people around us. If we're very angry inside, our face gets crunched up and red, and when other people see our face, it definitely affects them. It's the same thing with the way a Buddha's body can affect others except that that's in the other direction.

Buddha's body, speech and mind are one entity

All of the Buddha's body, speech and mind are one entity and they are cross-functional. The body is not

something made of atoms but a reflection of the mental state. It may appear as a body made of atoms, but it's not really that. For that reason, they say that even the pores of the Buddha's body are omniscient. Why? Because they aren't made of atoms. Our pores don't have consciousness; they are made of atoms. But the Buddha's pores are not. That that can happen has to do with getting down to the subtlest energy levels of body and mind when they become inseparable.

Possesses 32 signs and 80 marks

They also talk about the different physical signs that you might see on the form of the Buddha, called the 'Supreme Emanation Body', for example, that of Shakyamuni Buddha. You'll also see these signs on some of the Buddhist deities if you look at the pictures. They are called the 32 signs and 80 marks.

I won't go through all 112 of them because you guys like lists, but not that much. I'll pull out a few of the more common ones.

Dharma wheel on his sole and palm

For example, on the sole of each foot and on the palm of each hand is the impression of a thousand-spoked Dharma wheel. You've probably seen this in pictures. They say that the Buddha's feet don't touch the ground, and so when he walks, he doesn't harm sentient beings on it but he does leave the imprint of a wheel. Now one way of thinking about it: "Wouldn't it be nice to walk on the ground and not squash

sentient beings?” It’d be very nice. So when we get to the level of mind where we can do that, we can save many lives. And they say that each of the 32 signs has a specific cause. The cause of this particular one was greeting and escorting our spiritual teacher and also selflessly offering service to others.

Hair-curl between his eyebrows

There’s another one that you’ll see very often, which is the hair-curl in the center of his forehead. It is wound very tightly but when it is pulled, you can’t measure how long it is. Don’t ask me if this is literal or not. But it is a special sign (as with all the other physical signs) that comes through a great accumulation of positive potential. This particular one comes from serving all those who are more knowledgeable and superior to us with respect, in other words, serving our parents, teachers, elders and so forth, with respect. Having respect for them is one’s crown jewel. Having an attitude like this towards them, helping them attain upper rebirths through for example, showing them karma—this kind of action is one of the contributing causes to getting that kind of physical sign.

His food always tastes delicious

You’ll like this one. Another of the physical signs of the Buddha is that whatever he eats tastes delicious. The cause for this is nursing the sick, the old and the infirm, and especially caring for those whom others find repulsive. It’s interesting, isn’t it? You know,

when you hear of the causes, you can see how they relate to the physical sign and result. It's very interesting—the karmic causes of the 32 signs and how they are displayed in the body.

Crown protrusion

The other one that we see so often is the crown protrusion on top of the Buddha's head. It is said that it is made of radiant flesh; and at a distance, it seems to be four fingers' width high but upon close scrutiny, its height cannot be measured. The karmic cause of this is visualizing our spiritual mentor on the crown of our head, and also visiting temples and monasteries and practicing at those places.

Round, full cheeks and teeth of equal length

The Buddha's cheeks are round and full like those of a lion. Really round, full cheeks. The cause is completely abandoning idle gossip. Interesting, isn't it? There's another one about the teeth. All the Buddha's teeth are of equal length, not with different ones jutting out. And the reason for this is abandoning the five wrong livelihoods—in other words, earning one's livelihood honestly and not getting involved in flattery and bribery and hinting, and things like that. Being even-minded towards others results in one's teeth having even length.

Clear and distinct eyes

The black and white portions of a Buddha's eyes are

clear and distinct. Here it might be blue and white, or brown and white. They say Buddha has black eyes. I suppose Buddhas can have blue eyes or green eyes, don't worry. But they are clear and distinct; in other words, there's no redness or yellow discoloration in the eyes. And the cause of this is looking at others with compassionate eyes, and working for their welfare and generating equal concern for others, regardless of whether they have great suffering or minor suffering.

QUALITIES AND SKILLS OF A BUDDHA'S SPEECH

The Buddha's speech has sixty qualities. I won't give all of them, but I really like reading up on them because I find it very inspiring. Just listening to the qualities is like a teaching to me on how I should try and train my speech.

Teaches everyone according to his capacity

For example, with the Buddha's speech, everybody hears it according to his own capability. So a Buddha might say one sentence but it will become a different teaching for everyone. For example, the Buddha may say, "All things are impermanent," and some people might think, "Oh OK, then I can't get attached to my telephone because it's impermanent—it's going to break". Somebody else might think, "I'm going to die". Somebody else might think about subtle impermanence and the nature of change on a very subtle level. Some people might hear that same

statement and realize emptiness. So the Buddha's speech has this quality of being very flexible in its meaning, so that one thing said can communicate with many different beings according to how they hear it, according to their own level of mind. I think that's incredible.

Goes straight to our heart and mind

Another quality is that the Buddha's speech goes straight to the heart; it goes straight to the mind. It indicates how we can apprehend, know the two truths, how we can know how things exist. It is very forceful. Now that does not mean that every time each sentient being hears a teaching, it is going to go straight into her mind. Due to our own karma, we all have our veils and mazes that the Buddha's speech has to fight through, to get into our hearts. But what this is saying is that from the side of the Buddha's speech, it has the potential to go straight into the heart and make some very definite change in people's attitudes.

Sometimes when you listen to teachings, you really feel that. I remember a few years ago, His Holiness was teaching the Lamrim Chenmo. It was a most extraordinary teaching. I felt like I was in a pure land. The teachings just really went in. So it has something to do with our mind, with the circumstance; but from the side of the Buddha, his speech has that power to do that. We find when we listen to teachings that sometimes, one sentence cuts through so much junk. So this is the power of the Buddha's teachings, the power of the Buddha's speech.

Unstained

Buddha's speech is also unstained in the sense that it is spoken on the basis of having abandoned all of the afflictions and their imprints. Now imagine being able to speak from a mind that has no more anger, ignorance and attachment. When you hear that the Buddha's speech is unstained, this is the kind of thing to think about. What must that be like? And we can see that this is a quality that is possible to attain.

Sparkling clear

The Buddha's speech is sparkling clear. In other words he never uses words and expressions that aren't known to people. The Buddha never uses highfalutin language to impress everybody with the thought, "Oh the Buddha must know what he's talking about because I can't understand it." It is not like those times when you go to these conventions and the speakers get up and speak but you can't understand anything! And they're supposed to be famous!

So the Buddha talks at a very ordinary level, using expressions and things that can get across to people. I think for us this is a reminder to speak in ways that other people can understand. If you are talking to a child, explain what you are explaining in a way that that child can understand. If you are talking to people from another culture, explain it in a way that the people from that culture can understand. So what it means is developing a sensitivity to whoever is hearing what we are saying, and remembering that communication isn't just getting it out of our mouth.

Communication is the other person getting our meaning, so we have to be attentive how we say something, to help them get our meaning.

Ability to tame, pacify, subdue

The Buddha's voice has the ability to tame, pacify and subdue because it teaches us the antidotes to afflictions, hence allowing us to tame them. Now imagine having the kind of voice and speech that can subdue other people's minds so that what you say, instead of inciting their anger, pacifies it; so that what you say, instead of inciting their jealousy, pacifies it. This again is something we can think about and apply in our life, and try and practice as well as we can because all these qualities are gotten by repetition, by training.

Gives happiness and bliss

The Buddha's speech gives rise to happiness and bliss. Why? Because he teaches the Four Noble Truths and shows the path to happiness and bliss. So again, the meaning the Buddha expresses by using his speech in that way is able to lead others to happiness and bliss. You look at some people: whatever they say makes everybody else uptight and a nervous wreck. And so you can see it's how they say it and what they say that matter. Again this is indicating to us to be attentive to what we say and how we say it so that we can try and lead others to states of happiness and bliss through what we say.

Never disappoints

Another quality is that the Buddha's speech never leaves one disappointed. When others hear it, contemplate and meditate on what was said, they achieve the beneficial results that are described. It does not mean that the Buddha's speech never leaves us disappointed because every time I hear a teaching, I would get it and be happy. It doesn't mean that. It refers to the long-term effect of hearing the teachings and the sutras, of contemplating and meditating on them. We will never be disappointed because we can put it into practice and it becomes meaningful for us.

Clear

The Buddha's speech is always clear in all details. He doesn't speak in riddles. He doesn't hide stuff. He doesn't mix everything up and say there are three points but then only give two or four, or something like that. In other words it is clear and easy to follow.

Logical

His speech is logical. In other words it cannot be undermined by our direct perception. It doesn't contradict itself in its statement. Again, we can see how some people contradict themselves, how their speech is completely illogical, and how what they say happened is not what you experienced. A Buddha's speech is not like that. And again this indicates to us how to develop our qualities of speech.

Without redundancy

The Buddha's speech is free from needless redundancy: it does not go over something again and again, and get us bored. He just says what he has to say and then goes on.

Bellowing of an elephant

His speech is like the bellowing of a god's elephant. In other words, a Buddha does not hesitate to speak out. A Buddha doesn't sit there [wondering], "Oh, what are people going to think about me if I say this? And I don't know if I should do this ...". You know how we get tied up? A Buddha knows what it is, knows how to express it, and is not hesitant. So I guess this is the ultimate in assertiveness training!

Melodious

A Buddha's speech is like the melodious call of the ancient song sparrow. It continues from topic to topic without a break. And after it's ended, it leaves us wanting to hear it again. Wouldn't it be nice to have that kind of speech?

Without self-conceit

A Buddha's speech is also without self-conceit. A Buddha never gets proud if the other person comes up and say, "Oh, it's so great what you said". There is no conceit in his speech. And it's also without despair or despondency, so even if somebody else complains

after a Buddha speaks, the Buddha does not get filled with self-doubt or regret and spiral downwards into depression.

Complete

A Buddha's speech never leaves anything incomplete because it constantly works for the benefit of others. So it's not on again, off again. It's not like "I'll talk nicely to you now because you're nice to me. And later on when you're nasty to me, I'm not going to talk nicely to you!" It completely works for others.

Without feelings of inadequacy

Buddha speaks without feelings of inadequacy, and never lacks self-confidence in what is said or to whom it's said.

Exhilarating

A Buddha's speech is exhilarating. In other words, the more a Buddha explains, the more we feel free of mental and physical fatigue and discomfort. It invigorates us.

Continuous

It is continuous, so it is not like the Buddha sits and fumbles for words and can't get the right word out. He speaks in a very continuous manner, and also teaches continuously, not, "Well I'll teach now because I feel like it, and I'm not going to teach later

because I'm exhausted". There's just this speech that is able to teach continuously whenever the opportunity is available. That doesn't mean sitting down and saying, "There're Four Truths and Two Truths and Three Supreme Jewels and ...". It just means that everything can become a teaching; everything can become a guidance to others.

No nervousness

The Buddha never speaks with nervousness. He never makes up words and gets his grammar goofed up.

And the speech is not in a rush or a jumble. There's a nice even pace to it. Not nervous, not tense, and it can flow.

These qualities of the Buddha's body and the Buddha's speech, when we hear about them, can be very effective for our mind because it gives us some direction about how to train our body and speech, what kinds of things to try and develop. It can also give us some confidence that there are people who actually have developed these qualities. This isn't some kind of mythical thing. By reflecting on our own ability and seeing how it is possible to increase it, we can also infer that there are people who have done that and there are people who have completed it. And that therefore those people are reliable.

Questions and answers

[Audience:] Wanting to attain Buddha's good qualities—is it a form of attachment?

There are different kinds of desire or aspiration or wanting. If it involves exaggerating something's good qualities, and having built up this false image, you want it and you're clinging on to it, that is attachment. But when you can see good qualities and you aren't exaggerating, and you can see that you can attain those and you want to attain them, that kind of desire to gain those qualities is quite reasonable. Now if you get to the mental state where you feel, "I've got to become a Buddha. I've got to become a Buddha because I want to have those qualities because I want to be best. So then everybody will offer me apples and oranges ..."—then something's wrong there. But not all aspirations and desires are defiled ones.

Another example: if people start to say, "Well, the Buddhas have all these great qualities, therefore if I pray to the Buddha, he can completely change my life upside down, and give me a Mercedes Benz and everything else I want." That would be definitely an exaggerated view of the Buddha. And you can see in some Buddhist countries, people do have incorrect notions of what a Buddha is. Sometimes people pray to Buddha in the same way as other people pray to God.

[Audience:] Are the qualities of the Buddha separate from the qualities of the listener?

Things are interdependent. Everyone, even among us now, hears everything in a different way. Each of us definitely heard the teachings through our own filters. I think your point about the two parallel tracks of Theravada and Mahayana is really good because

different people heard the same teaching by the Buddha, but logically it meant different things to them because of the way they think. And it completely made sense in their own way of thinking.

Are the qualities of the Buddha separate from the listeners? They're interdependent. Things don't happen as isolated events in the universe. Everything that's happening is happening in relationship to something else. So the Buddha's speech is clear because there's a listener who hears it clearly. That doesn't mean every person who hears it can hear it clearly. And is the Buddha's speech clear regardless of the listener? Now this is an interesting one. When radio waves are being emitted, there are radio waves but it definitely depends on somebody having turned the radio on for there to be sound. Now, just because the radio is not turned on, you can't say there're no radio waves or that there is no sound. There isn't any sound but there is the potential for sound.

Why do they even talk about the Buddha's body, speech and mind? It isn't because Buddha's body, speech and mind are three big categories, each with a big line around them. The reason why the qualities of the Buddhas are discussed in terms of body, speech and mind is because we have a body, speech and mind so we can relate to how it's getting expressed.

[Audience:] If the Buddha always manifests in ways that will benefit others, how come not everyone benefits?

When you look at Shakyamuni Buddha and his cousin Devadatta, you could ask how Shakyamuni was

manifesting to benefit sentient beings, because his cousin went to the hell realms for many millions of eons for trying to kill Shakyamuni. Wasn't that very uncompassionate? He should not have manifested because he sent Devadatta to hell by that? That's quite logical in a way.

Another way of looking at it is, I don't think we can expect to get only good results whenever something happens, because there is this whole thing of interdependence. The Buddha from his side is acting very purely, but while some people will benefit from it, others, like Devadatta, will create negative karma. So I guess the idea is that in all these manifestations, the Buddhas are able to do more benefit than harm. So maybe they can't directly help the person who has an inferiority complex so much, but because that person cooks them dinner one night, they were able to make some kind of karmic connection. Just within the Buddha's life, he had so many different relationships with so many different people, and you can really see how he was able to benefit people according to their capability to be benefited. And it was in very, very different ways. Some people he benefited by giving to them. Some people he benefited by letting them give to him.

The Buddha, from his side, does not set us up. We might be in a whole group of 100 people and the Buddha might be benefiting the 99 others, and it is only us who are not benefited. Buddha cannot control what we think. And it might be that initially things look good, but then at the end our mind goes bananas. But if that happens, it isn't that the Buddha sets us up.

Negative karma created in relation to the Buddha

[Audience: inaudible]

There are two things here. First of all, in the prayer, “being displeased with the presence of the Buddha” means not liking there to be Buddhas on this earth, not liking there to be Buddha’s teaching.

In general, they do say that if we are with a Buddha or a bodhisattva and we create negative karma by getting upset or making bad speech or whatever, the karma is heavier than doing the same thing to somebody else. Why? Because of who the other person is, because of their qualities. And you can see it is not that the Buddha is setting us up to create negativity. Rather, it is the obscuration we have in our mind that is getting us so ticked off. That obscuration is what’s putting in the negative imprint.

So it is not like the Buddha’s setting you up and because you are nasty to a Buddha, you create bad karma. But you can just see in your own mind that we obscure ourselves. We can see this sometimes even with ordinary people. For example, we grow up thinking, “Oh, my parents didn’t do this; they did that; and they did that ...” And then you do this meditation on recognizing the kindness of our parents and it’s like, “Wow! They benefited me so much. How come I couldn’t see it before?” And then we begin to realize that our own blindness is what puts the imprints on the mind, not our parents.

It is said that it is better to meet a Buddha and create negative karma than not meet a Buddha at all. At least you are making karmic contact; there is some

connection.

[Audience:] Will we recognize Buddha if he appears to us?

You don't expect the Buddha to kind of ride in on his elephant radiating golden light! You know the story of Asanga who was meditating so long to get a vision of Maitreya? Remember that? And Maitreya appeared as a dog? And it was only when Asanga purified his mind that he could recognize that it was really Maitreya the whole time? He put Maitreya on his shoulders and he went through the village saying, "I've seen Maitreya! I've seen Maitreya!" And everybody else just saw this dog and thought he was loony!

Maintaining open-mindedness along the path

[Audience: inaudible]

You're asking what is the role of faith—what are you supposed to do with the things you hear, which don't make complete sense to you? You may be doing it even though it does not make complete sense to you. Why? Because there is something inside of you that feels that there is something here that you don't completely get, and so you are going to go along and do it with the hope that eventually you'll get it. It involves having that kind of open mind: "This all might not make complete sense to me. But recognizing my own limitations, I can't completely throw something out just because I can't put it in perfect order. I sense that there's something going on

here although I can't express it in words and I can't say it logically. But if I keep going with this, maybe my mind will get clear to the point where I can perceive clearer and this can go more directly into my heart."

The Buddha did say, "Don't believe anything unless you have tried it and proven it by your own experience". But the Buddha did not say, "Just because you don't understand anything, throw it out of the window". What we are very bad with in the West, is gray areas. We should give ourselves some kind of space to try it out. We feel something's going on here, so see what is going on, see where it takes us and learn more, and experience more as we go along. I know I certainly do that. Just personally speaking, sometimes my mind protests and then at other times, it's like, "Hold on. I don't understand but there's something going on here. There is definitely something going on here". It is very interesting.

At the Kalachakra teachings in October, they did the long life puja for His Holiness on the last day. There was one point where His Holiness put on his hat and the leaders of the different schools all had their hats on. And then they had all this brocade and dancing and this whole thing. And a part of my mind was going, "All this paraphernalia, and hats and brocade, what's all this junk?" And another part of my mind went, "Irrefutably there is something going on here that I don't understand, but I'm very glad I'm here. There is something very special going on that I just don't get". And those two things were going on simultaneously in my mind. So I think sometimes we have to listen to that other part. In this case, there

might be some cultural thing and we might not need all these hats in the West, but there might also be a lot of other truth to that, that there is something special happening.

Seeing the Buddha with the understanding of emptiness

[Audience: inaudible]

The question is that seeing Buddha as a personality, as a figure gives you a lot of difficulty. You like the idea of seeing the Buddha as something abstract but so much of the language seems to describe the Buddha as a personality.

I have come across the exact same thing. And I've come to my temporary conclusion that they use this kind of language because that is what most people are habituated in thinking. That is the kind of language that most people cue into. But other people may have to look at the same language and make it abstract. So instead of saying, "Here's the Buddha who has these qualities," we say, "There are all these qualities and on top of these, we label 'Buddha'. And beyond that, there's no Buddha there, folks." When we listen with ordinary ears, it sounds like there is a personality there that's the Buddha. But when we really understand emptiness, there's nobody there.

Buddha's nature

[Audience: inaudible]

You can talk about Buddha's nature in so many different ways. But it's really emphasizing to us to not see the Buddha as God out there on his white cloud, that there is an unbridgeable gap between us. That does not mean there is no external Buddha. That would be an extreme. But to say there is an external Buddha, and that's all there is and he's sitting on a cloud, white beard and all ... that's also extreme. Seeing the Buddha's nature is very helpful to get us to see that. That is why last time I talked about causal refuge and resultant refuge. The resultant refuge is our own Buddha nature in its fully manifest form. So when we visualize the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha in front of us, we think of it as "That's my Buddha nature projected out there in its fully manifest form".

So we're going to have to close now. I really encourage you to talk about all this with each other. Because I think there is a lot to be gained from discussing these things, and thinking about them yourself. In the Tibetan tradition, they say, you get about 25% from your teacher and 75% from talking with your friends in terms of your understanding. That is why they do all this debate. I think it is really useful. We don't always have 25% teaching and 75% discussion, but the discussion doesn't have to be limited to this room. There can be other times, other places.

QUALITIES OF A BUDDHA'S MIND

We have been talking about taking refuge and trying to understand why we take refuge. We have also been talking about what the objects of refuge are and their

qualities. There is a real wealth of information in this section and the more we learn, the more we will understand the path we are following. When we talk about the qualities of the Dharma we will learn more about what exactly the Dharma does. So when we say, “I practice Dharma,” we will know what we are trying to do. When we talk about the qualities of the Sangha, we will have an idea of the stages and paths that we slowly progress through as we practice. When we talk about the qualities of the Buddha, we will get an idea of where we are going and of our own potential.

In talking about the qualities of the Buddha, we are talking about what we can become. This gives us an idea of our own potential, which we usually do not even know exists. That is why when we hear about the qualities, we go, “How do I believe that?” In learning the qualities of the Buddha, we are learning something about the person who is guiding us, the founder of our teachings, what he taught twenty-five hundred years ago and what all the other Buddhas who continue to appear will continue to teach, what their qualities are and why they are reliable.

Last time we talked about the qualities of the Buddha’s body and the qualities of the Buddha’s speech. Tonight we are going to go into more detail about the qualities of the Buddha’s mind.

The two basic qualities of a Buddha’s mind: wisdom and compassion

If we talk about the qualities of the Buddha’s mind in an abbreviated way, we come up with two basic qualities: Buddha’s wisdom and Buddha’s

compassion. You will hear about these two things, wisdom and compassion, over and over again because these are the two principal things we want to develop.

The method and wisdom aspects of the path

You will also hear about the method aspect of the path and the wisdom aspect of the path. These two are in correlation. The method aspect of the path is talking about the determination to be free, compassion, the altruistic intention of bodhicitta and the different actions such as generosity, ethics and patience that are done with this altruistic intention. By doing the method aspect of the path based on compassion, we have what is called the collection of merit, or the collection of positive potential. The chief result that the collection of positive potential brings about is a Buddha's body.

The other aspect of the path, the wisdom aspect, is talking about the meditation on emptiness and the lack of inherent existence. By meditating on that, we have the accumulation of wisdom and the chief result that brings about is a Buddha's mind.

These two influence each other, but here we are just talking about the principal results that they bring.

Tantric symbolism

In tantric symbolism when you see a male and female in union, the male is symbolizing the method aspect of the path and the female is symbolizing the wisdom aspect of the path. The two of them in union is showing that we need to unify the method and the

wisdom, the compassion and the wisdom, within our own consciousness to become a fully enlightened Buddha. They say that for a bird to fly, it needs two wings. So to go to enlightenment, we need both sides: the wisdom and the compassion. We get lopsided if we go to just one or the other.

The Buddha's wisdom: the ability to see the two truths simultaneously

When we talk about the qualities of the Buddha's wisdom, we are referring to the ability to see the two truths—the ultimate truth and the relative or conventional truth—simultaneously. Conventional truth refers to all the things as they appear to us, all the things that function within our daily life. All the functioning things, all the things that appear to us, your watch, whoever you live with, your boss and everybody else are all conventional truths.

Ultimate truth is the way things really exist beyond the appearances. Conventional truths—tables and chairs and popcorn—all appear to us as truly existent, but they really are not that way. On the appearance or conventional level, all these things appear as truly existent, solid and concrete to us ordinary beings. However, on the ultimate level, the ultimate truth of those objects is that they lack any inherent, essential nature that exists independent of other phenomena.

The perception of an arya being

When you get to high levels on the path and do deep meditation on the wisdom that perceives the

emptiness of inherent existence, at the time of that deep meditation none of these phenomena appear to your consciousness. All a high practitioner perceives is the emptiness of inherent existence. Then when they come out of meditation, all the appearances of phenomena still appear inherently existent to them because their mind still has some stains on it. But because they have realized emptiness, they know that things may look solid, but really are not solidly independent.

It is like when we watch a movie, it looks like there is a real person on the screen. But when we stop to think about it, we know it is not a real person; it is just a movie. In the same way, a highly realized being, an arya, has discordance between their meditation time and their time after meditation. In meditation they see emptiness directly with no appearance of chairs, rugs and things like this. But then when they come out of meditation and are walking down the street, they cannot perceive the emptiness of things and all these things again appear truly existent. They cannot directly perceive the emptiness at that time, but they know these things are empty so they can say, “Oh! This is like an illusion. It looks truly existent, but it really is not.” So they flip-flop between meditation and post-meditation perception.

The perception of a Buddha

Now the special quality of a Buddha is that a Buddha can see both levels of truth simultaneously. This is something a Buddha can do that all the other arya beings, highly realized beings, cannot do. The latter go

back and forth between the two perceptions. A Buddha can perceive both at the same time. In addition, when the Buddha perceives conventional phenomena, these things do not appear to a Buddha as truly existent or inherently existent anymore. They appear as completely dependent arising. This is because the Buddha has totally removed that last veil, that last stain in the mind which causes the discordant appearance.

So when we talk about the Buddha's wisdom, we are talking about this incredible ability to perceive how things really exist on a conventional level, dependent on causes and conditions, parts and consciousness, terms and labels. At the same time, Buddhas perceive the deeper level at which all phenomena exist, that all phenomena do not have any inherent existence whatsoever. This is a very special achievement.

The significance of Lama Tsongkhapa's hand mudras

Sometimes you will see pictures of Lama Tsongkhapa that show him sitting with one hand in the teaching position and the other hand in his lap in the meditative position. The hand in the meditation position is showing that he is in deep meditation on emptiness and at the same time, he can teach. In other words, he is able to deal on a conventional level and at the same time he perceives emptiness. That is symbolically showing, through the hand gestures, the qualities of a fully enlightened one.

The Buddha's compassion

When we talk about a Buddha's compassion, we are talking about the loving-kindness that a Buddha has for all living beings. We have already discussed how a Buddha's compassion is impartial and goes equally towards everybody no matter how that person feels towards the Buddha, whether they like the Buddhas or not, whether they make offerings or not, or whether they have faith or not. They also say that a Buddha's compassion for us is much stronger than our own compassion for ourselves and that a Buddha cares more about us than we care for ourselves.

That does not seem possible. How can anybody care about me more than I care about myself? Even though we care a lot about ourselves, to the point of being very self-cherishing, in another way we do not really care about ourselves. For instance, we will eat all kinds of junk food that is not good for us even though we know it is not good for us. When we are doing this, we really do not have much compassion for ourselves because we are eating in a way that is harmful to ourselves.

If we look at our lives, even though we care about ourselves, we do certain things that wind up being harmful to ourselves. We get into accidents. We also beat up on ourselves emotionally; nobody needs to do that for us. But a Buddha with loving-kindness and compassion will never deliberately harm us. Their compassion is so great that they will never harbor any ill intention or do any action that harms others.

Questions and doubts

Now the question comes up: if the Buddha does not

want to harm me and the Buddha is always benefiting me, how come I am so miserable? How is it that when I am trying to practice the Dharma, sometimes things get even worse? If the Buddha taught the Dharma to benefit and I am practicing the Dharma but my mind is completely bananas and my life is falling apart, then what good is the Dharma? What do you mean the Buddha is being compassionate towards me? He is teaching me all these things that are making me stressed out!

We have to understand that from the Buddha's side, there is no intention to harm us; there is only the intention to benefit. From our side, sometimes we do not understand how to practice properly so we go overboard in one direction or another, or we go under board. We get off-balance, but it is not because the Buddha lacks compassion. It is more because we are not familiar with how to practice so we get off-balance sometimes. Also, sometimes when you are practicing, things get worse before they get better. It is like Ayurvedic medicine, you take it and you get sicker, but it eventually cures you. Whereas with Western medicine, you take it and it cures you right away, but afterwards you get the side effects.

Sometimes when we are practicing, it really does seem like things are getting worse. We practice and it seems like we are more selfish than before, or we are less concentrated than before. We might feel just completely nervous (what we call "lung") and stressed out. We are doing all this Dharma and it seems we cannot hold our life together. So, sometimes things do get worse before they get better. We are taking big doses of strong Dharma medicine and

sometimes we do not know how to put it into context with our lives and we get off-balance.

But getting off-balance is OK because everything we learn about ourselves is more information. We have our laboratory with us and we are doing research on the nature of mind, so we learn more about ourselves, about the mind. We learn more about how other people are too, because other people are exactly like us. So the more we can understand our own difficulties, problems and imbalances, when other people come to us for aid we will better understand what they are talking about. So when you have difficulties in your practice, do not blame the Buddha, do not blame yourself. Just recognize that these things happen and we can slowly get ourselves more balanced and keep going. Just recognize that we can learn a lot from having gone through these things.

The ten powers of a Buddha

So that is just a brief look at the qualities of the Buddha's wisdom and compassion and talking about the Buddha's mind in a brief way. When they talk about these things in the expanded way, they talk about the four fearlessnesses, ten powers, eighteen unshared qualities, twenty-one categories of uncontaminated wisdom and all these things. We will not go through all these lists right now, but I picked one of the sets, which is called the ten powers, to go through because this might give you some idea of a Buddha's qualities.

How the Theravada school describes the Buddha's qualities and how the Mahayana does, is different. We

can go back and forth between the two according to what is useful to us at that time. But when we are talking about the ten powers, we are talking through the Mahayana vision, which is a much more exalted and vast vision of what a Buddha is capable of doing.

We have to remember that when we are talking about the qualities of the Buddha, we cannot directly perceive them. We can look at a flower with our eyes. That is something perceivable by our mind. But the Buddha's qualities are not things that we can see with our eyes and our mind is too obscured right now to directly see these qualities. We are getting some kind of intellectual idea about what the Buddha's qualities could be and then as we practice the path and purify our own mind, we will start to realize that we can attain these same qualities. We will see the little sprouts growing in our mind and infer by these little sprouts growing in our mind, that there is a fully grown tree in somebody else's mind, even though we cannot directly see that full-grown tree.

So that is why I say, I have not seen these powers directly, but I believe them because somebody else told me so. I cannot make you believe them and I do not even understand them, so what am I doing here [laughter]? I think it can be helpful, nevertheless, to think about these in order to help you get some kind of idea of them.

1. The Buddha knows the appropriate and inappropriate relations between various actions and their results

In other words, he knows that if there is happiness,

what the appropriate cause for happiness is. We say in Buddhism, virtuous or positive actions are defined in terms of the result they bring. So the Buddha is able to see that if there is wealth it came from generosity, which is an appropriate cause for wealth. If there is a precious human life, that came from keeping good ethics, which is the appropriate cause. He can also see inappropriate causes. In other words, if somebody has an upper rebirth, it is not because they hoarded away all their possessions and shouted at their neighbors; that is an inappropriate cause for that result.

The Buddha knows what the constructive actions are and the destructive actions, because a Buddha can know what results come from all those different kinds of actions. That is very useful information and the more we can make this grow in our own minds, the less confusion we will have. We would be able to discriminate between constructive actions that are appropriate causes for happiness and destructive actions that are inappropriate causes for happiness. The Buddha knows these already because of having purified all the ignorance, anger, attachment, and stains on the mind. This kind of information is readily available to the Buddha because of being able to see ultimate and conventional truths at the same time. It is like somebody who has computer screens on all the time, all the information is there.

2. The Buddha knows the distinctive ripenings, or the distinctive results, of all individual karmas

The first power was talking about general principles that the Buddha knows. What general things cause

happiness and what general things cause suffering. The second power is that he knows specific actions.

For example, we are all sitting in this room tonight. We can in a general way say this is because we had good ethical conduct in previous lives. We were generous in previous lives so we have enough material wherewithal to be here and we are not starving. It is because we made some kind of prayers in our previous lives to meet the Dharma that we are here. So we can say in a general way that because we have heard what the Buddha said about appropriate and inappropriate causes, we can surmise the kind of things we must have done in our previous lives to be here.

But only a Buddha could look at any particular individual in this room and say, “Ah! Twelve eons ago you were born in such and such a country. You were named such and such. You did such and such, and that was the specific karma that led you to have this aspect of what you are experiencing in this room tonight. So all the little details, the exact specific ripenings of karma, only a Buddha has the clairvoyance to see all of those without any mistakes.

The Buddha can see all the different destructive karmas, constructive ones and neutral, or unspecified, ones. He can see the ones that are contaminated by ignorance and the ones that the aryas create that are uncontaminated by ignorance. So all these kinds of things the Buddha can know. Again, this is very useful information. If we could know those kinds of things, it would be much easier to help others.

3. The Buddha knows the various aspirations or

inclinations of all sentient beings

A Buddha would know what their aspirations are from this life. Buddha would be able to tell what they aspire for in terms of future lives, what they aspire for in terms of the path, whether they want to follow a hearer path, or a solitary realizer path (both of which lead one to become an arhat), or whether they want to follow a bodhisattva path which will lead them to become a fully enlightened Buddha. So the Buddha knows the different aspirations or inclinations of different people, what they are inclined to do and what they aspire to do. Again, if you know these things it is so much easier to help other people.

4. The Buddha not only knows the aspirations and the inclinations of all sentient beings, but he also knows their actual dispositions.

I asked my teacher what the difference was between an inclination and a disposition? He said, “Well, somebody might be inclined to do something, but it might not be their nature to be able to do it.” So with the third power the Buddha would know their aspirations, what they want to do and what they are inclined to do. The fourth power means that a Buddha would know if it is in their nature, character and disposition to be able to carry out their aspirations.

Imagine when bringing up your children, if you are able to know both their aspirations and their dispositions, you can help them so much more. But if you know only the aspirations but not the dispositions of a person (or vice versa), the ability to benefit them

is not as great. The Buddha knows the different dispositions of all of us. He knows all the different factors in each person that can lead to their enlightenment and all the different qualities that are predominant in them that can be easily cultivated. He knows all the different right conceptions we have and also what are our misunderstandings. This enables a Buddha to correct us when we have gone off-balance and also to bring out our own good qualities.

5. The Buddha knows different people's faculties

There are various ways to describe faculties. One way is to talk about people's abilities. Sometimes these are translated as dull and sharp faculties, but I do not like the terms dull and sharp. I think it is better to say moderate faculties and keen faculties, or something like that. But the idea being spoken about is that people have different faculties. What they often describe here is that people with moderate faculties, like when they hear the qualities of the Buddha, they believe in those qualities and they instantly have faith. We might think, "That must be a high faculty, because I don't feel that". [Laughter.] But it is not, the people with high faculties want to understand why before they have the faith. So a person of keen faculties will do research into the Buddha's qualities, what it means to perceive emptiness and so forth.

People have different levels of faculties and are satisfied with different levels of answers. That is precisely why the Buddha said different things to different people, because they had different abilities to understand and different ways that they would be

satisfied with teachings. A Buddha is able to perceive all those different faculties and that gives a Buddha the ability to guide others very skillfully and in a way that is appropriate. He will not teach things that are too difficult nor too easy and that prevents people from getting complacent or discouraged.

6. The Buddhas perceive all the different paths leading to every type of goal

The Buddha knows all the paths and the different things to do to take rebirth in any of the six realms in cyclic existence. He knows the different consciousnesses to generate if we want to become a hearer arhat, a solitary realizer arhat, or a fully enlightened Buddha. These three vehicles come up quite often—the hearer, solitary realizer and bodhisattva vehicle—so let me just detour a minute to explain this a little because it is coming up in this point we are discussing. The Buddha knows the different paths of each of the three vehicles.

The first vehicle is the **hearer** vehicle, as in somebody who hears teachings. These people develop the determination to be free. They basically collect a small amount of positive potential, realize emptiness directly and become an arhat, freeing themselves from cyclic existence.

A **solitary realizer** is so called because often, they live alone. In their last rebirth many solitary realizers were born at a time when there was not a Buddha appearing on Earth. So they were solitary and became realized in that lifetime. They too generate the determination to be free. They collect a moderate

amount of positive potential, gain the insight of emptiness, and then become an arhat and liberate themselves from suffering and cyclic existence.

The third vehicle is the **bodhisattva** vehicle. These people generate not just the determination to be free of cyclic existence themselves, but more importantly, the altruistic intention to become a Buddha in order to benefit others and lead them to lasting happiness. With that bodhicitta motivation they realize emptiness and clear their mind completely of all stains to become a fully enlightened Buddha.

So there are these three levels of aspiration according to the three vehicles—hearer, solitary realizer and bodhisattva. Even though the hearer and the solitary realizer have the same goal of arhatship, the kind of arhatship they attain is slightly different. The solitary realizers can do more things because they have collected more positive potential on the path.

The Buddha knows not only who has the inclination to follow which vehicle, he also knows whether they have the disposition and capability to do it. Also with this power he knows the past and how to lead everybody on each stage of each of these three different vehicles. For example, to get downtown, some people feel comfortable taking the bus, but freak out about driving on the highway. Other people are going to feel comfortable driving and do not want to take the bus. If you know all the different ways to get down town, then you are going to be very skillful in leading people to where they want to go. Whereas, if you only know one route to downtown and you only know one vehicle to use to get there, then you are much more limited.

7. A Buddha knows how to help those who are in deep meditative states

Here we will talk about what is sometimes translated as different meditative absorptions, or meditative trances. I do not particularly like the word “trances”. I prefer different levels of deep concentration that one can attain along the path because it is not like you just get one level of concentration and that is it. There are many different levels of concentration, but we do not even understand just one of them! The Buddha is skillful, because the Buddha knows all the different levels and can give advice to people about which kind of meditative states to cultivate and which ones not to get too hung up in because they are so blissful that you can just get totally distracted by the bliss and never realize emptiness.

So the Buddha knows which ones to cultivate, which ones to be cautious of, how to cultivate them and how to keep people from getting stuck, or complacent, in their meditative concentration. That is very skillful. We may think, “I don’t have any concentration at all,” but some time we will have concentration and it is nice to know that the Buddha knows all these different levels and can help us cultivate the valuable ones and not get stuck in the others.

8. The Buddhas have awareness of their own and others’ previous rebirths

Buddhas know who was born as whom, when they were born and what kind of rebirths people have had.

In that way, they also know all the different karmas people have brought into this life and they also know what appropriate relationships to make with people in this life. For example, Ananda was suitable to be Buddha's attendant, whereas Shariputra was better off doing something else—these are two of the Buddha's disciples at the time he lived. By knowing people's previous rebirths and the kind of relationships he had with them, the Buddha was able to know what kind of relationship to form with them in this lifetime.

I think this is a very useful ability to have. We can see in our own lives that sometimes we do not know what kind of relationships to make with other people. We may want to have a certain kind of relationship with somebody and we may try and try to make it work, but sometimes it just does not happen. If we had awareness of previous karma, different karmic connections we have had with different people and different tendencies we have created together, then we might not get into forcing relationships when there is no cause for them to be something other than what they are already.

On the other hand, if we had the awareness of past relationships with other people, we would know in what way to cultivate beneficial relationships with them in this lifetime. Sometimes we lose a lot of opportunity with people because we do not know this kind of thing. Maybe there are some people with whom we have the opportunity and karma to have incredibly good relationships, but because we are completely oblivious to the potential there, we do not know how to make that happen. So, it is a really good quality of the Buddha to know people's previous

rebirths, the kinds of relationships that have been there and to be able to guide one's relationships with them in this lifetime in a constructive way.

9. The Buddha knows the death, the intermediate states and all the future rebirths of everybody, up until their enlightenment and where they will manifest afterwards

Does this mean that the Buddha knows all our future rebirths and that everything is predestined? Does that mean everything is fated if the Buddha knows our rebirth?

No, it does not mean everything is fated and predestined. Lama Yeshe explained it to us by saying, "You might know a person really, really well. You might know that because they have a certain habit, the chances are that this time a particular thing is going to happen in a certain situation. It is like you know they are going to be late for dinner because they are so often late for dinner and even though they say they are going to be on time, you know they are going to be late for dinner. Your knowing that they are going to be late for dinner, does that mean that the person has no choice about whether to be late or not? No, it does not mean that. That person still has a choice. They still have free will. They can still do what they want and they might even prove you wrong. But because of your knowledge of that person and their previous habits, you can get a feeling of the kinds of things they are going to do."

I think it works with the Buddha in that way. It is not that everything is pre-planned, destined and we

just have to do it. If that were the case, then there would be no use doing anything. It is more that the Buddha has the ability, through seeing the kinds of habits that we get into, to predict what is likely to happen.

We could get into the whole argument of asking if this means that the Buddha knows absolutely everything that is going to happen? I do not know, some people might say “Yes” and some people might say “No”. His Holiness the Dalai Lama said that you never know anything exactly until it happens. I think it is good to remember that things are always dependent-arising and that things are always changing. Different factors influence something. Some small thing can completely change a result. But at the same time, we cannot operate totally outside of cause and effect. Also, our free will is limited, isn't it? I do not have the free will to flap my arms and fly in the sky, but I do have the free will to go and take an airplane.

So when we talk about free will and pre-determination, I have a feeling that somehow we are not even framing the question right. It may not need to be looked at in our Western way. It may be best to just realize that things are dependent-arising. Because things arise depending on other issues and because you understand cause and effect, you can have an idea and predict certain things that are going to happen based on present information. Does that make some sense to you?

10. The Buddha knows the degree of depletions of contaminations on each being's mindstream

This means that a Buddha knows how worn away is your anger or how worn away is your attachment. The Buddha will know who has been able to abandon what level of obscurations on the path and who has still yet to abandon those different levels of obscuration ...

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

You might think, “Well, that is fine, but the Buddha lived 2,500 years ago and I did not meet him so how do all these qualities affect me? There are a few different ways to think about this. One way to think about it is that there may be Buddhas you do know, but do not realize they are Buddhas. They still have the ability to guide you. Second of all, Shakyamuni Buddha gave the teachings on how to develop all of those things. He gave the information on how to develop those qualities and he acted out all those qualities. So all that information is there and we can learn it and put it into practice. Even though we did not meet the Buddha directly, we still have the whole lineage of the teachings which was motivated and acted out by these qualities and teaches us the way to develop these qualities ourselves.

Questions and answers

[Audience:] There are beginningless rebirths, how can anyone know them all, because there are always more rebirths to be known, are there not?

Maybe we need to develop the idea of the infinite

ability to know things as well, so you have the parallel railroad tracks—one is the rebirth and the other one is the consciousness that knows that. I think this kind of thing points out how we get stuck when we think about things that are infinite. It is as if we have this idea that we have to learn things just one at a time. Whereas if you have an infinite mirror, it reflects all of infinite space all at the same time, something does not have to keep growing inch, by inch, by inch to be infinite. Yet something that is infinite has no boundaries, so we cannot pinpoint it.

The Buddha guides us

[Audience: inaudible]

Being able to have a personal relationship with the Buddhas who actually have the ability to take care of us, if we have that kind of confidence, it changes our attitude. We feel very safe, not like we are out in the middle of empty space [laughter], but we feel that there is help somewhere in the universe. Somebody is intending to help us. [Laughter.]

I think what this points out to me and what I see in my own mind, is that I really have to overcome my ideas of how I think the Buddhas should manifest to help me. Sometimes we think, “If there is really a Buddha, this is what a Buddha should do so that I will believe that there is a Buddha. And this is how the Buddha should help me because this is how I think I need to be helped.” But I have very fixed rigid ideas about this and then I have to ask myself, “Do I know the best ways to help myself? Do I really know that?”

Maybe the Buddha, from the Buddha's side, is trying to help me and maybe I am walking away from things because of my own stubbornness."

Or maybe the Buddhas are trying to help me and I am indeed receiving their help. But it looks to me like the world is falling apart around me because things are getting worse instead of better. I often think the Buddha should make everything better real quick instead of me being in situations that are quite difficult. But these situations are real opportunities to grow, so I really have to work on my ideas of thinking, "Buddha, look, if you really exist then I need this and this and this." In those cases I am treating the Buddha like Santa Claus and asking for what I think I need to make me happy.

If you raise kids, your kid may think one thing is good for him or her, but you have wisdom and a broader view and you know another thing is better for him so you put your kid in that situation even though he, or she, may not like it. I remember when I was little, I did not like to go to places where I did not know anybody. My parents said, "Look, you go and you will meet people and you will have a good time." I did not want to go, but they made me go. I think they were very wise, because they were right. I usually went and had a good time. But before I went, I was really obstinate and I did not want to go. So somehow, through parents having a bigger vision, they can lead the child in a wise way even though the kid might be throwing tantrums all the way to the place. I think sometimes it works that way too with the Buddhas trying to guide us.

The Buddha is not a creator god

[Audience:] Some of these qualities of the Buddha sound very much like qualities of God, and I've just decided that I don't believe in any kind of being who is like that.

No, Buddha is not God. There are a few big differences. One difference is that the Buddha did not create the world. Buddha did not invent samsara and did not invent cyclic existence. Buddha did not invent karma. Buddha is not making us suffer. Buddha did not invent all the different rebirths. Buddha did not create anything. This is a big difference.

Another big difference is that a Buddha is not omnipotent. There is a difference between being omniscient and omnipotent. With omniscience, which is a quality a Buddha has, a Buddha can perceive everything that exists in the universe. Omnipotent is the ability to make anything happen that you want to happen. The Buddha is not omnipotent. The Buddha cannot pull out our karma so that we do not have any problems anymore. From a Buddhist viewpoint, we would say there is nobody who is omnipotent because if somebody were fully compassionate and omnipotent and could change the world with a snap of fingers when they want to, then a Buddha certainly would have done that already, because there is no reason at all to make cyclic existence go on longer if you can stop it.

There is no idea in Buddhism of Buddha looking over, watching us suffer so that we will learn something. There is none of that. If the Buddha could

stop suffering, Buddha would. But Buddha is not omnipotent in the sense of they have great powers and abilities. From their own side, they are unobscured, but because things are dependent arising, they interact with the rest of the world and cannot make everything turn out any way they want it to. So those are two big differences.

Are there some other things that you want to bring up here about the qualities that made you feel uncomfortable?

Buddha does not judge us

[Audience: inaudible]

Goodness, that means somebody is sitting there with a checklist, “Have you been good? Have you been naughty?” [Laughter.] Somebody is spying on me and is going to mark down the black points and the white points? Again, the idea in Buddhism is very, very different. Buddha is not spying on us to see if we have been good or bad. The Buddha’s mind is like a mirror. It can perceive everything, but because the mind is fully compassionate, any information the Buddha gets is processed through that compassion.

A Buddha is not sitting there judging us. But, if a Buddha sees us lose our temper, they are able to have compassion for us. And wouldn’t it be nice if that person was not pushed by their uncontrolled emotions to do that? Wouldn’t it be wonderful to help that person so that they can stop that habit? So the whole way the Buddha is looking at us is very different from the way many of us were brought up as children,

thinking of God looking down at us. Does that make some sense?

As you think about these things, if you feel uncomfortable about them, please bring them up. I think when we come to Buddhist teachings, each of us comes with our own backpack of past experiences. Rather than be limited by or fight against our backpack, it is good if we just set it down, take it out and look at what is inside and see if we still need those ideas or not.

Afflicted obscurations and cognitive obscurations

[Audience:] How does meditation on emptiness purify the mind and enable somebody to become omniscient?

I think it is helpful to first understand the different kinds of obscurations on the mind. This will come up later, but it is good to go over it more than once. We often talk of two levels of obscurations: one is the afflicted obscurations and the other one is the cognitive obscurations.

The afflicted obscurations are the afflictions and their seeds that include ignorance, anger and attachment and all the contaminated karmas that make us take rebirth in cyclic existence. Once that level of obscurations is removed, then one is an arhat and the mirror of one's mind is greatly cleaned because you no longer have ignorance, anger, attachment and other afflictions. Simply because so much of your energy is not used in going into these wrong perceptions and it is not obscured by all the

imprints of the karma that you have from having gone in all those goofy ways, then the mind just automatically can perceive so much more. That is why an arhat has great clairvoyant abilities.

But there are still some subtle stains in the mind of the arhat in the sense that they have not removed the appearance of true existence that occurs in the post-meditation time. Even though they can see the emptiness of true, or inherent, existence during meditation, when an arhat gets up from meditation, everything still looks truly existent even though they know it is not. So there is still some kind of veil on the mind. When you have removed that, then the mind is like an infinite mirror that no longer has any dirt on it.

What abilities people have depends on how much garbage they have been able to remove from the mind, just as a mirror's ability to reflect has to do with how much dirt has been cleansed from it. An arhat knows a lot of the things that a Buddha knows. An arhat knows a lot of people's past lives and karma and things like that, but they do not know everything exactly, completely, totally, as does a Buddha. An arhat can still maybe goof up sometimes because the mind, the mirror, is very clean, but there is still some dirt on it.

[Audience:] How much is the Buddha intervening in our world?

I have no idea, maybe 47.8%? [Laughter.] I think that probably depends a lot on an individual being's karma.

[Audience:] Why would our karma affect how they intervene in our world?

Say we have created the karma to meet the Dharma, practice it and to be open to the influence of the Dharma. Then the Buddhas, whose whole reason for becoming fully enlightened was to help us, help us spontaneously and effortlessly without having to think about it. It is as if our radio is turned on and the radio waves just get picked up. Whereas, if somebody does not have the karma to be helped and their minds are not open, why would the Buddhas hang around? Buddhas are not going to sit and knock their heads against the wall trying to help where help cannot be received. But they are not selective. They are not going to say, "Oh, this guy has a lot of faith, so I'll help him, but this other guy is a jerk and doesn't believe in me, so I won't help him."

The Buddhas help everyone, but not all receive that help

The Buddhas do give out their help, but if people cannot perceive that help and accept it, then why would they put it out there? It is like the Buddhas are holding out hooks, but sometimes we do not hold out a ring to put onto the hook. The Buddha is still going to have a hook out there because of compassion, and he might even alter the hook or make another kind of hook for us because our ring is so tiny. So, somehow they will change the way they help, it is not that the Buddha is going to completely abandon us because we are negative. But if our own minds are closed,

then the amount that they can help us is reduced, because we are holding out this very tiny little ring and we are not really giving them a chance to give us anything.

How much the Buddha can intervene in each of our lives is going to be quite different for each of us. We may not even know when they intervene in our lives. We may not even pick up on it when they do and yet they may be constantly intervening.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

For example, think of the Kalachakra a few months ago in New York when we took the bodhisattva vows at Medicine Square Garden. For me this was an incredible experience with 3,500 people saying that they wanted to become Buddhas for the benefit of all sentient beings. I was thinking, “What an incredible thing to do!” His Holiness was really acting like a Buddha in presenting to people the idea of aspiring to cherish others more than themselves and aspiring to become a fully enlightened Buddha to benefit others. He was offering this incredible alternative to New York drudgery. It was a very remarkable thing that happened when he gave the vows.

Yet, how much each person in that auditorium was benefited by that ceremony must have varied. The benefit probably ranged completely from A to Z because some people were probably already bodhisattvas. They probably had a tremendous experience listening to everything His Holiness said and also when taking the bodhisattva vows. Then there are probably some people sitting in the audience

saying, “This is interesting. I get to sit and watch this guy from Tibet who won the Nobel Peace Prize. Gee, he has a nice smile. He is talking about compassion—that is a real nice thing. It’s kind of hot in here and so I hope it ends soon because I’m going to go out to have dinner with my friends tonight.”

Both these people are sitting in the same auditorium and yet look how different the help that His Holiness is giving is being perceived by each of them. From His Holiness’ side, he is giving help to everybody, but people perceive it in their own way. They take what they are capable of taking and that is good. People will get some kind of benefit.

Benefit varies depending on our mental state

How much we benefit from things depends very greatly on our mental state and on our karma. Like I said, we may not even be aware of how much we are benefiting and how much the Buddha is affecting us in our life. Some of you who were there in New York, you might have thought at the time, “Gee this is great. This is wonderful.” Then ten or twenty years from now you might look back on that event and go, “Wow! I can’t believe it!” All of a sudden it becomes clear to you exactly how much His Holiness was benefiting you. But at that time, you did not understand. So many things happen like that in our lives, don’t they? We think we know what’s going on, then years later we figure out that something else was transpiring.

How perceptions differ

[Audience: inaudible]

When you study about the bee's eye, you will see that they have these very complex eyes with multiple lenses. How a bee perceives something and how we perceive that same thing are completely different. In the same way, dogs can hear things that we cannot hear. Also, a dog can smell so many things and know so many things through smell that they have a whole avenue of information that is totally closed off to us. Yet, we cannot say that the dogs' perception is wrong just because we do not hear or smell those things. In the same way, we cannot say that other perceptions, besides our own, cannot exist, because it is clear, even now, that they do.

Perceptions of the pure land

This is also the whole idea behind the pure land. When we talk of pure lands—those places that Buddhas create for practitioners to go to—it depends on your level of mind whether you can perceive the pure land or not, because the pure land does not necessarily have to be another place. If our mind is very pure, this here is a pure land. If our mind is overwhelmed by karma, this is like a hell realm. So, you can see again how three or four people can have three or four different attitudes, or reactions, to the same situation. It is not that something exists objectively out there, but rather it is how each person experiences and perceives something; it is due to their own mental state how something appears to them.

So we might look at this room and say this is a

good neutral place, but a hell being might come in here and say this is a hot burning hell. Then a Buddha might come in here and see that this place is a pure land. We usually come in here and we vacillate in our perceptions. [Laughter.]

Let us spend a few moments absorbing everything.

QUALITIES AND SKILLS OF A BUDDHA'S ENLIGHTENING INFLUENCE

We have finished talking about the Buddha's qualities of body, speech and mind during our last session. Now we are going to talk about the qualities of the Buddha's enlightening influence. We are basically discussing sutra teachings, but when teachers correlate these things to the tantra, they talk about the Buddha's qualities manifesting as specific deities. The Buddha's wisdom manifests as Manjushri. The Buddha's compassion manifests as Chenrezig or Avalokiteshvara. Vajrapani is the manifestation of the Buddha's skillful means, while Tara, the female Buddha, is very much the manifestation of the Buddha's enlightening influence. Tara is green, like Seattle is going to be in a few months, when everything grows; so this is also the function of the Buddha's enlightening influence—to make things grow in the minds of sentient beings.

There are two basic qualities of the Buddha's enlightening influence. First of all it's *effortless* and second it's *uninterrupted*.

The Buddha's enlightening influence is effortless

In terms of it being effortless, the Buddha doesn't have to sit and think about everything and plan it out. He doesn't have to sit and think, "Oh, it's Monday morning. Who can I help? I think I will benefit the sentient being over there." All this checking up and thinking about it doesn't have to be done. Whether he wants to help this guy or not isn't even a question in the Buddha's mind. It just comes effortlessly, the desire and ability to benefit other beings. Also, a Buddha doesn't need to think about how to help. A Buddha doesn't think, "Well, do I teach this person refuge? Do I teach them the Mahayana path? Do I teach them devotional practices? What do I teach them?" They don't scratch their head and go round and round in circles. They just know exactly what to teach each person that is going to be suitable for his or her mind. You'll see that this quality keeps coming up over and over again as we are talking about the different qualities of the Buddha, the ability to teach others according to their own disposition, according to their own needs.

I think, then, in pointing out that the Buddhas have the ability to do this, it is also pointing out to us that we are all different, and that we don't need to squeeze ourselves all to be the same. Also, when we are trying to help others we need to be sensitive to their different dispositions, inclinations and needs, and help people in ways that are appropriate for them. The Buddha doesn't say, "I want to help you like this, therefore you better need this kind of help and you better receive it because I am giving it." There isn't this going on. [Laughter.] The Buddha just knows what others need and gives it in a very personalized,

individual way.

I think there is something actually very profound about that as a lesson for us even at our own level of how we help people in what we do, because sometimes we just try to standardize everything too much. In the First grade you do this, in the Second grade you do this. Twelve-step program: first step, second step ... even gradual path, it's all standardized. But we are all individuals, aren't we? We are all listening to it differently. We are all taking it in differently. We are going to pick out different points and put it into practice differently, so we need to be aware of that and appreciate that.

Also, I think, (I know I am getting off on a tangent but anyhow,) we don't need to compare ourselves to other people. "What is everybody else saying? What is everybody else doing? How many prostrations have they done? Oh, they are doing mandala offerings and not prostrations. Maybe I should do mandala offerings just like them." That's not the issue. The issue is what our own individual needs at a particular time are and how we are going to get them filled in terms of the Dharma practice.

In many ways we have to learn to be our own doctors in our practice, to become sensitive to our own minds and to our own needs and which Dharma methods we may need at a particular moment. Which ones are going to help us? Going with that to some extent, being sensitive to what's going on inside. When we are angry, we work with the anger. When we are attached, we work with the attachment. Pick out the different methods in the teachings that fit with what is going on in our lives at this particular moment.

That doesn't mean that we have to jump around and play hopscotch every day. We do our meditations on the gradual path, hopefully following the outline investigating a subject each day. You keep that cycle up; but at the same time whatever is an issue for you in your own life, you find the antidotes in the teachings and apply them to that. You can do this whether or not that is the subject that you are studying right then or whether or not that is your principal practice at that moment. For instance, you might be in the middle of doing a hundred thousand prostrations but you wake up one day and you are feeling completely miserly and you know you need to do offerings that day. You need to do something to overcome the miserliness. You might keep the prostrations up but for that day emphasize something else that helps you counteract what's bugging you. It's really about learning to be a doctor to our own mind.

Buddha is like a doctor, effortlessly, skillfully knowing what medicine to prescribe. We need to also do it too.

To get back on track: that was one quality of the Buddha's mind, just the effortless flow of energy towards others without thinking, planning or whatever, somehow knowing exactly what to do. Whatever the Buddha does it hits the spot. It's what that person needs at that particular moment. When you sit down and read the scriptures (especially the Pali cannon, the Theravada scriptures, which are included of course in the Tibetan cannon, the Mahayana cannon), these are very much stories about the Buddha's life. They are the stories of how the Buddha lived and how he related to people.

Sometimes in these stories, you may read about how somebody is doing something and the Buddha's response to it and you go, "Why in the world is he doing that? What a weird thing to do," and yet you can see that somehow he understands the people on a very deep level because it brings about a good result.

So it's developing that sensitivity in ourselves to other people, to our own mind, and also realizing when we are reading the scriptures, that the Buddha did talk very individually to different people. He gave different teachings to different people. He gave different answers to the same question to different people, because people are different. What is skillful, what works, what is going to lead that person on the path to enlightenment is what is done at that moment and it's done effortlessly.

The Buddha's enlightening influence is uninterrupted

The second quality of the Buddha's enlightening influence is that it is uninterrupted. The Buddha doesn't get strung out, stressed out, exhausted and collapse, but rather a Buddha uninterruptedly is able to engage in all these kinds of activities. I used to see a lot of that with my own teacher, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, who (I am sure you have heard me say many times) doesn't sleep at night. He goes into deep meditation for forty-five minutes and then wakes up and continues with his prayers. You can just see how he is acting continuously for the benefit of others. All of his attendants are totally wiped out, but Rinpoche is raring to go any time, day or night. This is the

power of great compassion. As we develop the compassion in the mind more and more, things become more effortless. They become less choppy and much more continual. This is a nice quality of a Buddha's actions. They are uninterrupted.

Last night while I was walking around the lake, I was thinking about how the analogy of the moon's reflection in a pond is often used to explain the way in which the Buddha helps us. From the moon's side, the moonlight is just shining equally everywhere and it is shining effortlessly on the pond. It is shining uninterruptedly on the pond (let's pretend that the moon doesn't set). Then, depending on the pond's surface, different things get reflected. When speedboats go by on the pond you get a distorted reflection of the moon; if the pond is very still you get a clear reflection; and when there is lots of other light reflected then maybe you don't notice the moon as much as if it were a completely dark night. This again is emphasizing how the Buddha and we interrelate. It's not just from the Buddha coming down to us, but it's also how we relate to the Buddha. The enlightening influence affects each of us in a unique way, according to where we are.

The enlightening influence of the Buddha's body

The enlightening influence of the Buddha's body is that there are countless emanations radiating through infinite space to benefit sentient beings. We are limited by this one body made of atoms that becomes a big drag because it gets old and sick and dies. When you become a Buddha, because you've eliminated the

grasping and attachment, you no longer grasp for this kind of body. You have total freedom. There is so much freedom in the mind because of not grasping at this hunk of atoms. By the power of your own wisdom, by the power of your meditation, you can create all sorts of emanation bodies that appear throughout infinite space. If the Buddha appears here in America, he is going to look American. If the Buddha appears in China he'll look Chinese. Or maybe a Chinese person goes to America or an American goes to China. We don't necessarily notice them, but the Buddhas' manifestations are a skillful means to benefit us. These are constantly being emanated out for the benefit of others.

If this seems beyond your comprehension, then just start out with your own experience and consider what it's like to be attached to this body. Think how much of our energy is used living out that attachment to the body, and just think, "If I didn't have the attachment to this body, if I didn't have all this grasping in my mind, how much of my energy would be freed for doing other things?" It will give us some idea that we have different potentials and different abilities to do things.

[Audience:] What is the difference between being attached to the body and simply taking care of it?

We have to take care of our body to keep alive. You don't need to do that with attachment. Attachment is when we become super concerned. "I've got to have a beautiful body and a healthy body!" "I've got to do this and that and the other thing,"—all this clinging to

the body. There is a difference in the attitude with which we relate to our body.

The enlightening influence of the Buddha's speech

The enlightening influence of the Buddha's speech is that a Buddha can answer anybody's questions and teach whatever that person needs to know at that particular time. The enlightening influence of the Buddha's speech is answering questions, solving problems, giving appropriate teachings. This is indicating to us, again, our own potential, what we can develop.

The enlightening influence of the Buddha's mind

The enlightening influence of the Buddha's mind is that, through the power of a Buddha's concentration, they know the karmic dispositions of the different people. They know the different paths of the mind, the different meditation subjects. Because of knowing all these, then when they teach, they teach appropriately. The quality of the Buddha's mind is basically such that they can "tune in" to where other people are; and the Buddha's mind not just "tunes in," but it knows how to respond in an effective way. Because sometimes we can tune in to where other people are but we don't know what advice to give them to help. We are completely stymied. The enlightening influence of the Buddha's mind isn't limited in that way.

The Good Qualities of the Dharma

Now we'll discuss the qualities of the Dharma. It's said that when we know the qualities of the Buddhas, then we will get curious about how they attain those qualities; and then we will want to understand the qualities of the Dharma.

When we talk about the Dharma here, we are talking about two things: the true path and the true cessation. Remember before, I reviewed the four Noble Truths and those (true path and true cessation) are the last two of the four Noble Truths. They are also what are considered the Dharma jewel that we take refuge in. The true paths or consciousness are different levels of realization that one starts to attain when one enters what is called the path of seeing, when one has direct perception of emptiness. The true paths are all the different consciousnesses that become antidotes for the different afflictions and stains on the mind.

The true paths directly counteract the ignorance, anger and attachment, because the true path is a wisdom consciousness. When you have a wisdom consciousness in your mind, there's no space for the ignorant consciousness. So in this way, the ignorant consciousness gets counteracted. It gets worn away by the true paths, by those wisdom consciousnesses. Through doing that, one attains the true cessations, which are the stopping, or the ending, or the complete absence of the afflictions in such a way that they never reappear again. For instance, right now we may not be angry but our anger can flare up at any moment. When there is a true cessation of different

levels of anger, there will be no flaring up of anger again, because it has been completely removed from the mind. The mind has been completely cleansed. It is like you've taken the dirt off the mirror. It can't come back. There are different levels of cessation because there are different defilements, different degrees of defilements.

Those two things—true path and true cessation—are the ultimate Dharma jewel of refuge. What we are doing by practicing the gradual path is we are building up all these realizations slowly, until we can actually get to the true path where we have direct perception of emptiness. Right now, unless there are some aryas in this room (those beings who have the direct perception of emptiness), the rest of us are quite ordinary. We don't have path consciousness in our mental continuum right now. But as we practice the lamrim and go through this very skillful arrangement of the different Dharma subjects; as we start to understand the path to enlightenment; as we start to understand what is the path to samsara, to cyclic existence; as we start to understand all these different things about the Dharma and impermanence, refuge, karma, the precious human life and all these things, we are preparing ourselves.

We are in the process of cleansing the mind so that eventually we can gain the true path of consciousness. We are in the process of building up a big accumulation of positive potential, because it takes a lot of merit or positive potential to gain these realizations. All these other things that we are doing help us prepare for that realization of emptiness. The altruistic intention or bodhicitta is especially

important in that way, because when we do things out of an altruistic intention then whatever we do has so much more force, so much more potency; there is a much greater accumulation of positive potential on the mind, so that it becomes easier to realize emptiness.

So you see what we are trying to do. It's a gradual path. It takes time. We are doing these stages down here, learning them, practicing them, trying to understand. Then as we progress, we purify, we put more good energy or positive potential on our mind, we gain a deeper understanding of the teachings. At first we understand simpler teachings like the precious human life and death and so on. Then we start understanding more difficult teachings because we will get into the four Noble Truths, into the bodhicitta teachings and eventually we will understand emptiness as well—not only conceptually, but directly—and it becomes our own internal experience. And through that we can start this process of attaining the true cessations. In other words, we can start this process of cleaning the mirror in such a way that the stains will be gone forever.

Developing understanding of the path—the three step process

His Holiness always emphasizes that the Dharma is something to be followed due to understanding, not through blind faith. That doesn't mean that the people who have blind faith are bad. I think it's better that they have blind faith in the Dharma than if they have blind faith in the hockey team. People have blind faith

in many different things. I think it isn't harmful to them [to have blind faith in the Dharma] because at least it is a positive object. But if you are really going to get anywhere on the path, then you need faith or conviction that comes from understanding.

The understanding comes from hearing teachings, thinking about them using logic and analysis, and then meditating on them. We always have this three-step process to actualize the teachings: hearing and studying or learning; and then thinking or contemplating; and then, finally, meditating. It goes in that order. In that way the Dharma gets implanted in our mind. If we try and meditate but we haven't heard teachings, we are going to be making up our own meditations. If we try and meditate without having really thought about the subjects and understood them, then we are not going to habituate our mind with the correct perception.

We hear or study or learn in some way, then we think about it. We discuss it with others. We use reason. We debate it. We ask questions, and then we go on to do meditation to integrate it in our mindstream. We can do all three of these in our daily practice, but it's important to recognize that if we go in order, we are going to have more success. We do all three in our practice but we try and do them in order.

Another quality of the Dharma is that it cuts off the ignorance and it cuts off the craving/attachment. At the time of death it's the craving/attachment that is the real enemy, because it's the attachment at death time that makes us grasp and cling with fear to this body. Then because we cannot have this body, it makes us grasp for another body. It's this grasping

mind of attachment, first clinging to this body, then clinging to the next one because it's obvious we are leaving this one. That craving mind, that mind of desire or attachment is one of the chief factors that makes us take rebirth over and over and over again. Then, of course, once we have taken a rebirth out of attachment, we have all the different problems that come from that rebirth, like getting old and sick and dying, and not getting what we want, and getting what we don't want, and all these things. The clinging attachment, then, is one of the chief obstacles on the path.

The function of the Dharma is to remove that attachment, to remove the ignorance, to remove the anger, to stop the cycle of uncontrolled rebirth, all of which happen because our mind doesn't understand what's good for it. That's the function of the Dharma. That's what it does. That's why if we practice it, the results will be that we have less attachment, less anger, less ignorance, and consequently we create less negative karma. We cling onto fewer things. We have fewer problems. That's what it's all about. The reason we are all here is because we are tired of having difficulties and problems, and because we are tired of others having them also. So the Dharma is the antidote, the remedy, the medicine for all of that.

The Good Qualities of the Sangha

Now we'll go on and talk about the qualities of the Sangha. It is quite a big subject. We won't do it in too much detail. The last time we met I began to talk

about the three vehicles: the hearer vehicle, solitary realizer vehicle and bodhisattva vehicle. When we talk about the Sangha, we are talking about the highly realized beings of each of those vehicles.

THE THREE VEHICLES

The **hearers** are people who have a determination to be free of cyclic existence. They practice the path. They abandon the afflicted obscurations—anger, attachment and ignorance—and the karma that causes rebirth. They have a small accumulation of positive potential. As a result, they become an arhat of the hearer vehicle; in other words, a liberated being of the hearer vehicle, somebody who is free of cyclic existence.

In the **solitary realizer** vehicle the motivation is the same: the determination to be free of cyclic existence. One realizes emptiness in the same way, but one has a greater accumulation of positive potential as a solitary realizer than as a hearer, and one actualizes the result of being an arhat of the solitary realizer vehicle. Again, one has removed the afflicted obscurations and one is free from cyclic existence (one's own consciousness talking rebirth).

The third vehicle is the **bodhisattva vehicle**. Here the motivation isn't just the determination to be free from cyclic existence; the motivation is to become a Buddha in order to free others from cyclic existence. One has an extremely huge collection of positive potential. One practices what is called the six far-reaching attitudes, also known as the six paramitas or the six perfections—different translations. One frees

one's mind not only from the afflicted obscurations that keeps one tied to cyclic existence, but one also frees one's mind from the cognitive obscurations, the subtle stains on the mind. By freeing our mindstreams from both these levels of obscurations—the afflicted obscurations and the ones that are the cognitive obscurations—then we are able to attain the state of a fully enlightened Buddha. Therefore we not only free ourselves from cyclic existence, but we also have this whole accumulation of qualities of body, speech and mind and enlightening influence that we have just been talking about. That's a brief summary of the three vehicles.

THE THREE VEHICLES AND THE FIVE PATHS AS A ROAD MAP TO ENLIGHTENMENT

Now we will go into it a little bit more in-depth. It might seem technical to you. But it's actually quite practical. It does involve some vocabulary. Don't let it frighten you off, because what it's showing is that there are definite steps and stages on the path. It's indicating to us what things we need to go through. This is like the road map. Instead of just saying, "Yeah, go south and you will get to Cloud Mountain," it's saying, "Take I-5 and get off at exit 56"—an actual step-by-step way to progress instead of just some vague thing. What we are going to get into a little bit more now is the step-by-step progression that people take either as a hearer, as a solitary realizer or as a bodhisattva in order to reach their goal, which is either arhatship or the full enlightenment of a Buddha.

We have the three vehicles, and each of the vehicles has five paths. The five paths of each of the vehicles have the same names, but they have slightly different meanings because each vehicle is slightly different. Where the blinkers are in a Toyota is different than where they are in a Cadillac. They both have blinkers but they are in different places. Similarly, the terms are the same in each of the three vehicles, but they have slightly different meanings. The five paths are 1) the path of accumulation, 2) the path of preparation, 3) the path of seeing, 4) the path of meditation and 5) the path of no more learning.

The hearer vehicle

We will start out with the hearer vehicle. This person, in order to enter into the first path, the **path of accumulation**, has to develop the determination to be free of cyclic existence so that it is spontaneous, day and night, effortless in the consciousness. For example, we have a little bit of determination to be free from cyclic existence when we come and hear teachings, but when we go to the ice cream parlor we forget about it. What we want to do is take the determination to be free that we have now, develop that, deepen it, and broaden it. In this way we have it in our mind not just when we are in a nice condition like this (during a teaching session). Also, it is not just a little flicker, but something real deep and profound that we take with us when we go to “thirty-one flavors.” In this way one can go to “thirty-one flavors” and still have the determination to be free of samsara at the same time. When one has that

determination day and night spontaneously then one has entered the path of accumulation.

While they are in the path of accumulation they develop their calm abiding, or samatha meditation. They meditate on the four mindfulnesses of body, feelings, mind and phenomena. For those of you who have done vipassana practice in the Burmese tradition or the Thai tradition, this is the basic practice that they do, the practice of the four mindfulnesses. In doing that and through the power of one's concentration and realization one is able to gain many different miraculous powers. This is true even when one is just on the path of accumulation, because there is a lot of purifying of the mind going on here, a lot of development of positive qualities.

One enters the **path of preparation** at the time in one's meditation when one has a correct conceptual understanding of the four noble truths, with a mind of calm abiding and special insight. Having entered the path of accumulation, one continues to meditate, and as one's meditation progresses, it gets to a certain point where it's a really "A", number one, correct conceptual understanding of the four Noble Truths. It is a really deep conceptual realization, not just a flaky one that goes away. When you have that conceptual realization, the first moment you have that, you enter into the path of preparation. Conceptual doesn't mean just sitting and thinking about it intellectually. It means in your meditative states you really understand the four Noble Truths perfectly, but your understanding is still conceptual. It's not totally direct. You don't directly perceive emptiness at this point. It's a conceptual realization of emptiness, but it's not

just intellectual rigmarole.

Then on the path of preparation one continues one's meditation on the four Noble Truths, particularly one's meditation on emptiness. At the time when you have a direct, non-conceptual understanding of emptiness (in other words, you've removed that little bit of mental image that separated you from emptiness), at that time in your meditation, you attain the path of seeing.

To review, on the path of accumulation, you are accumulating the positive potential, accumulating the causes to gain realizations. On the path of preparation, you are preparing for the direct perception of emptiness. On the path of seeing, you get it. You are seeing emptiness directly.

On the path of meditation, you are habituating yourself. Remember 'meditate' means to habituate or to accustom or to familiarize. So on the path of meditation, the person is habituating their mind with this non-conceptual realization of emptiness, and in the process of doing so, they are removing the different levels of afflicted obscurations of ignorance, anger and attachment on their mind. When one has completely removed all the ignorance, anger and attachment from one's mind, then one attains the fifth path of the hearer vehicle, the path of no more learning. At that point, one is an arhat. The path of no more learning is arhatship. At that time you go, "Yippee! No more cyclic existence. I'm done with it."

As an arhat of the hearer vehicle you attain many incredible qualities. You have perfect calm abiding or samatha. You have great vipassana, direct realization of reality. You have purified your mind of all this

garbage and much karmic imprint, and so as a result you can manifest in many forms. You can take many forms and dissolve them into one form. You read in the scriptures about the arhats flying in space, and they have fire coming out of the top part of their body, and water coming out of the lower part of the body. Because of the power of one's mind, one has these kinds of abilities. You can emanate objects. You can transform objects. You can fly. You can miraculously go places where your students are. They have many great methods to help others.

Often in the Mahayana texts, it seems like the arhats are getting put down, because we are being told that the arhats don't have bodhicitta, they don't have altruism, they don't become fully enlightened Buddhas; they just get themselves out of samsara and stay in their own state of self-complacent peace, or nirvana. Even though we are told that, that is from a Mahayana perspective. We are being told this in order to invigorate our minds so that from the very beginning, we will enter the Mahayana path.

In actual fact the arhats have incredible, great qualities, a far greater number of qualities than we have. They have much greater love and compassion than we have. So we can't put arhats down. No way. But in the Mahayana tradition, the reason sometimes it looks that way is because they are encouraging us to take the direct path to enlightenment from the beginning. Rather than having to go through the hearer vehicle or the solitary realizer vehicle, become an arhat, stay in nirvana for a few eons and then have the Buddha wake us up and say, "Hey, you can't forget about others," and then you have to start all

over at the beginning of the bodhisattva vehicle. People who are arhats can become fully enlightened Buddhas, but it's going to take them a while.

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

By the way, the reason the hearers are called hearers is because they hear the teachings and then they teach them to others, causing other people to hear them. The reason the solitary realizers are called by that name, is because in their last lifetime, they gained arhatship in a solitary environment, by themselves.

The bodhisattva vehicle

Then we have the bodhisattva vehicle, which has the same five paths, but they are meditated on in a slightly different way. The hearers and the solitary realizers entered their paths of accumulation by having the determination to be free from cyclic existence. Bodhisattvas enter the **path of accumulation** by having the altruistic intention to become a Buddha for the benefit of sentient beings. Again, not just having the bodhicitta flash through the mind (like when they cultivate the motivation at the beginning of a session or something), and not just having an artificially created motivation, but it's an altruism that is deep and profound, constant day and night, spontaneous, effortless.

It's actually possible, then, to develop that in our own minds. There have been all these beings who have entered the Mahayana or the bodhisattva path of accumulation. That's the demarcation line—the

spontaneous bodhicitta in the mind—a pretty big realization just to enter the first path. Now you can see that the motivation is an incredibly strong one. It's not just, "I want to be free of cyclic existence." It's, "I want everyone to be free and I'm going to do something about it. I'm going to become a Buddha." One has that deep profound motivation day and night, and it is not artificial. The mind is very, very powerful when one enters the path of accumulation.

Then on the path of accumulation, you do lots of meditation. You do many different types of actions to create positive potential. Then at that time in your meditation when you have a correct conceptual understanding of emptiness that is the union of calm abiding and special insight, you enter the path of preparation. This is similar to what the hearers had when they entered their paths of preparation, but the bodhisattvas are doing it with a bodhisattva's motivation and with a bodhisattva's accumulation of positive potential. So the realization is really powerful.

You see, the thing about the bodhicitta motivation is that it amplifies the positive potential in the mind. This is because when we create positive potential, it's done in conjunction with not only our action, but with the motivation for the action. If you are motivated to help one being and you make an offering to the Buddha, you get the good karma, the positive potential of helping one being. If you are motivated to help all sentient beings by becoming a Buddha, you get the positive potential that accumulates from having this motivation to help all beings. This is why we develop the bodhicitta motivation over and over and over again before we do anything, because it

enhances our mind. It gets our mind very clean clear about why we are doing something. It also becomes very powerful so that we create an incredible amount of positive potential. Our mind gets enriched very quickly. It's like the difference between using a cheap fertilizer and an 'A' number 1 fertilizer.

Then the bodhisattvas continue to meditate on emptiness. When they have direct perception of emptiness, a non-conceptual perception, they enter the path of seeing of the bodhisattva vehicle. Their samatha and vipassana—their calm abiding and special insight—is direct at this point instead of just conceptual, which is the case on the path of preparation. At this time they begin the process of removing the different levels of obscuration from their mind.

Now on the path of meditation, they are familiarizing themselves with the realization of emptiness. They are also accumulating a lot of positive potential through the practice of the six far-reaching attitudes. Actually one is practicing the six far-reaching attitudes throughout the whole path: generosity, ethics, patience, joyous effort, concentration and wisdom. Even we are trying to practice them, but on the path of seeing and path of meditation, a bodhisattva perfects them, a bodhisattva completes them. Why? Because the bodhisattva has a very powerful mind at that level of the path—path of seeing and path of meditation. They have not only the spontaneous altruistic intention to become a Buddha, but they also have a direct perception of emptiness at the same time, and these two realizations together completely transform generosity.

You can be generous and give an apple. A three-year-old can give somebody an apple, but it's a very different act than if a bodhisattva gives somebody an apple. Because a three-year-old's mind—assuming that the three-year-old isn't a bodhisattva—is just, “Here mom, have an apple. Here Dad, have an apple.” A bodhisattva, their mind is giving this apple, but with the intention to become a Buddha for the benefit of all beings, and with a realization of the emptiness of inherent existence of the following: oneself as the person who is giving the apple, the apple which is the object that is being given, the giving of the apple, and the recipient of the apple. In other words, realizing the emptiness of inherent existence of the whole scene, and yet, although it is empty of inherent existence, still all of these things (the giver, the gift, the giving and the recipient) are dependent arisings and they appear like illusions. So when a bodhisattva gives an apple, they have this complete incredible understanding going on in their mind. That is why we say they perfect their generosity. They complete the perfection of generosity. They complete the far-reaching attitude of generosity.

What we are doing now on our level is we're hearing about how the bodhisattvas meditate and we are trying to do it in a similar way. We are trying to do it according to our level. We are not bodhisattvas yet. Don't sit there and emotionally beat up on yourself because you are not a bodhisattva. If you were a bodhisattva you wouldn't be here doing this right now. You are what you are. It's good enough. It's fantastic. But we can still improve. We listen to what they are

doing, how they practice, and we try and do it. We do it a little bit at a time. We forget it. We don't do it right. We get lazy. We do it, but it's kind of weak. We do it slowly, slowly, slowly. It's like a kid learning to ride a bicycle. It's like when we learned how to read when we were kids: slowly, slowly. But you do it. One step at a time. That's what we are in the process of doing.

The ten grounds or bhumis

Now between the path of seeing and the path of meditation, there are what are called the ten grounds, or the ten bhumis, which correspond to the ten far-reaching attitudes. You will hear this terminology again. 'Bhumi' is a Sanskrit word. It means ground. These are different levels of realization that are interspersed between the path of seeing and the path of meditation, and on each of these ten you perfect a certain quality. So on the first of the ten grounds when you are on the path of seeing you perfect the far-reaching attitude of generosity. The other nine grounds are all on the path of meditation.

The second ground that you perfect is that of ethics. (The second far-reaching attitude that is perfected is ethics.) Then one perfects the far-reaching attitude of patience, then the far-reaching attitude of joyous effort, then the far-reaching attitude of meditative stabilization, or concentration, and then the far-reaching attitude of wisdom. That's the usual list of far-reaching attitudes, the six. But we can also talk of the ten far-reaching attitudes. So here we are adding four more.

The seventh far-reaching attitude is skillful means; then prayer; then power or strength; and then deep wisdom or deep awareness. So you see there are these ten far-reaching attitudes. There are ten grounds. One perfects them gradually. In the process of doing that, one is removing all of the afflicted obscurations from one's own mind. In fact, by the time you start the eighth ground, you are finished with the afflicted obscurations.

On the eighth, ninth, and tenth grounds you are purifying your mind of all the cognitive obscurations. Then at the end of the tenth ground you enter into what is called the vajra-like meditation: meditative stabilization or samadhi. At the end of that meditation, your mind is completely purified of all the stains on the mind, which are the cognitive obscurations, and you become a fully enlightened Buddha. That's the path of no more learning of the bodhisattva vehicle. It's a fully enlightened Buddha. At that time one gains all the qualities of the Buddha that we had been talking about. One's mind becomes the truth body, and one automatically has an enjoyment body and all the emanation bodies.

This is a whole process of cause and effect. It's like planting a seed in the ground and the seed grows. Each moment of the seed growing, becoming a sprout, growing bigger, getting flowers and bearing fruit, it's in a sequence of cause and effect; and it just gradually happens like that. This is the kind of path that we're starting on.

When we hear this kind of thing, it's a very good way for us to gain some faith that it's possible to do this. We can see that it's all set out: step 1, step 2, step

3, step 4, so we don't need to get confused, we don't need to get perplexed, "What do I practice? How do I do it? What do you realize?" All these people have done it before. They write out the information sheet on how to do it, and that's what all this is. They say, you do this and then this happens, and you do this and this happens. You start out in Seattle, you go south on I-5. Look out for Boeing because then you know you are going in the right direction. You go further and you see the sign for Olympia. You see the capital. "Okay, I'm on the right way. I should expect this." You have the directions. You know the landmarks of the different things. That's what this is. It's set out for us.

Qualities of the bodhisattvas

When somebody becomes a bodhisattva of the third path, the path of seeing (in the first ground/bhumi), at that time they get this set of twelve qualities and they can behold a hundred Buddhas. They can receive inspiration from all hundred of these Buddhas. They can live for a hundred eons. They can see a hundred eons into the past and the future. They can enter and arise from a hundred samadhis. They can vibrate a hundred world systems. They can illuminate a hundred world systems with their radiance. They can make a hundred sentient beings ripe for realization. They can travel to a hundred pure lands of the Buddha. They can open a hundred doors of Dharma, which would mean teachings. They can emanate into a hundred bodies and each of these bodies is surrounded by a hundred bodhisattvas.

In the second ground all these things happen, but it's a thousand. In the third it's a hundred thousand, the fourth a billion, the fifth ten billion, the sixth a trillion and the seventh a hundred quintillion, and they didn't give me the numbers for the eighth, ninth and tenth (grounds). [Laughter.] But you can get the idea that our mind has some pretty incredible capacities if we use them. If it seems like, "What are you talking about? Me, being able to do those kinds of things?" Well, even the scientists say that we only use a very small percentage of our brain cells. Even the scientists are talking about our under-used capacity. This is also saying that if we free our minds from certain limitations and start using our potential and capacity, we can do this, too.

Review

That concludes talking about the qualities of the three jewels of the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. Tonight we covered in specific the qualities of the enlightening influence of the Buddha and the qualities of the Dharma. Then we went into this rather lengthy explanation of the qualities of the Sangha so that we can see the paths and the cessations, the Dharma that the Sangha actualizes to become Buddhas. You see how the three interrelate also. Knowing this, then, when we say "I take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha" it's like, "Wow, I know what I am saying. I now know something about the qualities of those that I am looking to for spiritual guidance and to be my example on the path." We also know the kind of help we can receive. We also know what we can become

ourselves.

Questions and answers

[Audience:] One of the things that I really appreciate about Buddhist practice is its simplicity. So I am thinking about how to reconcile some of these teachings that seem so complex to me, and for that reason I get this real sense of aversion about the complexity. I get confused; basically, I get confused. I feel hopeless and frustrated. [parts inaudible] How do we deal with this?

When it just all seems like too much, how do you make it simple again? Let's consider the process of becoming a doctor. As a doctor, you go in and you see people with certain symptoms and you know immediately what to do to help them. It's just like second nature, you don't need to go back and look at your medical books and think of what to do and study. You see these patients and you've had a lot of experience and you know what to do. If I went in and tried to do your job, I would be completely bungle-minded. If you gave me a medical book to read, if I knew which way was up that would be good, let alone try and pronounce some of the words in it.

But somehow you started out as a little kid in kindergarten and first grade who didn't know how to read or add or do any of these things. But you increased your ability over time. You went to medical school, you learned all these different things. As you learned them, they became like second nature, so that the things that were overwhelming when you were in

first grade are just so habitual now you don't think twice about them. Or the things that when you were a beginning medical student just knocked the socks off of you, and that you couldn't understand, now you can teach to other people. So I think it's just a thing of being at where we are at, knowing where we can go, and slowly, slowly ...

[Audience: inaudible]

So it just seems like this is all a bunch of hocus-pocus added on by history, but you like the simplicity of the practice. When you do the practice what do you want to attain out of the practice?

[Audience: inaudible]

Then what you can do is learn the methods of meditation, learn the methods of the teaching, practice them and see what attainments you get. Then maybe you can come and tell us what you have attained afterwards, if it corresponds with any of this or if it's something completely different. In other words, don't get hung up on a hundred and a thousand and a million and, "Why isn't it $877\frac{1}{2}$?" To me, I don't think getting hung up in the mathematics of this thing is the important thing. If you're studying to be a neuroscientist, then you say there's "x" number of brain cells in the brain. But when you are operating on somebody, you are not sitting there thinking, "Well do they have "x" number or "x" number plus one, or maybe they have a small brain, so they have 10,000 brain cells less." It really doesn't matter at that point.

Vipassana vs. Tibetan meditation practice

Again, that is going to depend a lot on each person's individual disposition. It's very interesting, the people who have done vipassana say, "Oh, it's so simple, it's so simple." If you go to Sri Lanka or Thailand you're going to find reams and reams of academia describing the path, too. It's just that when you go to IMS (Insight Meditation Society) they've stripped everything away and just told you to breathe. In all of the Buddhist traditions, there's an incredible academic scholarly side to it explaining many steps and things and what's abandoned on each level of the path. So don't get into this thing of, "Well, I'm just going to go to Thailand and I don't have to worry about it," or "I will go to Burma and I won't have to worry about it." It's just that the way things are being presented in America has been simplified to such an extent that people are able to get something that they can get their hands on and do right away and feel some sense of accomplishment.

[Audience: inaudible]

Then what you can do is you can sit and watch your breath. And when you start off your prayers and you say, "I take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha," sometime over the next however many meditation sessions you do of watching your breath, sometime the question may appear, "What's the Buddha?" [Laughter.]

I am sitting here watching my breath doing vipassana meditation, "What's vipassana? What really

is vipassana?” Or do you know what samatha is? Do you know what to look for, what the signs are of attaining samatha, what the signs are of attaining vipassana? Do you know all the steps to do to get that? Just keep watching your breath and some time, a question might come. Then maybe some of this information might be useful. Or you might be sitting there watching your breath and then these thoughts come, “I am sitting here watching my breath and this is so boring. What am I doing this for? What am I trying to get out of this? Do I just want to sit here and breathe in and out all the time? [Laughter.] Where am I trying to go? What am I aiming at? Am I just trying to get some peace of mind so that when I go to work I can smile?”

That is definitely part of the reason; you will get that. You watch your breath and you will get that. You can go to work and you can smile, “Well, why should I keep on doing breathing now? What am I trying to get after I have gotten that? Where am I really going in watching my breath? What is my human potential? Is the extent of my human potential sitting and watching my breath so I can go to work and smile? Is that all?” I mean, that is a wonderful thing to want out of life—to go to work and smile and not get angry—but is there more to get out of life than that? And when you die, sure your mind is going to be more relaxed because you have gone to work and you smiled, but where are you going to go when you die? What’s going to happen when you die? In the long term of this, where are you going with it all?

So we have to be able to go back and forth.

[Audience: inaudible]

Yeah, then put it on the back burner. In other words, the Buddha did teach that “You don’t have to believe this all just because I said so.” You check it out through experience, through logic; you see what happens. You use what is useful to you, but the thing is, we shouldn’t throw something out just because it is not useful to us at the moment. Right now you might be thinking, “A clock is useful to me, but I don’t need a hot water bottle, so I’ll get rid of the hot water bottle.” But you might need a hot water bottle tomorrow.

The idea is that when things don’t make sense, put them on the back burner. Don’t knock your head against the wall. If you can accurately disprove something, then throw it out. If you can say with certainty, “This absolutely is not true, this is total garbage. It’s a falsity. It’s a lie,” throw it out! You don’t need it. But if it’s something that you just don’t get, put it on the back burner. Don’t completely throw it out. But use what is beneficial to you right now, and remember that you change. When you were a little kid, size ten clothes didn’t help you at all. They were a nuisance. You didn’t want to put them in you little bag when you were three years old, because they weighed you down, but now they are very useful.

[Audience: inaudible]

That’s true. You can just say, “I don’t know.” There’re many things in this world that we don’t know. We can’t prove them. We can’t disprove them. So we just

say, “I don’t know.” How many things do we really know? [Laughter.] What do we really know? You live with a person for ten years—do you know that person? Do you know yourself?

We do know something but we have limited knowledge. But the knowledge grows. It grows. It changes.

Okay. Let’s just sit quietly.

Recognizing that spiritual practice transforms us

I was listening to a tape this morning by Jack Kornfield and Robert Welsh, who are both therapists. Jack Kornfield also teaches Vipassana meditation. Robert Welsh commented that in therapy they study pathology and psychology. When you look in a psychology textbook, the index has lists of all the different problems and pathological conditions of the mind, but there is no entry under mental health. In other words, there is no clear definition in psychology about what mental health is. It is taken for granted that mental health is the absence of these other problems—who knows what it is. He was saying that as a result of not having a positive definition for mental health, whenever people have had transcendent, religious experiences, the therapists don’t know how to deal with it. They don’t have any framework in their schema for where to put this kind of experience because the schema doesn’t talk of health; it only talks of pathology. As a result whenever someone had some kind of transcendent, religious experience they usually call it schizophrenia

or mental breakdown or hallucination or something like that. [Laughter.]

I thought about that and I thought, that is very interesting. It's as though something in our culture discredits religious experience, and discredits religious quality. Somehow we only frame things in a way so that all we look at is what is wrong. Then it made me think some more ... that our cultural upbringing may help explain why some people have trouble with this section of the lamrim, when we talk about the Buddha's qualities. We are talking about these transcendent qualities but there is no place in psychology for them. They haven't been investigated by science. And because they have not been found in any of the major sources of information that we come in contact with, including the newspaper, we tend to think that they don't exist. In our culture there is just no framework with which to acknowledge, categorize, or learn about these things. This idea was making me think quite a bit.

I was also thinking that whenever we talk in this setting about things like developing wisdom and compassion, and developing a silent, peaceful mind, a calm mind, everybody understands what we are talking about. No one has any difficulty accepting that it is possible for the mind to be in a calm, peaceful state. Somehow we feel that such a state must be possible, and it must be possible to have some wisdom and some loving kindness for everybody. That part does not seem to give people much of a problem.

I have noticed that the problem is that people are skeptical about how this peaceful mind and having wisdom and compassion could change a person, and

how one could make use of them. It's almost as if we think that we could only have wisdom, compassion and a quiet mind when we are sitting in meditation. We experience those qualities in meditation but when we get up from mediation we will still be our old selves, just like we were before we sat down. We think we get those qualities when we are sitting on the cushion but they will not affect any other aspect of our life. That could be why when we hear about the qualities of the Buddha, we say, "What is going on here?", because the qualities of the Buddha show the effects of meditation on all aspects of a person's life.

It is not the case that when you get some kind of spiritual realizations, you just sit on your meditation cushion experiencing them peacefully but nothing is going to change. There is actually a very substantial change in character, in personality, in the sense that the way you interact with others afterwards is completely transformed. When you have the realizations of wisdom, compassion and stillness of mind, then all the energy that you usually waste on worry and anxiety and frustration is now liberated and can be directed in so many other ways.

So all that energy ... it has got to transform something very dramatically in our character, don't you think? Those realizations of wisdom and compassion and samadhi, they've got to give us the ability to see things that we have not been able to see before. For example, being able to understand people's previous experience, their previous karma and how their present dispositions and inclinations are a result of their previous karma. Also, what they can achieve and what they can't achieve as a result of

their previous karma. Having perfect wisdom has got to also include the wisdom of knowing all the different paths along which to lead somebody in order for them to have realizations. Having that kind of compassion has got to affect the way we speak to people, the power of our speech, and the power of our influence on others. It will also affect what we can do with our body.

I think we have to expand our vision of what enlightenment is. It is not some nice little individual experience that I have on my meditation cushion and then say, “Isn’t that nice?” Rather, it’s some dynamic, transformative thing and after it happens you are not the same anymore. It is definitely possible to attain all the qualities of the Buddha because things really get altered when you have those kinds of realizations.

I have been trying to think a lot about where people have been getting stuck and it seems to me that maybe this is one of those areas. We think, “I want a little peace of mind now”. Somebody made the comment that she thinks we come to teachings more just to cope with our life than to get tools to transform our existence. Like, “I just want to come, do some breathing and feel a little bit better about myself. That’s good enough.”

And that is good, there’s nothing wrong with that. But it is limited. If we are only thinking of our spiritual practice in terms of, “Well I had a bad day at work and I need some way to relax. I don’t want to get into alcohol and tranquilizers because that’s a bad habit, so I’ll do some meditation instead.” That’s fine.

There’s nothing wrong with that. It beats alcohol and tranquilizers, and saves you a lot of money, but

spiritual practice can be more than just coping with a bad day at work.

Also, therapy and spiritual practice may be similar in their goals but there is also a big difference (in their goals). They both deal with the mind. They both try to cure our mental problems. But therapy is basically designed to help a person cope with the way their life is right now. That's good, and that's good enough. Spiritual practice, on the other hand, is not only about helping you do that, but it's also about helping you go on from being stuck in this whole situation to start with. It's about helping you go beyond being stuck in the narrow limited views of this-is-who-I-am, this-is-all-I-can-be, this-is-how-the-world-exists and don't-tell-me-anything-else. Spiritual practice is going to tear that apart. So it has a much more expansive goal than therapy does. As a side effect it produces some of the things that therapy also produces. I think it's good to be aware of that when you're listening to teachings, and ask yourself, "What is it we are doing here?"

Now we will continue with the topic of refuge. [Laughter.] We have talked about why we take refuge. We have talked about what the objects of refuge are. We've gone into why they are good objects of refuge and what their qualities are—the qualities of the Buddha's body, speech and mind, the qualities of the Dharma, the qualities of the Sangha. We know exactly who our guides are and what's going on.

Taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha

by learning to understand their distinguishing characteristics

The next section is taking refuge by knowing the distinguishing features of the Three Jewels. The subject of what makes them different from each other comes up because after learning everything that precedes this subject, we might think, “Each of the Three Jewels—Buddha, Dharma, Sangha—has so many incredible qualities. Can’t I just take refuge in one? Wouldn’t that be simpler? Why do I need three? Since everything is one, let’s make it one!” [Laughter.] And the answer here is, “Well, sorry folks! It’s got to be all three because they each have distinct features that make them different from each other.” It is quite interesting to listen to these distinguishing features because it gives us an even clearer idea of exactly what Buddha is and how to relate to a Buddha, exactly what Dharma is and how to relate to it, and what Sangha is and how to relate to the Sangha.

1. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE THREE JEWELS

The distinction between the Three Jewels is first of all in their characteristics. The characteristic of a Buddha is somebody who has abandoned all defects and developed all good qualities. That’s the definition of a Buddha. If anybody ever asks you what a Buddha is, that is it, in simple English. Somebody who has abandoned all the garbage and developed all the good stuff. What more could you ask for? A Buddha

doesn't get angry anymore, doesn't get frustrated and neurotic anymore, all of which sound pretty good. The Buddha also has the characteristic of seeing the two levels of truth simultaneously. In other words, seeing not only all relative conventional existence and how it appears as an illusion, but also seeing how it appears as an illusion because it actually lacks any kind of solid inherent existence. The Buddha sees both the appearance level and the deeper level of how things exist. This means that a Buddha is omniscient.

The characteristic of the Dharma is the true path and the true cessation. The Dharma is the result of the Buddha's arrival on our earth. In other words the whole purpose why the Buddha came is to give Dharma teachings. The Buddha gave the Dharma teachings to help sentient beings fulfill their needs.

The Sangha are those who realize the Dharma. So the Dharma is the real refuge, the Buddha is the one who taught it, and the Sangha is the proof in the pudding. Because the Sangha have realized the Dharma they can give us guidance on how we can do it. They teach us by example. They also show us the validity of their teaching because they have been able to manifest the Dharma and use it in their own lives. When we see the effectiveness of the teachings by looking at the Sangha, it helps give us faith and confidence that it actually works.

2. ENLIGHTENING INFLUENCE OF THE THREE JEWELS

The second group of distinguishing features are described in terms of their enlightening influence: how

their enlightening influence operates on us. The Buddha's enlightening influence operates by giving us the verbal teachings, thereby giving us the opportunity to develop the realizational Dharma or the insights on our own mindstream. The Buddha influences us by telling us what to practice and what to abandon, and he transmits all these in the most effective way.

The enlightening influence of the Dharma works by eliminating our afflictions, our contaminated karma, and therefore all of the unsatisfactory conditions of our life. That's a pretty nice way to influence, isn't it?

The Sangha influences us by giving us encouragement, by inspiring us, by showing us an example, and by assisting us in the practice. The Sangha practices and gains the result. When we see this, we get excited about doing it and therefore we engage in the practice too.

It is interesting to look at the different kinds of enlightening influences, how each of the Three Jewels influences us in a particular way. This knowledge can give us an example of how to influence others. The Buddha influences by teaching, so maybe we can teach others a little bit of Dharma. The Sangha influences by practicing, by showing a good example, and by encouraging us. This, too, is something we can start to do at our own level. Especially with your family, colleagues or with people who aren't particularly Buddhist or interested in the Three Jewels, we can influence them just by practicing ourselves, and transforming our minds. This could cause other people to become open to the Dharma.

One woman came to a retreat that I did at Cloud

Mountain. I talked to her privately beforehand, and the whole reason she came to the retreat was because she met two of the people in this group who were such nice, kind, open people. She practiced another Buddhist tradition before but the people she met here were so nice that she thought, “Gee, I wonder what is in the Tibetan tradition? These people are so nice.” So she came to the retreat. We influence people sometimes without even trying to. That is sometimes the best way that we influence them—when we are not trying to. Just by being who we are, we can be helpful to others. Thus we can see how the Sangha influences us, and how we can also train our mind to become like the Sangha. These are just very simple things.

My little sister doesn’t have much interest in Dharma but the little interest she has is because I don’t get angry when my mom needles me. Robin goes, “Wow, I wonder how is it that she doesn’t get angry?” [Laughter.] “There’s got to be something here.” This kind of influence on others is mostly by example, from what we do.

3. ASPIRATIONS OR FERVENT REGARD WE HAVE FOR EACH OF THE THREE JEWELS

The third distinction has to do with the aspirations or fervent regard that we have for each of the Three Jewels. In other words, it has to do with how we show our regard for them. How we show our feeling of connectedness to them.

Regard for the Buddha

With the Buddha, we aspire to make offerings. We develop devotion and respect for them and show our respect and gratitude by making offerings and by offering service. We respect their qualities and out of that, we therefore want to offer service, and we want to make offering. It is like you meet somebody who is very nice and automatically you want to start doing things for them. In other words making offerings and showing respect to the Buddha isn't something that we *have* to do. It's not the case that you are only a good Buddhist if you do this. "Ok, I will go buy some apples and put them on the altar if I have to."

It's not that kind of thing. Rather, it's like when you think of the qualities of some person you really care for, then you want to go out and buy them presents. You want to do favors for them because you like them so much. This is the same kind of attitude you develop towards the Buddha. By seeing the qualities of the Buddha, feelings of affection, regard and respect come, so that we want to offer service and do things.

Making offering does not mean just offering things on the altar. Remember that the best way to offer service to the Buddha is to help sentient beings. That is what makes the Buddha the happiest. That is the whole reason that the Buddha became a Buddha—it is for the benefit of sentient beings, not so that he could get apples and oranges and candles and incense. If we help other sentient beings, that's the best offering that we can give to the Buddha.

Regard for the Dharma

We show our regard for the Dharma by putting it into practice, by using it to transform our minds, to make it manifest in our mind. That doesn't mean that we have our mind and we put the Dharma on top of it. It's not like a bologna sandwich. It's more like when you put food coloring in water, all the water turns pink. We mix our mind with the Dharma so that our mind becomes the Dharma. So that everything we are studying that sounds so academic and intellectual now, actually becomes our personality. It sounds intellectual because we are unfamiliar with it. But as we start to put it into practice and it becomes us, then it no longer is intellectual.

It's like when you study car mechanics. For me, studying car mechanics is an intellectual pursuit. It's definitely on the level of intellect. I am completely rusty in more ways than one when it comes to that. But this is not the case for somebody who is trained as a car mechanic—they take things apart and put them back together, and they can do it while they are thinking about something else, simply by the force of habituation and familiarity. Likewise we can mix our mind with the Dharma by practicing it, and making the mind go from here to there. This is the same way that the car mechanic made it go from intellect to habit.

Regard for the Sangha

The way we show regard for the Sangha is by practicing together with them, by joining them in their efforts to make Dharma a living force. The ultimate Sangha that we are taking refuge in are of course

beings who have direct realization. But here, we are talking about making a living community. What we try and do is help other Dharma practitioners, practice together with them, and help them in their Dharma work.

Sometimes people think that Buddhism is very individualistic. You come to a Dharma talk, everybody sits down and meditates, and after you dedicate everybody goes away and nobody ever knows each other. That's not the way it should be. Of course each of us has our own individual mindstream, and our meditation is solitary, but we come and meditate together and share a lot of energy that way. When we discuss things together and when people ask questions, air their doubts and explode in their frustration, they're sharing with other people. We learn from each other and we help each other in that way.

Similarly, when people are doing Dharma projects and trying to make the Dharma happen by organizing things, then we help. Together we make it work, and we ourselves benefit. I think it is very helpful here not to think of our practice as an individual thing. Of course we have our meditation cushion in a nice quiet place in our house. That's nice, and that's our own private little thing. But we live in an interdependent world. We depend a lot on each other. We relate with each other. Our practice has really got to bring this out, especially in our society where people usually feel so lost and unconnected. Therefore it's very important in our Dharma setting to share and help each other, and practice together.

One person called me up last week and said, "I

really want to meditate every day but I just can't get myself to sit down and do it, so I say to myself, 'Don't you love yourself enough to meditate every day?'. Of course she doesn't meditate every day so the obvious answer is "No, I don't love myself enough to do that." So she said, "Well, how do I do it?" I started talking about the benefit of coming and being with a group because here are a lot of other people who are doing it. You pick up energy from them. You hear about their experiences. You can learn things from them and be part of the whole group energy. But she didn't like my answer. It involved too much time. [Laughter.] She seemed to expect me to be able to completely change years of habit in five minutes. I don't have that ability.

[Rest of teaching not recorded.]

CHAPTER 7

The Benefits of Having Taken Refuge

We Become Buddhists

The first benefit is we become a Buddhist. You may say, “What is so great about becoming a Buddhist? I am already a member of this club and that club and a member of another club, what do I need another membership card for?” Becoming a Buddhist is not joining a club and getting a membership card, rather it means that we are starting on the path to enlightenment. So, one of the benefits of taking refuge is that it initiates us onto the path to enlightenment.

Of course we can create good karma without taking refuge and you can be doing practices that are beneficial to yourself, but the meaning of becoming a Buddhist is that you are actually stepping onto the path that the Buddhas follow. You are trying to go in that same direction that the Buddha went.

This can bring up the whole subject of, “Well, is Buddhism the only path that is going to lead you to enlightenment?” We have been through this a few times and I thought of another example that might help illustrate this point. For instance, from here to downtown there are many roads that will take you downtown. There is more than one way to go downtown. You can drive a long way. You can drive a short way. You can go on the highway or you can go

on the side streets. But not every road that you take from here where we are now will lead you downtown.

We tend to go to extremes of saying, “It’s got to be Buddhist and if you are not a Buddhist you are going to hell.” That is completely erroneous. On the other hand thinking in the other extreme and saying, “Everything is the same and all religions are the same,” is like saying you can drive any direction that you want from here on Fifty-fourth Street and you will wind up downtown. But that is not true, because if you drive north from here you will wind up in Vancouver and not downtown! So I think we have to use our discriminating wisdom and not get hung up in words and labels—that is not important, but we do have to look at the meaning and what is going on.

A travel story

Once when I was traveling, I went to one center that had been established for many, many years. Many people come to it. Most of the places I go to, when I arrive the people say, “Oh we are so glad you have come. We are looking forward to your teachings. We do not know much about Buddhism, but we are looking forward to it.” Well I got to this particular place and they said, “Oh we are very glad you have come, but you really should know we are not Buddhists.” They went to great lengths to tell me repeatedly that they were not Buddhists, but they said that they were very advanced and have a very advanced philosophical system. They said I should understand that when I teach there, I am teaching very high-class people who know what they are

talking about.

They said that the system they were following and Buddhism come to the same point. They gave me many of their books to read—many, many books—and I cannot claim to have understood them. In fact, I do not think I did because there was incredible vocabulary in there. You have to learn very specialized vocabulary to understand the books.

So I was riding in the car going somewhere, talking to some of the members and asking them questions because I was trying to understand their philosophical system. They kept insisting that their system and Buddhism led to the same goals and I was trying to understand what it was they believe. I did not understand all the “universal mind”, “cosmic mind” and “over self” vocabulary and I was really trying to understand the meaning of the words and asking questions, trying to get to some definitions. It was a very interesting discussion, because at the end I think we could not prove that both systems were getting to the same place, because we could not understand what the other was saying!

We need to be astute

I think it is just too glib to say that all is one and it all leads to enlightenment when we cannot even understand what the other people really believe, let alone what our own system believes. We need to be aware and astute here and not be fanatical and close-minded, but we don't want to be sloppy either. When we take refuge in Buddha, Dharma, Sangha we are saying that we have examined the qualities of

Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, know something about the path, have confidence in it and decide that this is the direction that we want to go in.

There may be other teachings that are very good. All religions have something good in them. All religions exist to bring human happiness. By taking refuge, however, we are declaring that this particular systematization is something that speaks to our heart. We have confidence in it, are going to follow it and therefore we make a clear decision in our lives. I think that is important.

Settling down to one path

I am always talking about the example of someone studying crystals on Monday night and holistic healing on Tuesday night, etc. We can continue to do that. There is no pressure to take refuge. It is our own spiritual practice; we are the ones that are responsible. But at some point we might actually want to find one principal direction and settle down and do that.

For instance, when you are young you date a lot of guys, but at a certain point you will probably get married. It is like you get tired of going out with all these different guys, so you think marriage might be better. Of course, marriage brings a whole new set of headaches, but you do have the opportunity to go deeply into the relationship that way. Well it is the same thing here, becoming a Buddhist and taking refuge does not mean you do not learn about crystals and holistic healing anymore. You can still learn about those things, but you have your principal thing designated and that cuts out the confusion just as

getting married cuts out the confusion of fifty million guys. But taking refuge does bring you some new headaches initially because you have to start looking at your mind.

We begin to purify

It is not that Buddhism brings headaches to us, but sometimes the idea of commitment to one path can make a lot of stuff come up in our life because that is when we really begin the process of purifying. When we begin to purify, all of our junk comes up. When we begin to meditate, we have to look at what is in our mind. Whereas when we go from one spiritual thing, to the next spiritual thing, to the next, it is like we are in a spiritual amusement park, getting amused by all the external things, so of course we do not look at our mind. But when we take refuge, we have to start looking at our mind. That is why I say practicing is like living in a garbage dump initially. [Laughter.] But there is hope. I firmly believe that it is possible to transform the garbage dump into something better, but we have to start out where we are.

If we do not really take refuge, even though we may create a lot of good karma, that karma will not be dedicated for the attainment of enlightenment, because we have no faith in enlightenment and no faith in the Buddhist path. So this first step of making a commitment, becoming a Buddhist, entering into the Buddhist path, really clarifies where we are going. Then when we create good karma we can dedicate it for the attainment of the goal of enlightenment. Whereas, if we do not really have much confidence in

Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, we may create good karma but we will not dedicate it for the attainment of enlightenment because if you do not believe in enlightenment, why would you dedicate the good karma for that?

[Audience:] If you have not taken refuge but still believe in the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha and enlightenment and you dedicate good karma, are you saying that that dedication does not count?

Well you can believe in enlightenment and dedicate for that without having taken refuge. I think it will bring that result, but you have to ask, “Have you not taken refuge then?”

We Establish the Foundation for Taking All Further Vows

The next benefit of taking refuge is that it establishes a foundation for taking all further vows. The reason for this is that taking refuge confirms in us that we want to attain liberation. Taking refuge confirms that we want to follow the path set out by the Buddha and thus having confirmed that, it sets the stage so that we can actually take the different levels of precepts or vows that can help us accumulate good karma and help us abandon our habitual confused behavior.

Also, if your refuge is very strong you will keep your vows well. If your refuge is not very strong, then you will not keep your vows well. If you have not taken refuge, then you will not follow the precepts. If

you do not believe in the path and the goal that the Buddha explained, you will not follow the method to get there.

THREE SETS OF VOWS

Refuge serves as the foundation for taking any further vows or initiations. There are actually three sets of vows that one can take as a Buddhist.

The first level is called pratimoksha or individual liberation vows. These include the five lay precepts, the monk's and nun's vows and also one day vows. The second type of vows is called the bodhisattva vows. The third type is the tantric vows.

These are in order of how easy or difficult it is to keep them. In other words, the individual liberation vows are the easiest to keep because they point out physical and verbal behaviors that are to be abandoned. The bodhisattva vows are more difficult to keep because they point out mental behaviors to be abandoned, as do the tantric vows which are even more difficult to keep.

Nowadays, because initiations are given very freely, sometimes people's first exposure to Buddhism is through an initiation. They might say something like, "I've taken Yamantaka initiation but I am not a Buddhist." Actually, refuge vows are given as part of the initiation ceremony, but if the person does not consider themselves a Buddhist then they have not taken the bodhisattva vows or the tantric vows and if you have not taken those, you have not taken the initiation. So people may say they have taken an initiation, they may think they have and that's okay,

there is nothing wrong with saying that or thinking that, but if one has not taken refuge in one's heart either in a separate ceremony or in the earlier part of the initiation, then one really has not taken an initiation.

REFUGE VOWS ARE THE DOOR

That is why refuge is the door to the Buddha's teachings. It is the doorway that you enter into to be able to commit yourself to any of the further practices. Like I continually say, somebody can learn Buddha's teachings and practice them without being a Buddhist. If something the Buddha taught helps your life, practice it. It does not matter if you take refuge, or if you don't take refuge.

But now when we talk about taking refuge we are talking of actually settling down and getting into the path and doing it; it is a different level of involvement. The advantage of taking refuge is that you get to take precepts. You are probably going, "Ugh, I get to take precepts. Who wants to take precepts! When I take the one day Mahayana precepts, I can only eat one meal a day. I can't sing and dance. I can't have sex. I can't do this. I can't do that. Why is this an advantage?" [Laughter.] Well that shows us something about what we think is important in life.

The advantage of taking precepts is that it acts as a framework for us to become more mindful, more aware of what we are saying, thinking and doing. If you take a precept to do, or not do, something that has been in your mind all day, you become much

more aware of what is going on instead of just being on automatic. Taking precepts is very beneficial that way. Also, by keeping the precepts, we continually create good karma no matter what we are doing as long as we are not directly breaking the precepts.

There is a refuge ceremony for people who wish to take refuge. When you take refuge you automatically take the precept not to kill. In addition, if people want to take any of the other precepts at that time they may, because taking refuge gives one the ability to take the five lay precepts for one's life and one gets all the advantages of taking the precepts.

We Can Eliminate Results of Previously Accumulated Negative Karma

The third advantage of refuge is that it helps us to eliminate the negative karmic imprints on our mindstream. Previously in our confusion we may have acted destructively in verbal, physical and mental ways and we have those imprints on our mind and they will bring results. Taking refuge helps us to purify that because if we take refuge, we take vows, and vows help us to purify our past negative karma. If we take refuge, we are also more likely to do the other practices that help us to purify, like doing the four opponent powers and doing purification meditation. Also if we take refuge we have a deeper connection with the Buddha and by making offerings, doing prostrations and so forth to the Buddha, this also helps to purify our negative karma, because we are generating very positive attitudes when we are doing

these practices. Refuge can be a very strong purification of all the different karmas that we have created.

We Can Quickly Accumulate Great Positive Karma

Offerings to the Buddha

The next benefit of taking refuge is that it enables us to create a vast store of positive potential for very similar reasons. In other words, if we take refuge then we are more likely to engage in the practices that are going to create positive potential in our lives. Also when we take refuge, because of the qualities of the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, they become very strong objects for us with which to create karma because of their qualities. If we make offerings to the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, we create a very strong, powerful karma compared to offering to our best friend, unless your best friend is a Buddha!

In other words, according to the level of a person's spiritual realizations, the qualities they have and their relationship to us, we create karma. Some people and some things are heavier objects karmically for us than others. The Buddha, Dharma, Sangha are heavy because of their qualities. If we have taken refuge and are prompted to make prostrations, or offerings, or serve the Buddhist community in some way, then because of the qualities of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and because they are very strong objects with which we create karma, we create a lot of good karma

through our prostrations, offerings and so on.

Is this making sense? Is this clear? It might sound like we are just trying to get people to give money to the temple by saying that they get all this extra merit if they offer to the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, or they get all this extra positive potential if they help the Buddhist community. Shouldn't we help everybody and not just Buddhists? Well yes, of course we should help everybody, but what we are saying with this example is that when you give to a charity you want to give to a charity that is going to be able to make full use of what you give to them.

You are not going to give to a charity where your stuff just gets frittered away. Because the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha have the qualities that they do, any way in which we help them, becomes us helping all other sentient beings because the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha are working for the benefit of all those sentient beings. So it is not that I am being narrow-minded and will only help the Buddha and will not help this other person because he's not Buddhist, it is that if you help the Buddha and help people who are working for the benefit of other sentient beings, as you help them, they in turn help a huge array of people.

Questions and answers

[Audience:] Does this mean that we should give to the Buddha rather than to the poor and needy?

I was trying to differentiate. I am not saying to not give to other charities. It is great to give to other

charities and we definitely should give to other charities, but when we make offerings to the Buddha, due to the power of the Buddha, due to the Buddha's qualities, there is some additional benefit that accrues to us. When we help the poor and needy, we also get some additional benefit due to their state of need. Giving to the poor and needy, because of their state of existence, creates more good karma than giving to your friend who is a millionaire. So I am not in any way advocating one thing over the other, but I am trying to say that different objects have different responses to us and we have different responses to them.

[Audience: inaudible]

Your question is if there can be people who are Buddhist who don't call themselves Buddhist, then what is the benefit of focusing on things that do call themselves Buddhists? Well, because it might help your mind. In other words if something calls itself Buddhist it does not mean it is completely pure. I am not saying that everything that has the label 'Buddhist' is one hundred percent kosher, don't get me wrong. And I am not saying that everything that isn't Buddhist is not kosher, but what we are saying here is that it does make a difference in your mental state.

They say that when you offer anything to anybody, imagine that person is a Buddha. You then create the same karma as if you are offering to a Buddha because in your mind you are imagining that person as a Buddha. That does not mean that if we offer guns to

someone to commit harm but think that we are offering the guns to a Buddha, then it is the proper way to practice. What we need to take note is that whatever I say here is a general guideline. Everything depends, if this hasn't gotten into your mind yet. [Laughter.] We have to get out of the black and white mentality that many of us grew up in. Everything depends.

Offerings and karma

[Audience:] If the poor do not have the qualities of the Buddha, but we give to them while thinking they are the Buddha, how does that create the same karma as giving to the Buddha?

I am going to give you my personal opinion here. It seems to me that we create karma both due to how we are thinking of the object we are giving to and what they are in actual fact. So from our side, giving to somebody who is a Buddha and giving to somebody who is not a Buddha but thinking they are a Buddha, from our side it is the same karma. But in terms of the karma we create due to their qualities, it seems like it is going to be different karma. So maybe it is both the same and different depending on which side you look at it from. [Laughter.]

They also say that if you offer one apple to the Buddha and imagine that you are offering the whole sky full of beautiful fruit, you actually create the same karma as if you are offering the whole sky full of fruit. In that way you create the same karma whether you offer that actual physical object or not. I remember

discussing this with one teacher and saying, “Well how could that be because if I actually had tons and tons of bushels of apples, wouldn’t giving all of that be better than to give one apple?” I did not get a real clear answer on this or maybe I got a clear answer but didn’t understand it, or I can’t remember it, but my own current state of thinking is that from our side, imagining it and offering it is the same as if you actually have those things. But from the side of the physical substance that you actually give, there is a difference between giving one apple and giving ten barrels full of apples.

So it seems to me that there are two kinds of karma involved—the karma that you get from the visualized offering and the karma that you get from the actual offering. So in response to your question, it seems to me that there are two kinds of karma, the karma that you get from imagining somebody being a Buddha and the karma that you get from them actually being a Buddha or not being a Buddha.

Visualized offerings

[Audience: inaudible]

If you are doing the visualized offerings because you are actually very miserly and do not want to give anything, then you are not really practicing properly. On the other hand if you are really poor and you do not have much, but you give one apple with a real dedicated heart, because of the power of your thought, your motivation and your wish, that offering is much more valuable in terms of your motivation

than somebody who is giving fifteen truckloads and can well afford to do so. So it seems like there are many different factors here upon which the karma depends. It depends on your motivation which involves your visualization and it depends on the actual physical thing. It depends on so many different circumstances.

[Audience:] What are the five lay precepts?

The five lay precepts are not killing, not stealing, not committing unwise sexual behavior, not lying and not taking intoxicants. There are different ways of giving refuge. Some teachers give refuge saying that you have to take all five precepts, i.e., either all or nothing. Other teachers give it saying that if you take refuge, you definitely have to take the first precept of not killing. As for the remaining four, you can choose to take one, two, three, or all four of them. Or you can choose not to take any of the four. The ones that you did not take as precepts, you can take them as aspirations or wishes for your mind to be able to be peaceful about doing them in the future.

I do it this latter way so that people can choose which (of the four) to take as precepts and which to take as aspirations, but people have to be very clear about their choice before the ceremony. Let us say you take the precept not to steal today, but tomorrow when you want to take something from the company for your own personal use, you say that you did not take the precept of not stealing, that you only took the wish and the aspiration to someday take the precept of not stealing. This is not allowed.

[Audience:] What is the definition of 'intoxicants' in the precept of not taking intoxicants?

In the Tibetan tradition intoxicants include alcohol, cigarettes (I think snuff is considered tobacco) and any kind of drugs that make you lose your senses like cocaine, grass or heroine. Caffeine, interestingly enough, is not considered an intoxicant. You can drink coffee, tea and Coca-Cola.

Unwise sexual behavior

[Audience: inaudible]

The Buddha did not say anything specific about premarital sex. When you look at Buddhist societies they are very down on premarital sex, but the Buddha himself did not say anything specific about it. He did say that to have sexual relationships with somebody who is under the control of somebody else, in other words a child who is under the control of the family, that that is an improper object, an improper person. So then I guess teenagers have to think, "Am I under the control of my parents? Is the person I am going with under the control of their parents?"

Especially included in unwise sexual behavior is any kind of sexual contact that would cause harm, would spread diseases. Although the Buddha didn't specifically mention it because maybe this was not an issue in ancient India, unwise sexual behavior includes just about any irresponsible sexual behavior that hurts other people's feelings, like sleeping with somebody and dropping them the next day and they

wind up crushed. The Buddha did not say anything about that specifically because I do not think in ancient India this was a big issue. Marriages were arranged and you did not date so there was no possibility for this to happen. But my own personal opinion is that I think this would fall within the realm of what Buddha was talking about when he talked about unwise sexual behavior and doing things that harm other beings.

Polygamy and polyandry

[Audience: inaudible]

When you look at the vows, the Buddha did not prohibit polyandry or polygamy. Polyandry is having more than one husband. In ancient India men often had multiple wives. Many of the kings had multiple wives. That was okay under Buddhism. In Tibet the women have multiple husbands. That was okay under Buddhism. These things are out in the open and societally accepted so that they are not going to hurt other people's feelings.

Now if you move into our culture, would polygamy or polyandry be okay here? I don't think so, because the way our culture is set up, people are supposedly monogamous. It seems to me that a lot of this depends really on what is acceptable in the society. So maybe because this was acceptable in Indian society, the Buddha did not speak out against it in that particular context.

[Audience: inaudible]

Because many Westerners can't stand anything that involves limiting their amount of pleasure. Whenever I teach the precepts, people have so much difficulty with this precept of not committing unwise sexual behavior.

[Audience: inaudible]

Where some people are at in terms of their own feelings, they do not want anybody to say anything to them about how they should behave. If they come out with a rule for themselves, that is fine, but they do not want anybody else telling them what they can and cannot do. This is a very hard, tough, rebellious mind and it almost does not matter what the Buddha says, they do not want to have anybody telling them anything. But if they came out and said that same thing for themselves, that would be okay. Here we are talking about people's different states of mind and everyone is quite different. Even within this group here, we are quite different.

Homosexuality and lesbianism

[Audience:] What does the Buddha say about homosexuality and lesbianism?

This one is interesting. I have been trying to get some resources on this because in Lama Tsongkhapa's text, the Lamrim Chenmo, there is some comment about homosexuality. I asked a friend of mine who is a Theravada monk and he says that as far as he knows, he has not seen anything in the Pali scriptures about

this. So I am not sure what exactly is going on, but at least in Lama Tsongkhapa's view, homosexuality is something that is to be avoided. In general, especially among the Zen tradition, you will find many people who are gay practicing Zen because they say that the Buddha does not care whether you are gay or not.

I once asked one of my teachers about this because somebody who was gay came to me and wanted to know about this. This subject is incredibly difficult to talk with Tibetan monks about, it is extraordinarily difficult. They don't talk about it. They say that in Tibetan society nobody is homosexual. I have my doubts about that. Anyway my teacher's answer was that attachment is attachment, it does not matter what the object is, so from his viewpoint whether you are homosexual or heterosexual, it is not really important—attachment is attachment.

Birth control and abortion

[Audience:] What did the Buddha say about birth control and abortion?

They did not have birth control in the time of the Buddha so there was not anything specifically said about this, but we can say that abortion from a Buddhist viewpoint would be taking the life of a child. That does not mean that people who have abortions are bad. His Holiness says that this is always a very difficult decision. It is a very hard thing to decide upon, but if one believes that abortion is taking a life and one does not want to get oneself into that position, then the best thing to do is to use some kind

of preventive measures so that you will not encounter that. But isn't that just common sense?

[Audience: inaudible]

People have to be reasonable. If you use birth control you know it is not one hundred percent effective. You know there is a possibility it won't work. So if a pregnancy results that is unwanted, you accept it.

It seems to me that in anything we do in our life, we should try and think of the different results that could come about and go into the situation with our eyes open. Then we could say, "Yes this could happen. It's a risk, but I'm willing to engage in this even though there is a risk. If it comes out the way I don't want it to, I will bear that responsibility and follow through on it." Usually we do not want to see the results of our behavior unless they are good results and when bad results come, we often get angry at somebody else thinking that this should not happen to us.

Lying

[Audience: inaudible]

Technically speaking to break the lying precept from its root means that you lie about your spiritual attainments. Now that does not mean that you can lie about everything else. If you lie about everything else it does damage the precept, but it does not break it from the root. But you do damage it and you do create negative karma. The precept is specifically

about lying. I think some people may generalize it to any kind of harmful speech, but I have learned about it as specifically lying. I think it is wise in any case to abandon any kind of harmful speech, whether we have the precept to do so or not.

[Audience:] What about gossip?

Well we have to understand what gossip means. Talking about somebody else does not mean that you are gossiping. It is what you are saying, why you are saying it and how you are saying it that determines whether you are gossiping. I really hope that when a doctor refers a patient to a surgeon, that the doctor talks about that patient to the surgeon. [Laughter.] So just talking about other people does not necessarily mean gossip. We have to think about why we are talking about them. What are we saying and what is our attitude towards them?

In a similar way—and here we are getting into more fine-tuning—pointing out a seemingly negative quality of somebody is not necessarily criticizing them. For example, if you are in charge of hiring people for a job and a person has a quality that does not seem appropriate for the job, you can say that the quality does not seem appropriate for that job. But that does not mean that you are angry and are blaming and criticizing.

Review your speech

I think the real key to having good speech is thinking before we speak and really checking our motivation. I

have emphasized again and again that it is very helpful to sit down every evening and think about what you said, felt, thought and did during the day. You begin to notice patterns coming up, specifically patterns of really sloppy speech, or harmful speech. As soon as you start noticing those patterns it makes it much easier to stop them. You know the kinds of situations you are likely to do it in and you can be more mindful when you get in that kind of situation. Or you may get a kind of feeling in your mind and it is easier to identify this if you have been able to recognize it a lot in the past. So identifying it is the first step. Then keeping your mouth shut is another step. [Laughter.]

Breaking precepts

[Audience:] When we take precepts we have to confront the issue of what happens when we break them, so what do we do if we break them?

The reason we take precepts is because we cannot keep them purely. If you could keep them purely, then you do not need to take precepts. But to take the precept, you have to have some reasonable confidence that first of all you want to keep it, that you want to keep it well and you are going to put some effort into it, so it is not just thinking that you will take the precept but don't have to keep it. You should think that this is something that you want to do, have some confidence you can do it, but you don't necessarily expect to do it one hundred percent perfectly because if you could, you would not need

the precept. So going into it with that kind of attitude, then we are fully aware that sometimes we are going to transgress. So what do we do then?

Regret, restoration, determination and remedial behavior

Our usual pattern when we transgress is to think, “I’m guilty. I’m bad. I’m horrible. How could I do this? I don’t want anybody to know because then they will know what an idiot I am blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.” We have this whole tape we play for ourselves. [Laughter.] Instead of playing that tape, we develop a sense of regret for what we have done, which is the wisdom mind recognizing our mistake. We do not beat ourselves up emotionally about it, but we recognize it and do not rationalize it.

Then we restore the relationship somehow by taking refuge in the holy objects, or generating altruism towards other sentient beings. Then we make some kind of determination not to repeat it again according to what we are capable of, and then we do some remedial behavior, generally some kind of purification practice, community service, or some kind of positive action.

That is why I really encourage you in the evening to look over the day, rejoice in what went well, in the good karma we created, and go through the four opponent powers for the things that we messed up on.

That is a really nice way to complete the day and to evaluate the day and go on. If we do that, then we will begin to notice patterns and we will start to take some active steps to counteract those patterns.

Purification and rejoicing

[Audience:] Is there a psychological benefit of doing purification first and rejoicing second?

That is the order in the Seven Limb Prayer and there must be a reason for it. It might be that in order to allow ourselves to see the good things, we first have to clean up the mess. It could be that we clean up the mess through doing the confession first, then we can see the virtues better. I think with Westerners, it is sometimes skillful to do it the other way though.

Another possible reason for doing the confession before the rejoicing is because if you rejoice, but you do not do it properly, you could become proud; whereas if you do the confession first and look at your garbage, becoming proud is not so much of a danger. I think sometimes in the West we neglect the rejoicing part. It's really funny because in the West we go to the extreme of getting very proud and arrogant and also to the extreme of totally putting ourselves down. I think we have to learn to realize our mistakes, but also rejoice in our good qualities. Do not neglect either of them.

Pride and shame

[Audience:] What is the relationship between pride and shame?

Well sometimes we are very ashamed and so to cover it up we put on a big show and become very proud. So pride and shame very much correspond. Some people

who are very proud, the whole reason for the pride is because they don't like themselves very much. I think that this is always helpful to remember because sometimes when we are around people who are very proud, we get jealous. There is no need for us to get jealous of somebody's good qualities. If they do have those good qualities, that is fine. If they are just blowing themselves up out of all proportion, we don't need to get jealous either because what they are doing is inaccurate and is indicative of their own internal pain.

The refuge ceremony

[Audience: inaudible]

Some teachers say you only take refuge once. My teachers used to let people take refuge several times, so I do it that way. The person who does the refuge ceremony becomes one of your spiritual teachers. I think it is wise to reflect upon that and then one chooses whether to take refuge with that person doing the ceremony or not. We have to remember we are taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, not in that person, but that person becomes one of our spiritual teachers because they did the ceremony and provided the link with the lineage.

In terms of taking precepts, Lama Yeshe said that once you have the five lay precepts you do not need to keep taking them again and again unless you have broken them from the root.

Breaking precepts from the root

[Audience:] What would be breaking the precepts from the root?

Each of the precepts has to have an object you recognize, a motivation, the actual doing of the action and the completion of the action. So for instance with killing, to break the precept from the root, one has to kill a human being. But that does not mean that it is okay to kill animals. This would be the intentional killing of a human being where the other person dies before you do, so it is not about getting into a car accident because there is no intention there.

Then for stealing, it is to steal things that you know do not belong to you, things that are considered by the society to be of value and that you could be penalized for taking.

For unwise sexual behavior, it is going outside of one's relationship, or going with somebody who is in another relationship and knowing that they are in a relationship, knowing what you are doing and then having the pleasure at the end.

With lying, it is lying about one's spiritual attainments, saying you are a bodhisattva, or have realized emptiness, or attained dah, dah, dah, when you have not.

As for the intoxicant precept, I give it very strictly and intoxicants include anything ... the Buddha said even one drop of alcohol. Some teachers say (I think they do this for Westerners) that it means getting out of control with the intoxicant, so one glass of wine is okay. But that is not the way I do it because I figure you do not get drunk if you do not take even one glass. I think it is much easier to make it clear.

[Audience:] What about foods that are cooked with alcohol in it?

I have been in that situation and I have learned to ask beforehand or spit it out. I think if you know something has liquor in it and you eat it that is a problem. If you do not know and you have no intention, I still think it is wise to spit it out. Well technically speaking the alcohol has evaporated through the cooking. But personally speaking, the way I keep that precept, is no spaghetti sauce with wine even if it has been cooked for ten hours, because for me I think it is just much better to be very clear about this.

[Audience: inaudible]

There are some actions that are naturally negative and then there are others that are prohibited because the Buddha said so, the Buddha made a vow. Something like killing or stealing is naturally negative whether you have a precept or not. If you kill or steal you create negative karma by that action.

Taking alcohol itself is not a naturally negative action. It is negative only if you have taken the precept. The reason the Buddha made that precept and encouraged us to avoid intoxicants is because if you get intoxicated, then you are quite likely to break all the other precepts. But the alcohol in and of itself is not a negative thing. It is what you do when you are drunk or doped up that is harmful.

[Audience:] Can you explain more about 'knowing

the object' as part of breaking a vow from the root?

It means that you literally know the object. “Here is Joe Blow. I want to kill Joe Blow. This is Joe Blow and I have the motivation to kill him.” So it is not an accident. You do it, he dies and you are glad about it.

Some people kill people but they really do not want to. Maybe you are a soldier at war. In that kind of situation it is not the same karma. You are killing, but it is not the same karma as if you volunteered to kill someone. Doing it but with a mind that regrets doing it is quite different.

Now in terms of the precept, in terms of our monk's and nun's vows, when you are doing it if you have a mind of regret and do not have one single moment of wishing to conceal it, then it is not a complete transgression. But if you did it, felt happy about it and even if you did not intend to conceal it and your regret comes some time afterwards—the next day the regret comes—it is still broken.

[Audience:] What about suicide?

Technically speaking to have a complete action of killing it involves killing another human being and it involves that person dying before you do. Now in suicide those two factors are missing, but I think it is still quite negative karmically.

Review

Last time we talked about the advantages of taking refuge. We spoke about the first benefit—becoming a

Buddhist. In other words, one enters the path that the Buddha has described and starts to practice.

The second advantage is that having taken refuge we become a candidate, or a base for all the other vows that the Buddha gave. When we have confidence in the path that the Buddha set out, we will want to follow it. One of the first things that the Buddha instructs us to do is to observe cause and effect, in other words to leave behind our bad habits and to make some effort to create good ones. To help us, the Buddha very kindly set out precepts. We can choose the level of precepts that we want to take and then do that practice. It's very beneficial, but that has to be done on the basis of refuge. If we don't have refuge and trust in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha then there is no reason to do anything that's prescribed. It is like if you have no faith in a doctor, you will not want to take the medicine that they prescribe.

The third benefit of taking refuge is we are able to eliminate negativities very quickly. One reason for that is that just the thought of turning our mind towards virtuous actions is purifying. Another reason is that once we entrust ourselves to the guidance of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, they teach us further practices for purification.

The fourth benefit is that we quickly create a great amount of positive karma. Again, this is because taking refuge itself, recollecting the Triple Gem itself, puts a good imprint on our mind. Also, by following the path, we're led to do all sorts of other virtuous actions which again leave good karmic imprints on our mind. This thing about imprints, you can see it to

some extent. For example, we say that taking refuge itself purifies and creates good karma. When you take refuge, see for yourself what effect it has on your mind.

In fact, you can see the effect any action has on your mind. When you sit down on a Sunday afternoon watching a football game and everybody's yelling and screaming, can you feel the energy in your mind? Can you feel the energy in your body? Or when you watch a movie that's full of violence, it affects your dreams at night even though it's just a movie. You can see how it affects your mental energy, and how that in turn affects your physical energy. And that's just sitting and watching something.

If you imagine the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha instead—you think of their good qualities, you take refuge and imagine light coming into you—that definitely leaves an imprint too. It changes the whole feeling, the mental tone, and it also does something to your physical energy. We can see it when we look at our own experience. This shows us why an act in and of itself can be either purifying or creating a negative impression. Watch your own experience, watch what happens when you think about different things.

We Cannot Be Harmed by Humans and Non-humans

The fifth benefit of taking refuge is that we can't be harmed by humans and non-humans. This happens because after taking refuge, we engage in the practice of purification, and that stops the negative karma that

would cause us to experience external harm. In addition, if you take refuge, your mind is in a positive state. Even if other people are trying to harm you externally, your mind doesn't interpret it as harm. You interpret it instead as a benefit. Refuge becomes a powerful protection.

When I was in Southeast Asia, I found that people there are dreadfully afraid of spirits. There are many spirit stories. The people all want some quick, cheap and easy method to stop the spirits. It's funny because if you give them a red string to tie around their neck, they feel, "Ok now I'm protected," but if you tell them to take refuge, they don't like that very much. But really in the scriptures it says that taking refuge itself is the one thing that protects you against harm from spirits.

The story of a spirit who tries to harm others is told. One time, the spirits went to the cave of a great meditator to harm him. Seeing that the meditator was meditating on love and compassion, the spirits changed their mind. They couldn't harm that person. Why was that meditator meditating on love and compassion? Because he took refuge and he was following the path.

The whole idea is that whenever we keep our mind in a virtuous state, we do less to attract negative energy towards us, be it the negative energy of humans or spirits. Whereas when our mind is in a negative state, when our mind is critical and judgmental, we interpret everything as harmful. In addition, through our actions, we attract negative energy towards us. For example, when we act obnoxious, other people return the 'favor'. We can

easily see that.

We Will Not Fall to Unfortunate Rebirths

The sixth benefit is that we won't fall to unfortunate rebirths. This is, again, because we purify the negative karma and create good karma. More importantly, if we can remember the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha at the time of death, then the mind becomes very virtuous. When our mind is in a virtuous state, there is no possibility for negative karma that we have created in the past to ripen. Whereas if we spend our life creating good karma but still there is some negative karma in our mindstream, and at death we completely blow it and get very angry or attached, then that sets the environment for the negative karma to ripen.

The idea is to train our mind in remembering the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha as much as possible when we are alive. Then at the time we die, remembering them will come very easily. Basically, the tendency is that we die just like we live. If we live in attachment, anger and ignorance, we tend to die that way. If we train our mind to think about Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, taking refuge in them, and if we train our mind to think about loving-kindness, they become our second nature and arise quite easily in the mind at the time we die. If they are in the mind, then at that moment no negative karma can ripen. Dying becomes easy this way. You recognize that the Triple Gem are your objects of refuge who will guide you in this life, in the intermediate state and in future lives. You don't have to fear anything. Your mind relaxes,

you can think virtuously and at death you just take off the way a bird takes off. The bird doesn't look back. It just goes forward. This is the benefit of training our mind in refuge and being able to recall it at the time of death.

While we are healthy we tend to forget about taking refuge. We are involved in our day-to-day activities, busily running around. We are completely convinced that we are always going to be healthy because we are healthy right now. But all the people who were operated on today, all the people who died today, they were at one time healthy like us. Because of impermanence, because of transience, illness, old age and death eventually come around. I think it must be terrifying to have to face surgery or death without any kind of refuge, without any kind of feeling of trust in something beyond one's own ego. When we are in stressful situations like having an illness, it becomes very clear that we have very little control over our body or over much of our experience.

Whereas if the mind is trained in refuge then even if the body is out of control, the mind can be peaceful and calm. Even though there might be physical pain, there's no mental pain. I think a lot of the difficulty we experience when we are sick or dying is not due so much to the physical pain. Rather, it is due to the mental pain that comes in reaction to the physical pain. If we can have refuge, then all that gets solved.

In General Our Virtuous Purposes and Temporal Goals will be Fulfilled

The seventh benefit of taking refuge is that in general all of our virtuous purposes will be fulfilled. That includes also our temporal goals. But this is not a money back guarantee. It doesn't mean that just because you have taken refuge, you are going to get a new car. [Laughter.] What it is saying is that if we take refuge and generate a good motivation, we create the karma for our temporal and ultimate goals to be fulfilled.

Also if we take refuge before we engage in an activity, it puts our mind in a very positive frame and we are filled with confidence. We don't feel alone in whatever work we are undertaking, and that shift in our mental attitude automatically makes what we do more successful. That's why they say before we engage in any kind of action, for example, if you are traveling or doing a project, it's very good if you spend a few minutes and take refuge. It puts the mind in a positive frame and helps with our karma. It helps with our attitude. It helps with our confidence and so on. That is why taking refuge every morning is highly recommended. We start our day having that positive frame of mind. It allows us to accomplish the things we want to achieve in this life as well as in future lives.

Also, if we practice, then even if we don't achieve our desired goal or things don't turn out the way we planned, the mind doesn't freak out. For example, you are working on a project and it doesn't come out as you like because you don't have control over all the different conditions leading into it. Still, if the mind has refuge, you don't freak out. When we have refuge, our mind is directed towards more long-lasting

and broader goals. If things don't turn out the way we want, the mind automatically thinks about the different teachings the Buddha gave and is much more accepting of the situation. We stop all those other problems that come out of frustration, anger or resentment.

We Will Quickly Attain Buddhahood

This one actually encapsulates the previous seven. By taking refuge and following karma, then we are able to have a precious human life, meet qualified teachers, hear teachings, and have the necessary circumstances to practice. By doing these over many, many lifetimes, then we eventually become Buddhas. This is all done on the basis of taking refuge.

To see how valuable and how important refuge is, you can look at your friends or other people, either people who have no spiritual practice whatsoever or people who get involved in weird types of teachings and teachers. You can see the effects that it has on them this lifetime, and by inference you could see what is going to happen to them next lifetime based on what they are doing this lifetime. You come to appreciate having refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. They seem like a life raft in an ocean of confusion. It's good to think about the different situations. Think about your friends' and relatives' experience, and what happens in people's lives when they don't have refuge, and then you can appreciate your opportunity better.

When I was teaching in Montana there was one

woman who came to the teaching. Her brother had just died. He had gotten involved in a satanic cult. The people there wanted to sacrifice him and I think he killed himself before they could do that. That happens in this country. This happens as a result of taking refuge in the wrong object. Over and over again we can see what happens when people don't have the karma to meet good refuge objects. Their life gets totally confused now and, of course, future lives are a continuation of that confusion. Having met the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and as our understanding grows, we come to see how precious and valuable it is. The refuge becomes the concrete pillar of your life. It becomes the thing that enables you to make sense of everything and gives you a good direction to go in your life.

Just listen to other people's stories or read the newspaper with a Dharma mind. Then these types of things become quite evident. One woman just told me a few days ago that her marriage was breaking up because her husband got into some kind of group. I don't know what exactly it was, but they were one of these groups that was going to save the world and he just got completely into this save-the-world trip. As a result his whole family became unsaved. We need to reflect on our fortune and make use of it when we see how important our refuge is.

CHAPTER 8

Guidelines for the Practice of Refuge

Now we come to the section of how to train the mind, what guidelines to follow after having taken refuge. The reason that the Buddha explained guidelines is that refuge is the entry into the path. It's the gateway into the path. Having taken refuge, then in order to keep our refuge alive, in order to make it grow, in order to make our spiritual practice actually go ahead, the Buddha gave certain guidelines for the refuge practice. By the way, taking refuge is something completely voluntary. You can do it if you want. You don't have to do it if you don't wish to. It's completely up to you.

There're some specific guidelines as well as some general or common guidelines. The specific guidelines: for each object of refuge, there is one guideline to practice and one action to abandon. They come in pairs of what to practice and what to abandon.

Specific Guidelines for the Practice of Refuge

1. Having taken refuge in the Buddha:

- a. Do not turn for refuge in worldly deities

[Earlier part of this section lost due to change of

tape.]

There's a story which shows how worldly deities are not reliable refuge objects. A man with a goiter was sleeping on a mountain pass. Some spirits came up and wanted to harm him. But because he had some kind of blessing from a Lama, they couldn't harm him. They decided to take his goiter instead. They couldn't eat him so they took his goiter. When he woke up in the morning he was so happy because he had no more goiter. It was just what he wanted, to get rid of the goiter. He thought these spirits were great. He told his friend who also had a goiter. His friend then came and slept on the mountain pass thinking that his goiter would disappear too. Well, the difficulty was that the spirits didn't like the taste of the first goiter. When the second man came, they put what was left of the first goiter back to him so his goiter wound up to be twice the size.

The point of the story [laughter] is that spirits aren't reliable. First they take it and then they give it back. The whole idea when we take refuge, is that we want somebody who is reliable, who is constant in the help they give, and spirits aren't.

Many people are involved with channeling and so forth these days. Many of the spirits that are contacted are worldly beings who are just like human beings—some of them have wisdom and some of them don't. Some of them tell the truth and some of them don't. They are not reliable refuge objects. This is why we take refuge in Buddha, Dharma, Sangha and not in spirits. But if you want to make some kind of offering for worldly purposes, that's okay.

b. Respect all images of the Buddha

The thing to practice in terms of taking refuge in the Buddha is to treat the different representations of the Buddha with respect. This is not because the Buddha will get upset with us if we don't treat the statues properly, or that the statues are going to get mad at us or something like that. Rather, psychologically you can see if we value the Buddha, then we want to treat the different representations with respect because it has symbolic meaning for us. It's like if you value your grandmother, then the things she gives you, even the little things, you save and you treat them very well. You value a card your grandmother gave you when you were five years old, not because the card is so valuable, but because you value her and the card somehow represents her. A photograph of somebody you care very much about is just paper and different chemicals, but you keep it well because it is something valuable to you. The idea is that when we value something, we also value its representations.

For that reason it is recommended that we keep the Buddha's statues in a high place. We keep them clean. We dust our shrine every day and keep everything on it clean.

They also say don't use Buddha statues as collateral for loans. Here, I don't think any bank would take one. Maybe in Tibet, people were tempted to do that. The idea is not to use religious objects the same way we would use our ordinary material. For that reason also, whenever Dharma books are sold or whenever Buddha statues are sold, the profit made from that should go towards another Dharma activity.

It shouldn't be used for supporting ourselves. The idea being not to sell Buddha statues the same way you would sell used cars, but to regard them with an attitude of respect, and not just be seeking to make profits so that oneself can have a bigger and better house and better food to eat. If you make a profit, you invest it in other Dharma activities.

[Audience:] What are the karmic manifestations if we become the buyer instead of the seller?

Whenever this has been asked of my teachers, they say that you as the buyer don't create negative karma if you have an attitude of respect towards it and you weren't looking at it as ordinary material. It depends on the buyer's mind, what is in their own mind.

I remember my teachers being very, very strict about this [using the profit for other Dharma activities]. There was one shop in Singapore where they sold all these Buddha statues and when these people came to offer money to Lama Zopa, he couldn't refuse the money, but he had it kept aside. He gave it away or he used it for Dharma purposes, but never for personal use. Even money that was given to him from people who sold statues for profit, he used it with that attitude. In the Tibetan tradition they are quite strict about this. Maybe other traditions are not quite as strict, but I think it is helpful because then the mind doesn't get into a materialistic attitude with respect to Dharma objects.

They also say regarding Buddha statues that it's good when we look at them, not to say, "Oh, this one is beautiful and that one is ugly" just because the

artistry is good for one painting or statue but is not so good for the other. How can a Buddha's body ever be ugly? It's fine to comment on the artist's capabilities, but not on whether the Buddha is beautiful or not beautiful.

Similarly, it is good to try and treat all the different paintings and statues equally. In other words, don't put the beautiful ones at the front of the altar and the chipped broken ones into the garbage dump. Try not to have a mind that sees the expensive Buddha images as beautiful and the chipped ones as ugly, but try to have an attitude that sees the representation of the Buddha in whatever form it is as something that is attractive and beautiful. Also, don't put the statues on the ground or in a dirty place, but value them.

Of course all that is quite relative and whether we are treating the statues with respect or not really depends on the mind. There is another story that illustrates this. Somebody was walking down the road and saw a Buddha statue sitting on the ground. It was raining. The person had much respect for the Buddha statue and didn't want it to get wet. The only thing that was lying around was an old shoe. So he put the old shoe on top of the Buddha statue to protect it. This person created a lot of good karma because of wanting to protect the statue.

After a while, it stopped raining. The sun came out. Somebody else walked down the road, saw the statue, and said, "Yuck, who put an old smelly shoe on top of the Buddha? This is horrible!" And that person took the shoe off. [Laughter.] That person also created good karma because of his positive attitude.

2. Having taken refuge in the Dharma:

a. Avoid harming any living being

Then in terms of the Dharma, having taken refuge in the Dharma, the thing to abandon is harming all sentient beings. Specifically, it refers to killing but in a more general sense, it means to abandon verbally abusing them and also having malicious thoughts towards them. The whole reason that this is the guideline for having taken refuge in the Dharma is because the purpose of the Dharma, the essence of the Buddha's teachings, is to help others as much as you can, and if you can't help them, then at least don't hurt them. The bottom line of the Dharma is non-harmfulness. That is why harming is to be abandoned once we have taken refuge in the Dharma. It's the whole purpose of our practice.

b. Respect the written words which describe the path

To have respect for the physical representations of the Dharma, in other words the scriptures. This includes the books and now in our age, Dharma tapes, videos, etc. Again, this means not selling them just to earn your livelihood, but using the profit for other Dharma activities. It means keeping your Dharma books in a high and clean place. Technically speaking when you set up your altar, your Dharma books should be above the Buddha statues. They is because the Dharma books represent the Buddha's speech. Of all the ways that the Buddha benefits us, speech is the most emphatic one since we receive the most benefit from

it. Therefore we respect it the most and put it highest. Now often in the West, we have a bookshelf where we put the Buddha statues on the top and the books on the shelves (below). I don't know. Technically speaking the best thing would be to have the books higher.

Now sometimes in Tibet they put the books so high that nobody ever reads them. They have all the Kangyur and Tengyur wrapped up beautifully, because it says here that you are supposed to wrap your books and keep them clean. You put them in these glass cabinets and nobody ever reads them.

You just touch them with your head as you go by. That's a way to show respect and that's good. Maybe once a year somebody makes an offering and requests that the sutras be read and they are all taken down to be read. This is good, but it's limited.

From my viewpoint I would rather see Dharma books arranged in such a way that people see them and want to read them, rather than to have them kept so high that people find it troublesome to gain access to the books, "Oh I have to get a step ladder."

When you are reading a Dharma book, don't put your book down and put your coffee cup, your glasses or your phone bill on top of it. It's not because the Buddha, the Dharma, or the Sangha gets offended by this. It's a practice in mindfulness in how we treat material things. If we value the path to enlightenment, we will value the representations. We especially value the books because we learn so much about the path through the books that we want to treat it properly. It's like when you get married, you might have your wedding photographs but you don't put your dirty

dishes on top of it. You don't put your old shoes on top of a photograph of your child whom you care about because it ruins it. It is the same with Dharma books. It's a way of becoming mindful of how we interact with the things in our environment.

Especially important here is Dharma materials, like your old notes or even flyers from Dharma courses or things with Dharma words on it. The way to dispose of those is by burning or recycling them. In other words don't use your Dharma notes to line your garbage can, or something like that.

Actually technically speaking, they say to not step on any written word, or put your rubbish on it. In the West though, we have written words on the streets, on the sidewalks, on our shoes, and things like that. For the West we need to interpret it in terms of Dharma materials. Instead of just throwing them in the garbage, we should put them aside to burn. There is a very short prayer you can say. Even if you don't know the prayer, what you can do is think that you are sending the materials away but also asking more to come to you and asking that the Dharma reappear again in your life.

If you have bookshelves, keep your Dharma books on the high shelf. Don't put your playboy magazines and your consumer's guides on the top shelf and your Dharma books on the bottom shelf interspersed with various novels and shopping guides. Try to keep your Dharma books all together in one respectful area. Again this is training us to be aware of how we deal with things in our environment. It's very helpful. Often we are just spaced out in what we do with things. We don't pay any attention to where we put

things. Having this kind of guidelines makes us more mindful.

3. Having taken refuge in the Sangha:

a. Do not cultivate the friendship of people who criticize the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, who teach wrong views or who act unruly

Having taken refuge in the Sangha, the thing to abandon is cultivating friendships with people who criticize Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, people who criticize your teacher, people who have wrong views or people who are very unruly or do many negative actions. The reason for this is that we could be influenced by them. This does not mean that you remove these people from the field of your compassion. It doesn't mean that you cut off all your friendships with all your old friends and that anybody who is in the least bit immoral, you stick your nose up at them, turn away and say, "I am not going to associate with you." That is not the meaning of this.

The meaning of this is that we are very easily influenced by the things in our environment, especially by the people we cultivate friendships with. Therefore it's very important for us to cultivate friendships with people who are interested in creating virtuous actions and leaving behind harmful ones. We can clearly see this. Let's say, if you have a precept not to drink, if you hang around people who drink at every meal, it's going to be very difficult for you to keep that precept. If you hang around people who act very, very negatively, you become like that. If we

hang around people who are always criticizing the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, it's going to create doubt and confusion in our own mind. It might make us develop the skeptical, cynical mind that some of these people have.

The reason here for abandoning cultivation of these friendships is not because the people are bad or evil, but because we can be influenced in a harmful way since we still have defilements. However, we should definitely keep these people within the realm of our compassion. When we have a relationship with these people, we want to be kind, but we have to be attentive that we don't get influenced in a harmful way. If we cultivate friendships with people who don't value ethics, then our good friend, for example, in an attempt to help us, may ask us to get involved in a shady business deal. They think the shady business deal is a great way to make a lot of money. But it can be unethical and if we are close friends with that person, it becomes real sticky. How do we tell them we don't want to get involved? We may wind up getting involved and our ethics deteriorate.

This is why I am stressing that the group continues to meet [even if I'm away teaching elsewhere]. You cultivate Dharma friendships amongst each other. Dharma friends are incredibly important, because they are the people who are trying to go in the same direction that we are going in. They understand that part of us. They also want to keep good ethics. They are also trying to develop loving kindness. They aren't going to look at us and say, "Why are you meditating? It's better to watch TV." "Why are you reading that Dharma book? It's so boring." These are the people

who are going to appreciate our spiritual practice. Cultivating friendships with them is very helpful. We can take that good energy from our Dharma friends. As for our friends and relatives who aren't as interested in the Dharma, when we become very strong, we can share our good energy with them and become a positive influence on those people.

b. Develop respect for monks and nuns

The thing to practice in relationship to the Sangha, (this is another one that people go bananas over) is to respect the Sangha members, specifically monks and nuns, and not to get into this super critical mind. It is so easy for us to look at monks and nuns with a very critical mind. I remember when my teacher was teaching us this, he was telling us, "You guys, most of all, are the ones who criticize the monks and nuns because you are closer to them." We usually sit in lines according to our ordination order when we do puja, and Geshela was saying you can look up the line and start criticizing—this one burps; that one is sloppy; this one comes late; that one is dumb; this one doesn't clean up after himself; that one criticizes people; this one still gets angry; that one is uncooperative; this one doesn't tie his shoe laces. [Laughter.]

Geshela was saying with our critical mind we can go up and down the line and criticize everybody, but then what we are doing is when we get into that, we miss out on all the positive influence that these people can have on us. Even though the monks and nuns may not be perfect, still by the fact that they are trying to

keep good ethics, that part of them at least is setting a good example for us. By understanding in that way, we show respect towards them and not get into a criticizing mode. Showing respect towards monks and nuns doesn't mean that you grovel at their feet. It doesn't mean you go berserk and get uptight around them. It means that for the benefit of your own practice, you try and see their good qualities.

Now it may happen that you see people mess up. Monks and nuns are only human. We have faults and we mess up. The idea is that when you see somebody mess up, try not to focus on, "Why did that person mess up? They are a Sangha member. They are supposed to be perfect. They aren't keeping good ethics. They are supposed to be my example. I want a good example. They are letting me down?!" and go on a big rant and rave.

When we see people make mistakes, it is helpful to recognize that they are human beings. They can also come under the influence of their delusions and karma. Generate a feeling of compassion for them and try and help. There can be many different ways of helping. If you know the person well enough, you can go to them privately and ask if they need some help. With other people, you might have to go to their teacher and say something. Some things are no big deal. You just let go. If somebody didn't pick up after himself, you don't need to go tell the abbot, "This guy left his dirty socks on my floor!" [Laughter.] But on more serious breaches, you could talk to the person's teacher. You could talk to some of their other Dharma friends depending on their relationship with them. You could talk to them. Try and have a feeling of

compassion for them instead of getting into this critical mind. See that even if somebody messes up, still they are doing many things that are good. Even though they may break one vow, they may keep many others. Try in this way to get some benefit from the way we interact with people.

I find that people very often go to extremes and say, “Okay, you are a monk or a nun. You are up on some cloud. You are perfect. You never make any mistakes.” When they see you get annoyed, all of a sudden they lose their refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Simply because they saw one monk or nun get annoyed. Something isn’t right in that attitude. It’s expecting too much from people and going from the extreme of idolization and high expectation to the extreme of throwing the baby out with the bathwater, discarding the person’s good qualities along with the bad ones.

Questions and answers

Respond to wrongdoings with compassion

[Audience: inaudible]

Being accepting of the imperfections of monks and nuns is very much in line with our development of compassion, but sometimes we find it much harder to be compassionate towards people whom we consider more advanced than us. When a doctor makes a mistake, we file a malpractice suit. When we make a mistake, it’s okay. We should have compassion for everybody, but often in our culture we don’t.

The thing is, even if you investigate and find that somebody's doing something unethical, should you abandon the judgmental mind? Should you abandon criticism? Yes. We have to abandon the judgmental, critical mind in any case. Why? Because that mind is full of anger and jealousy. But that doesn't mean that you don't intervene. If somebody is doing something unethical, out of compassion you should intervene and prevent the harm from happening if you can. But you can do that without this very judgmental mind.

I see some cultural differences in people's attitude towards monks and nuns who make mistakes. In Asia, I don't think they tend to get into idolizing people quite as much. If you remember, at the psychology conference, it was mentioned, at least in the Japanese Jodo-Shinshu tradition, that they see their priests as older brothers and sisters in the practice, not as perfect human beings. He gave the example of a bouquet with a snake inside. They expect people to have faults. They don't flip out when it happens. Often the Tibetans are very much like that too. They don't get nearly as bothered when people do unethical things. Americans tend to get quite freaked out, or they tend to go into the whole denial trip. That's not saying that Asians don't deny. Very often it's very neatly swept under the rug and ignored. But in the West we have an especially hard time with this.

In the West, when things happen in churches or even in Buddhist groups, people either go to the extreme of denying it, covering it up and painting this person as glorious, or they go to the extreme of getting angry, belligerent, disillusioned and judgmental and critical and making a big scandal about it.

Personally speaking, I don't think either attitude is beneficial. If somebody's acting unethically and you know about it, it's something that needs to be dealt with. But it should be done without a critical, scandalous mind. It needs to be dealt with through compassion for the person who is acting unethically, compassion for the people that person harms, and compassion for yourself. Skillful intervention can resolve it.

In the case of the Tibetans, to have compassion towards people who are harming you is hard, and not all of the Tibetans do it. But the thing is that some of them are able to do it and you can see the beneficial results of that. Again, having compassion doesn't mean that you're inactive. For example, His Holiness the Dalai Lama is always telling people, "Don't hate the Chinese," even though they destroyed the country. But His Holiness certainly isn't passive in the situation. He works very actively for human rights in Tibet and Tibet's freedom.

Views on Sangha members who enjoy luxuries— investigate before jumping to conclusions

[Audience: inaudible]

I remember when I was in Malaysia, some people came up to me. Apparently a new temple had been built and there was a monk residing there. One man was upset because the monk had air conditioning in his room. "This monk has air conditioning! He's totally involved in the sense pleasure of samsara. This is totally degenerate!" This man was very upset

because he as a layperson didn't have air conditioning. Why should this monk who is supposed to be renounced have air conditioning? The monk should be able to put up with no air conditioning. The man was very upset about it. And I was thinking, "Wow, it must be so nice for this monk. He can meditate and do his work in peace without sweating all the time," because Malaysia is very hot. But in the eyes of this layperson, he couldn't see anything but the monk having air conditioning when he doesn't.

Actually, it depends on how that monk got the air conditioning. It is very possible that some devotee came into the temple and said, "Here's money. Use it for an air conditioner." When somebody gives you money for that, you have to use it as the patron asked. You can't divert it for another thing. If some patron came to the temple and told him to buy air conditioning, he has to accept the money and use it for the air conditioning, unless he can discuss it with the patron and convince him otherwise. I think we have to research and find out why this monk has the air conditioning before we criticize.

Sometimes people would come and say, "I saw these monks riding around in a Mercedes. Should a monk do that?" Again, how do I know? Maybe a follower invites them somewhere and comes to pick them up in a Mercedes. You can't say, "I'm sorry, go get a Volkswagen. I'm not going to ride in this." [Laughter.] Or sometimes, especially in Asia, people will offer cars to the temple. Maybe some devotee offered it, and the monk's using it. I can't say. Of course if the monk from his own side said, "Please give me a lot of money because I want a Mercedes,"

that's not so cool. But just because we see somebody riding in a Mercedes, we shouldn't jump to any conclusion. We don't know how they got it. We don't know what the situation is.

Before criticizing, I think it is better to investigate. That's what I would tell these people. "Go and ask him whose Mercedes it is, and why he's driving in it. Don't ask me because I don't know." But they didn't want to do that fearing they might offend him. Instead they preferred to gossip behind his back. That idea I don't like so much.

[Audience:] What if a monk who has an elaborate lifestyle tells you to live simply?

Well, I think living a simple life is very good advice. Leading a simple life doesn't mean that you have to go without air conditioning. Maybe you do a lot of work. You want to do meditation and having air conditioning would be very helpful. And if you can afford it, why not? I think it completely depends on the mind and on the motivation of everybody involved in the situation. If somebody offers you something that you didn't ask for, actually by your bodhisattva vows, you are supposed to accept it. Then maybe you can give it away to somebody else later. But if it's something that enables you to do your work better, you use it.

You may also encourage people to have simple lives because in general, it is better to lead a simple life. But that doesn't mean you are telling people, "Don't get things that might make your life easier" if making their life easier helps them to do their Dharma

practice better. In other words telling people to lead a simple life is helping them get free of the mind that says, “I need this and I have to have this and I want this and I can’t do anything unless I have all these things around me.” Is that clear?

[Audience:] What about in a situation like in a poor village, where Sangha members are living in great riches and the population is starving?

Again it depends on how they got the things. If it’s all contributed ethically, they can use it, but they may decide that rather than live very opulently themselves, they want to give some of the wealth back to the village. They may decide to do that. Sometimes you may encounter villagers who won’t accept anything. There are times when [lay] people refused to accept things I offered to them because I am a nun. They feel that they can’t take anything from a nun. I feel that if I offer people something, I want people to take it, but some people won’t accept.

People have to look at their own minds and their own situation. If you are living opulently as a religious person going, “I am so glad that I am a religious person because people make offerings to me. I don’t have to live like all these poor villagers,” then something is very wrong with your practice. But if you have a different attitude towards the things and you try to give it away but the people won’t accept it, or they will be very offended if you don’t accept their offering, then maybe you have to make use of some of the offerings.

I think what I am getting down to is, we have to

look at each individual situation before we evaluate.

Take refuge in the right objects

[Audience: inaudible]

You bring up a very interesting point in that in general in our life we take refuge in all sorts of samsaric things. We take refuge in the mirror. We take refuge in the clock. You know what is the real center of our refuge taking? The refrigerator! [Laughter.] That's where we really take refuge. And the telephone, the movies, our magazines and the television. The idea of taking refuge isn't anything new. We take refuge all the time in an attempt to stop our confusion and our suffering, but all these things are just wrong objects of refuge.

For our refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha to be worthwhile, it involves reducing our cravings for frivolous things. The real meaning of taking refuge is to help us overcome our craving. It's not like, "I'll make offerings to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and then I'll go eat some ice cream and some pie."

Common Guidelines for the Practice of Refuge

1. Mindful of the qualities, skills and differences between the Three Jewels and other possible refuges, repeatedly taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha

We have reviewed the qualities and the skills of the

Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Then we had a whole section on the differences between them, how to relate to each of them, and the special things that each one can give to us. We also had a whole section about the differences between the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha as objects of refuge and looking at other traditions, other teachings, other paths. The more we meditate on these, the greater the feeling of appreciation we have for having met the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. That leads us to spontaneously take refuge repeatedly. The refuge ceremony that helps us tap into the lineage of energy coming from the time of the Buddha can be done once or many times. But refuge is really a continuous growing process. We take refuge each morning, each evening, all the time during the day, and that increases our refuge throughout our life.

The more we contemplate the qualities and skills of the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, the deeper our refuge gets. I took refuge in 1975. At the time I took it, it was a very intense experience; but when I look back now at what I understood then, I think, “Mama Mia!” [Laughter.] because the refuge changes over that time. As you learn more and practice more, you begin to see how refuge relates very much to your daily life. Then the refuge gets deeper. Your whole attitude changes. Refuge is done repeatedly in this way.

If that sounds funny to you, it might be helpful to remember that His Holiness also takes refuge. If you look at the qualities of people like His Holiness and some other great holy beings and think that they also take refuge, then we can get some idea of where some of their qualities come from. Their qualities don't come from outer space, and it wasn't like they were

born with these qualities. These great leaders spent a lot of time cultivating the path. Why do you cultivate the path? It's because you have taken refuge. Refuge is making that decision to practice the path, to turn to the Triple Gem for guidance. Sometimes our egos don't like to look for guidance, but it's quite helpful to remember that the great leaders also do that.

2. Remembering the kindness of the Triple Gem, making offerings to them, especially offering your food before eating, offering prostrations and so on

When we remember the kindness of the Triple Gem—in other words, what the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha do to benefit us—then spontaneously the wish to show our respect to them through prostrations and the wish to show our feeling of gratitude through making offering come about. Again, these things aren't done because the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha need them, but they are expressions of our own feelings towards the refuge. Now, it might seem that when we start to do prostrations, sometimes there is no feeling at all. Or you do your water bowls in the morning, there is no feeling at all. So you might say, “There is no feeling. Why should I continue to do this?” But sometimes just the process of doing it might help us to clear away some things in our mind so that we begin to understand better why we are doing it, and that spontaneous feeling of affection and attraction towards Buddha, Dharma, Sangha can come. It's not like I have to do these things because I am a Buddhist. We do these things because we feel this kind of attraction and faith; we want to do them. Even though

we don't have the feelings right now, we know somehow by the process of doing this, it sets the stage for the questioning in our mind to go on so that those feelings can begin to arise.

Also, the Triple Gem is a very good field of positive potential. Because of their qualities, any karma we create in terms of them becomes very powerful. By offering and showing respect to them, there will be a very strong impact on our mind. If you offer and show respect to rock stars, that has an impact on your mind, too, and it shows you where your mind is going. That is why we offer and show respect towards the Triple Gem, because it makes an impact on the mind and it shows us where we are going.

Offering Food

In terms of making offerings, it could be that you want to have a shrine at your home and offer water or fruit or light, or whatever things you want to offer there; or you might go to a temple and make offerings there. Especially before we eat, we can make offerings of our food. Since we eat all the time (we never forget that, we're never too busy to eat), then it's an excellent time to create some positive potential while we are at it. No excuses that we don't have time for it. Doing the offering prayer before we eat is really important. I think that really sets us apart in some way. It makes us much more mindful than how we usually are when we are on automatic. You watch how people normally are around food. They are usually wolfing it down and completely mindless. The

mind is somewhere, who knows where, and they are just shoveling food into the mouth with no awareness of where the food came from or anything like that. Just the fact of sitting quietly and thinking a minute before you eat, I think, is very valuable in our life. It slows us down. It makes us think about where the food came from. We transform the food into beautiful wisdom nectar. We have a little Buddha made of light at our own heart, like our own fully actualized Buddha potential. We offer that nectar to the Buddha at our heart. When we eat, the light fills our body. It's like a whole meditation.

People talk about putting Dharma into daily life. This is one way to do it, because we are eating all the time. It's one very excellent way to put Dharma into daily life and it makes a big difference. I think it's nice to do it with our families also. One family that I stayed with on the tour had two little kids. Their son was five or six, and he would lead the offering prayer before dinner. It was a really neat thing, because the kids grow up with that tradition. They know the offering prayer and they lead it, and the whole family does it. I think it's really wonderful.

Even if you go out on a business lunch with people who aren't Buddhist, you can still offer your food. You don't need to sit there with your hands in prostration in the middle of the restaurant. You can just sit there with your eyes open and play with your napkin or your silverware, but inside you are offering your food. Nobody knows anything because you are playing with your napkin and silverware too, but your mind is doing something else. So there is always time to do this transformation thing.

I talked to one young woman who is just getting into the Dharma. When she gets up in the morning, she makes two cups of coffee. She puts one on the altar and she drinks the other cup. She thought of this all by herself. It's incredible, because this is what the Tibetans do. She thought of this because she really likes to have a cup of coffee in the morning. I thought it was so nice that she had this natural, spontaneous wish to connect in that way with Buddha, Dharma, Sangha.

Offering Prostrations

Another easy way to put Dharma into daily life is when you get up in the morning, get out of bed and make three prostrations. Then before you get into bed at night, again make three prostrations. It's a nice way to round out the whole day. In the morning, the first thought is of the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, really showing respect. It's not respect to an external Buddha, Dharma, Sangha; it is respect to our own human potential in its fully actualized form. Before we go to bed, touching base again with that potential, even just for the thirty seconds it takes to make three prostrations, is very valuable. You can do this kind of thing a lot in your life: small offerings, small respect, etc.

3. Being mindful of the compassion of the Triple Gem, encourage others to take refuge in the Triple Gem

When we are aware of the compassion of the Triple

Gem, that the Buddha cares more about us than we care for ourselves, we can encourage others to take refuge. Buddha has more compassion for us than we have for ourselves. Being mindful of the whole spiritual support system we have in our life to rely on the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, we can help others to take refuge. We can help them to contact the Dharma.

Now, this doesn't mean that you go out on the street corner to convert people to Buddhism. We don't have to go door to door to push and coerce people, but I think that it's good if we share with others what we have learned and how we have been benefited. Some people become Buddhists and they become closet Buddhists. It's like, "I can't tell anybody," and, "What are they going to think?" They do it very secretly. Probably lots of other people could benefit, but these people, because they are so caught up in what other people are going to think about them, don't bother to share things that happened in their daily life. I don't think we need to go around advertising and coercing people, but I think when colleagues and friends ask, "Oh, where did you go during the weekend?" you don't need to stumble and play with you napkin. You can say, "Oh, I went on a Buddhist retreat," or something like that. Then people are often curious and they get into Dharma like that. It's very helpful. Often, like I have been saying, just by our example, how we act, people get interested. It's like, "Well, what are you doing? You are not freaking out at work today when everybody else is freaking out." They become interested just by our example. Just our way of being can interest people.

For example, when His Holiness is here you can encourage all your friends and relatives to come to hear him speak. I mean, His holiness is totally societally acceptable. You don't need to be ashamed. He's a Nobel peace prize winner. There is nothing really to do with Buddhism, so to speak, he's a Nobel peace prize winner. You bring them there, or you share your Dharma books. Things like that. It can really benefit a great number of people.

4. Remembering the benefits of taking refuge, do so three times in the morning and three times in the evening

Last time we talked about the benefits of refuge: Refuge purifies negative karma. It accumulates good karma. It protects us from harm. It enables us to enter the gateway of the path. It helps us to attain enlightenment quickly. When we think about all these different benefits and spend some time in meditation thinking about them, then the wish to renew the refuge constantly comes, and so there is this practice of taking refuge three times in the morning and three times in the evening. This is a real nice way to round out your whole day. Instead of jumping out of bed and taking refuge in the refrigerator or the microwave or the telephone, we take refuge in the Triple Gem.

You can do it just by your own thought; or if you like to say prayers because prayers help you, then you can do even the short ones that we do at the beginning of teaching sessions here: *Namo Gurubhya, Namoh Buddhaya, Namoh Dharmaya, Namoh Sanghaya*. Or you can do the prayer starting with, "I take refuge in the

Buddha, Dharma, Sangha until I am enlightened.” You can do either of those. You just sit and do it three times in the morning when you get up and three times in the evening before you go to bed, to round out the day, to touch base. One of the big problems in our life is that we feel so scattered because we never sit down and stay still. We never touch base with our spiritual side. We just need to remember the benefits of doing that and a little bit of discipline. Then setting our mind to do it, and doing it. It doesn’t take so long, and we definitely benefit from it.

5. Do all actions by entrusting ourselves to the Three Jewels

Before we undertake projects or whatever, we can take refuge in the Three Jewels. Doing that makes us feel supported. It gives us a sense of confidence. Sometimes people call me because they have these incredible problems and they want me to help them with their problems. It’s like, “Mommy Tara, help!” [Laughter.] Refuge really works at that time, when you want to help somebody but you don’t know what to do. You take refuge, and something happens and you are able to do something. Or if you are in a frightening situation, you take refuge and that helps calm the fear, or it can even help avert the danger.

I was once on one of these twelve-seat prop jets flying over a storm going kerplunk, kerplunk, kerplunk. It is just amazing! It was like the Madderhorn at Disneyland. You just take refuge at that time. It helps greatly because you are putting your mind in a positive direction. Then if you live,

great; if you don't live, you've made some preparation. Your mind is peaceful. [Laughter.] In all these situations, then, to try and constantly renew the refuge, to do everything we do by taking refuge. I think when we are in difficult situations, when we really want to help and we don't know what to do, or when we are afraid, or when we are really getting pushed to our limits, or when we are exhausted, or whatever it is, just doing refuge in our mind is very, very helpful.

6. Do not forsake our refuge at the cost of our life, or even as a joke

If somebody is sitting there telling you that they are going to kill you unless you give up your refuge, you don't give up your refuge. You can say to that person anything you want to say, words are words; but in your heart, you don't give up your refuge. If you have this refuge and you give it up, what do you have then? What do you have and what can you rely on? It's like that part, that kernel, that core of you, that spiritual part of you that is so meaningful that gives you some sense of purpose in your life; if you give that up what are you going to have? Even if you live, what is the sense? We do not give up our refuge in a serious situation. We also do not give it up flippantly, like a joke. If we give up our refuge, our whole practice degenerates. You can see it very clearly. If you take refuge, you are entering into the door of the Dharma. You are going to do it. If you give up your refuge, you are exiting, and then what do we have left in our life? You still have the microwave and the refrigerator, but

... no great meaning in that. [Laughter.]

More Guidelines

These aren't directly included in the lam-rim outline, but still they are quite useful.

1. In analogy to taking refuge in the Buddha, commit ourselves whole-heartedly to a qualified spiritual master

If we trust the Buddha as a teacher, well, the Buddha is not around right now, so what are we going to do? In analogy to that, we are going to make contact with qualified spiritual teachers and entrust our spiritual guidance to their care. You can see how this fits in with taking refuge in the Buddha, because if we were alive at the time of the Buddha, the Buddha is going to be the one who tells us what to practice and what to abandon. Well, the Buddha isn't alive right now, at least not in that particular body, in that particular manifestation, so how are we going to get the teachings? We get them through our teacher. Like Amchog Rinpoche pointed out, even if Shakyamuni Buddha appeared on this earth, he wouldn't say anything different from what a qualified teacher would teach. In doing that, it helps to make our refuge in the Buddha quite solid.

2. In analogy to taking refuge in the Dharma, listen to and study the teachings as well as put them into practice in our daily life

What are we going to do having taken refuge in the Dharma? Well, we have to learn it. We learn it by studying it, hearing it and discussing it with other people and, of course, by putting it into practice in our lives. Putting it into practice is what the whole thing is about. You might have a great doctor, great nurses and great medicine, but if you don't take the medicine, you don't get well. If we don't practice the Dharma, the mind doesn't change. This is why it keeps coming back to practice. That doesn't mean we need to be perfect, ideal Buddhists and have some kind of glorified image of how we would be if we were a perfect Buddhist. That is ridiculous. We probably all have that image (which, of course, we never meet up with), but that is not the point. That is irrelevant. What we need to do is to try and put into practice whatever we have heard, and receive the benefit from it. Practicing the Dharma always helps, and by helping ourselves, then we can help other people better.

3. In analogy to taking refuge in the Sangha, respect the Sangha as our spiritual companions

Here Sangha is referring specifically to the monks and nuns, although the term Sangha in the west is sometimes used in a very general way. When you read it in the text, it refers specifically to the monks and nuns. The reason for respecting ordained beings as our spiritual companions is not because they are on some kind of hierarchical trip, but because they have decided to devote more time to the practice than we have decided to devote to it. Now, whether any individual monk or nun practices well is a completely

different ball game. But the Sangha in general is a group of people who have decided to devote a lot of time to practice. By looking at their example, looking at them as spiritual friends, then that helps our practice, because hopefully they are a little bit further on the path than us. They become like our big brothers and big sisters who can guide us. Paying respect isn't some kind of hierarchical trip. Rather, it's some way of deriving benefit from these people.

Then if you are going to broaden it, you can say Sangha also means the general Buddhist community. I keep emphasizing the importance of Dharma friendship and meeting with your Dharma friends and discussing the teachings together. It's incredibly important. We should look upon the other lay members of the community as our spiritual companions, because we are all learning, studying and doing things together. It's helpful to respect them for their efforts in the practice; to not compete with them, not get jealous of them and not compare ourselves to them, but to learn from their example, rejoice and be inspired by what they do. Similarly, if somebody is having a hard time, contact them and talk with them. If somebody hasn't come to teachings for a while, see what's going on. Really reach out and take care of each other.

It's funny, because we are all saying, "I want to slow down. I want to be more compassionate," and yet we fill our lives up with all sorts of stuff and when one of our Dharma friends is in trouble, we have no time for a five-minute phone call to see how they are. We just fill our lives up with so much stuff, running, running, running and then we get totally frazzled. I

think a big thing in our life is to get our priorities very clear, very straight and live our lives according to what is important to us. We don't have to be like everybody else, running around from here to there. There is enough freedom in this country for us to schedule our own lives the way we want. If we fill up our calendar and make our lives hectic, we can't blame society. We are the ones who made that choice.

There is no big society with a capital 'S' that fills up our appointment book for us and makes us frazzled. We are the ones who get on the phone and make all the appointments and fill everything up, then complain afterwards. Really, there is a lot of freedom in this society. It is not a communist state where people make you work when you don't want to. We have some control over how much we work. You might say, "If I don't work, I will get fired." Well, maybe it's more important to have more time even if it means less money and less work. There is enough freedom here where we can try and arrange things, maybe not in a perfect way, but we do have some power. We don't have to be pushed along by the elements of the society.

[Audience: inaudible]

The question is regarding parents who have to work outside of the home to support their kids, then come home and have household duties to do. What do they do in this case? I'm going to address it very generally here, because people have very different needs. Nowadays everybody needs to work, and everybody needs to work full-time because everybody needs

more money. People think they need all this money to support their kids. They are busy working to earn more money, so the kids do not feel loved and they feel rejected. So then they'll have to use all the extra money they make to pay for their kids to go to a psychologist. I think sometimes we need to really see what it means to take care of a child? Is it giving your time and giving your love? Or is it making \$100 million and giving them yet another sweater, another pair of skates and other things? What's really important to give to our kids?

In single parent households, the parent definitely needs to work. You come home and sometimes you are a bit frazzled, but your kid needs some help. I think sometimes it can be helpful to get into a pattern with your child of what you do when you come home. We come home, sit and breathe for five minutes, and then we do the housework. We pace ourselves instead of being in a frazzle to do so much as soon as we get home.

If you have very young children, you can get up a little earlier to do your meditation; or your child gets used to you meditating and they come and curl up with you when you are meditating. Little, small children can do that, but it helps to get the kids in that kind of habit, also. In terms of household duties, maybe engaging the kids in helping to do them, so that doing the household chores isn't just something you do to get it done, but it is something that we all do together so we spend time together. We can spend time together cleaning and we can play while we clean instead of, "Oh, God, I have to vacuum. Will you dust because I have to vacuum?" It's like "Well,

we can do it together and we can talk,” and it can be a time for human contact. It depends a lot on our attitude. Does that help at all?

[Audience: inaudible]

I think there is always a choice. But if you want a certain living standard, maybe there isn't a choice. When you meet a tough situation, remember that a tough situation has many variable factors in it. Maybe we can look at it more globally and see what kind of variables we could change. As soon as we say “I have no choice and my life is berserk,” and we repeat that mantra to ourselves over and over again, we will become berserk. But if we try and look at the situation and say, “OK. I am going through a difficult time. There is an economic problem so I have to work a lot. But I do have choice. I can come home and sit and hold my baby for five minutes. There are five minutes to hold the baby”, or “There are ten minutes to talk to the teenager”, or “There are fifteen minutes to play catch with your third grader.” Or, you engage the kids in things around the home so that you are doing things together.

So I think a lot of it depends on our attitude. As soon as we get in a frazzled mental state ... you see, it's a vicious circle. The environment being berserk makes us berserk, but as soon as we get berserk we make the environment more berserk. So we can try and break it somehow starting with ourselves. It takes effort, but it can be done, because if we get into this mentality that it can't be done, then, well, if it can't be done, why are you complaining? [Laughter.]

4. Train in accordance with the good examples that the Sangha set

When we see people doing something great, see them as an example and rejoice in it, whether they are ordained monks or nuns, or other Dharma practitioners—whoever it is that we see. This is difficult for us in our culture because we are so used to competing with other people, so that when they do well we feel lousy. This is a call to completely change our attitude so that when other people do something well, we feel really inspired and rejoice. We try and act like that too, instead of getting into a mentality of feeling miserable when somebody else does something well, then trying to trip them up so that they fall flat on their face the next time.

Again, it is coming completely from the mind, isn't it? When somebody does something well, we can either be jealous or we can rejoice. It doesn't depend on the external situation; it depends totally on our own mental state. But as soon as we get jealous or we compete with other people, then look what we do to our environment. Look what we do to our relationships with those people and look what we do to our own mind. As soon as we start comparing ourselves with people and compete, we are never satisfied with what we do. There is no satisfaction in our own mind.

Whereas if people do something well, or people have some good fortune (be it in a worldly way or in this context we are talking about doing something well in a Dharma way) we can rejoice at it, feel happy, and see that person as a good example for us. Then we are

happier. They are happier. The world is better because everybody is trying to improve himself or herself. It totally depends on the mind. Our habit of competing and comparing might be quite ingrained, we have to work on that; but again, this is why at the end of the day, we stop and we review what we did during the day. Then we can start to notice when we do that and start to counteract it.

5. Avoid being rough and arrogant, running after any desirable object that we see and criticizing anything that meets with our disapproval. Be friendly and kind to others and be more concerned with correcting our own faults than with pointing out those of others

Definitely something to train in, isn't it? Incredible advice here. This mind that likes to be arrogant, that likes to compare ourselves with others, that likes to put down other people because we feel that if we put them down, then we must be good. How does putting somebody else down make us good? That mind is really something to be abandoned.

Similarly, the grasping, greedy mind that wants to get its fingers in every desirable object possible is to be abandoned. That is the mind that makes us slightly bananas because we are running after one thing after another thing after another thing. This guideline is saying we don't need to do that. Our whole society may do it, but we don't need to. We don't need to run after every desirable thing. We don't need to be the best dressed. We don't need to eat the most fantastic food. We don't need to always be best in the office.

We don't need to always tell everybody how wonderful and glorious we are. Everybody else may be trying to do that or a great number of people in society may do that, but we don't have to do that. The Buddha is really challenging us.

It's amazing. In this land where everybody is so individualistic, there is an incredible emphasis on conforming. We don't have to be as individualistic; we don't have to conform either. We can choose how we want to be. Nobody else runs our mind.

6. As much as possible avoid the ten destructive actions, and take and keep precepts

This is basically talking about how to get along well in society: abandon destructive actions. We are going to get along a lot better with other people if we don't criticize, gossip, lie and do things like that. In addition, to really increase our practice of ethics, it's helpful to take precepts. Either taking some or all of the five lay precepts or doing the Mahayana precepts for twenty-four hours. It is an incredible practice of mindfulness, very good for the mind. That is a real way to act our refuge and start putting the feet on the path.

7. Have a compassionate and sympathetic heart towards all other sentient beings

This is the essence of the Dharma—to develop the compassionate, sympathetic heart, and to develop that whenever we can, sitting in traffic or wherever we go. I forget who it was, but somebody recently said they drive quite a bit to work. They are listening to Dharma

tapes in the car; they are doing mantra; they are reflecting on the teachings; they really use the time in the car very wisely. I thought, “That’s great.”

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

8. Make special offerings to the Three Jewels on Buddhist festival days

[Not recorded.]

Questions and answers

[Audience: inaudible]

Well, if you are doing offerings before your altar, you would make prostrations first, then offer, and then you could sit down and do refuge. I do that on a daily basis. But even before I make offerings on the altar, when I first get up in the morning and before I get out of bed, I take refuge and generate a good motivation. Then when I turn on the light, I think that I am offering light to the Buddha. Then I get out of bed and immediately make three prostrations. So you can do these every morning. You can mix the order up. [Laughter.]

[Audience: inaudible]

You might want to prostrate before you take the water bowls down, or maybe you don’t. I prostrate periodically throughout the day, but the last thing I do before I go to bed is always to make three

prostrations. Maybe you want to do it in a slightly different order. See what feels comfortable. You might, if you are doing prostrations, take the water bowls down and then do refuge. Or you might take the water bowls down and take refuge, then do prostrations and go to bed. Also, you can take your water bowls down at dusk time. You don't need to wait till just before bedtime.

[Audience:] Why do we offer water on the altar?

The idea of offering water is that since we are not attached to water, we can offer it wholeheartedly. It's not offered with a miserly mind. We can really give it because it is so plentiful. The tradition is to have seven offering bowls, although it doesn't really matter. There is this story about the meditator up in the mountains. All that he has is one bowl, so he offers water to the Buddha in it. Then when he has to drink tea, he asks the Buddha's permission to use the cup, and he throws the water out and has tea. So we can be flexible. [Laughter.]

It's a really nice ritual to get into. It takes me a while to wake up in the morning, so I can do this while I am still in the process of waking up. What you do is, you wipe the bowls out and stack them upside down. We don't put the bowls right side up on the altar because that is like somebody offering you an empty bowl. (It doesn't make our mind happy to be offered an empty bowl, so we don't put empty dishes on the altar.) You stack them upside down, then you hold them in you hand stacked up, and you put water in the top one. Then you pick up the top one and you

pour almost all the water out, but not quite. Then you put that one down. That way it isn't empty when you are putting it on the altar. Then you go to the second bowl and you pour almost all of the water out but you keep some in and then you put that one down. You do this as you go along and then when you have all seven of them out, then you go back to the first bowl and you fill them up.

We keep the bowls a rice grain apart. In other words, we do not keep the cups too close or too far apart, and we keep them at some uniform distance apart. Also, not to fill them to overflowing and not to be chintzy with the water, but you fill them up to the level which is a rice grain distance from the top. It's a mindfulness practice, how we relate to physical objects. It makes us mindful of what we are doing.

Then when you offer the water bowls you say "OM AH HUM" three times. That kind of consecrates it. Think that you are not just offering Seattle tap water, but mentally make it into blissful wisdom nectar. This beautiful, delicious, scrumptious nectar that you are offering to all the Buddhas in the ten directions, all the holy beings wherever they are. hung
When you set them up, you set them up from your left to your right. When you take them down, you take them down from your right to your left. You pour the water back into the pitcher and turn the bowls upside down.

CHAPTER 9

Karma

When we look at our precious opportunity, see how rare it is and how much we can do with it, but that it won't last forever, then we get a little concerned about what's going to happen if we continue on with our same old craziness. We start to look for some guides to show us a positive direction to take in life. Here we turn to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha for guidance, for refuge. The first teaching that they give us is the teaching on 'karma', or the functioning of cause and effect. It is actually at this point that our Dharma practice really begins. In other words, it is with the observance of cause and effect that we begin to practice. Cause and effect permeates everything we do; it permeates all of our daily activities.

Science and Karma

Science investigates cause and effect on a physical plane. You mix certain chemicals together and it produces a certain result, or you look at certain stars in the sky and you try to trace back their causes. 'Karma' is talking about causality on a mental level, and 'karma' refers to actions. Karma refers to the things that we say, do, think and feel, and the karma creates imprints on our mindstreams which then bring the results in terms of what we experience later on.

With science, you can see or you can try and see causality. However, we can't see electrons and protons and we can't see individual molecules of things, yet we still believe in how they function. Well, with karma, we can often see what we do, we can hear what we say, and we recognize what we think and feel. We can't see the imprints that are left on our mindstream though. Those aren't made of atomic things. We can't measure them. Even if they were, as I said, you wouldn't be able to see individual atoms. What I'm getting at is, just because we can't see something, we shouldn't say it doesn't exist. We can't see atoms yet we know they exist. Karmic imprints left on our mind from our actions equally exist even though we can't see them.

One of my teachers said that we shouldn't be like nomads who don't believe in airplanes simply because they haven't seen them. There are people who say "I haven't seen it, therefore I don't believe it!" They do that in terms of airplanes; in terms of people landing on the moon. We look at that and say, "That's dumb!", and yet with other things that we haven't been able to see with our eyes, we're completely convinced that they don't exist. You see, we are not completely consistent in our way of discriminating 'existent' and 'non-existent' here. What I'm getting at is we need to have an open mind to recognize how causality works on the mental plain. It's not something that is atomic which could be measured by microscopes or telescopes or other measuring instruments.

Karma is Not Retribution

It is very important when we talk about karma, to understand that it is quite different from the Judeo-Christian idea of retribution. I have found this to be a very common misconception. We may be listening to teachings on karma but we hear them through Christian ears, and we get completely confused. We are not hearing what the Buddha said, we are hearing what we were told when we were five years old in Sunday school. It is important that as we listen to this, to try and listen with a fresh attitude. That is why I start out saying that our actions bringing results has nothing to do with reward and punishment. There is no idea of reward and punishment in Buddhism. Having a system of reward and punishment assumes that there is somebody there running the universe, deciding who gets the rewards and who gets the punishment. This is not the case in Buddhism.

According to Buddhism, nobody is running the universe, nobody is pulling the puppet strings. Nobody is sending you here or there. Our life is completely created by the force of our own mind. Nobody is dishing out rewards and punishments. When we create a cause, it naturally brings a result that corresponds to that causal energy. We have all been busy planting flowers in the spring. When the flowers grow, they are the results of the seeds that you planted, but they are not the punishment of the seeds and they are not the reward of the seeds. They are just the results of the seeds.

This is important to understand because as we start discriminating different kinds of actions and the

different kinds of results that they bring, it is tempting to think “Oh ... Somebody did a destructive action. They are getting punished because they are a bad person.” That is totally out of the ballpark from Buddhist theory!

First of all, in Buddhism our actions may be harmful but that doesn't mean we are bad people. There is a difference between the action and the person who does the action. All the people have Buddha potential but their minds may be overwhelmed by garbage so they act in a harmful way. It doesn't mean they are harmful, evil, bad, sinful people. This is a big difference. Second of all, just because somebody made a mistake, it doesn't mean that they are getting punished. It's just that if you plant a certain seed, it brings a certain kind of flower or fruit or vegetable. It's not a reward and not a punishment.

I've tried talking about karma to Jewish groups. It is very difficult to talk about karma to Holocaust survivors. They go completely bananas, hearing it through Judeo-Christian ears. Karma has nothing to do with deserving suffering. There is no such idea whatsoever in Buddhism.

Everything Comes from the Mind

In Buddhism we talk about how everything comes from the mind. Remember mind doesn't mean brain; it doesn't mean intellect. Mind refers to all of our conscious processes—our feelings, our perceptions. There are several meanings when we say everything

comes from the mind. In particular, one of the meanings is that the source of our experiences in life is our own consciousness, in the sense that if I experience happiness, it comes from my own actions. My actions are motivated by my mind. If I experience pain, that too comes principally, though not solely, from my own actions. Once again, the source of my actions comes down to my motivation, my consciousness. This is one of the meanings when we refer to the mind as the source of everything. There is nobody outside to blame or accuse. We can't blame or praise God, because according to Buddhism, there is nobody running the universe.

Buddha did not invent causality. Causality is just the natural functioning of the way things exist. Buddha merely described how it works. This again is important to understand. Buddha did not invent positive and negative actions. Buddha didn't say, "This is a negative action because I said so. If you don't do what I say you had it!" Buddha just described things in the same way that a doctor describes, "You are sick because there is such a virus." The doctor didn't create the virus. The doctor didn't create the link between the virus and the illness. The doctor just describes it. Once you know the description then you can try to avoid that kind of virus. You don't want to get that kind of sickness again. There isn't all this heavy value judgment attached to the Buddha's notion of causality. We need to spend some time thinking about this.

Now, if you have your Lamrim outline, look at it. You will see that there are three major sub-divisions of the topic of karma:

- Thinking about the general aspects of karma.
- Thinking about the specific aspects of karma.
- Having considered cause and effect, how to engage in positive actions and avoid the destructive ones.

Actual Way to Consider the General Aspects of Karma

We will first talk about the actual way to consider the general aspects of karma. There are four general aspects.

1. Karma is definite

The first general aspect is that ‘karma is definite’. What this means is that if somebody experiences happiness, it is definite that it came from a constructive action. If they experience pain, it is definite that it came from a destructive action. It is never the case that you experience pain as a karmic result of acting constructively. In other words, what we are getting at here is that there is a very definite relationship between the cause and the result. If you plant plums you’ll get plums. If you plant peaches, you get peaches. You can’t plant plums and get peaches. And peaches do not come from chili seeds. There is a definite relationship in cause and effect here. In terms of karma, this is also the case.

This is really quite profound. Whenever we’re happy, it’s helpful to sit and think, “Oh this is coming from my own constructive actions. That’s the

principal cause. There are cooperative conditions (I just won a lottery) but the principal cause is the karma. The cooperative conditions are these nice people who give me the money and, of course, my treasured lottery ticket. But there is a definite link between the happiness and the principal cause (the karma) which is some action that I did previously.

Similarly every time we experience pain, it's helpful to understand that it comes from our own harmful actions. Other people may be cooperative conditions, they may yell or scream or beat us, but the real principal cause for being in that situation to start with, comes from our own action. There is nothing outside to blame or praise. This is quite profound. When we understand this, it gives us a tremendous feeling of being able to do something about our situation. Instead of being at the mercy of someone or something, or just attributing it to 'nature' over which we have no control, we come to realize that the source of our own experience of happiness and pain is our own mind. We realize that we can do something about it—create positive causes, abandon the harmful ones and purify harmful ones. There is a tremendous sense of empowerment that comes from understanding karma in this way.

Because Buddha had clairvoyant power, he was able to see what kind of causes produce what effects. Whenever sentient beings experience pain, he was able to see what actions caused them, and these actions are called 'destructive' actions. Whenever others experience happiness, he was able to see what actions caused them, and these actions are called 'positive' or 'constructive' actions. The breakdown

into constructive, destructive and neutral actions arose in relationship to the kind of results they bring. This is what I meant previously when I said the Buddha didn't say, "This is a negative action because I said so." He only described what was actually happening.

2. Results of an action increase

The second quality of karma is that the results of actions increase. The results are expandable. Karma, again, means intentional action, things that we say, do, think and feel. We might do one small action but the result of that might be quite large, in the same way that you plant one small apple seed and you get an entire apple tree. Many results coming from one simple cause. This is important to remember because sometimes we say, "Well, it is only a little white lie. It won't hurt anything." We rationalize and make excuses. If we understand karma, we'll understand that a little white lie might leave a small imprint but that imprint can get nourished. It can increase. It can expand and bring many results.

Or sometimes we might say, "Oh, I can only sit and meditate for five minutes. Oh I'm so lousy!" Here again, it is important to remember that five minutes is a small cause but it might bring a very, very big result because of the expandable nature of karma. The point is, as much as possible, we want to refrain even from small destructive actions. As much as possible, we want to put our energy into even small constructive ones, because of the expanding nature of an action.

3. If an action is not done, one will not meet with its results

The third quality is that if the cause hasn't been created, the result will not be experienced. If you don't plant the seeds, you don't get any flowers. The seeds aren't there, you also don't get any weeds. You hear, for example, of a freak accident, a plane crash or a train crash. Some people get killed while some people don't. Why is this so? Well, some have created the cause, let's say, to be wounded, and some actually have created the cause to be killed. If you don't create the cause, you don't get the result. Or people may be doing very similar kinds of businesses, and some will be successful and some won't be successful. Again this has to do with karma—some people have created the cause for their business to be successful; other people haven't.

In our practice, too, if we don't create the cause to have realizations and insights, we are not going to get them. It is not enough just to pray, "Buddha please, make my mind this and make my mind that," because if we don't create the causes we don't get the results.

I used to tease the people in Singapore. Many of them (those who don't know very much about Buddhism) go to the temples and pray to win the lottery. This is a big thing in Singapore. "May I win a lottery. May my son and daughter get good jobs and give me money. May the family be wealthy." They pray so much but when somebody comes along and asks for a donation for some charity, their answer is "No. We want the money for our family." This is a good example of if you don't create the cause you

don't get the result. The karmic cause of being wealthy is being generous. If you aren't generous, then all these prayers to be wealthy are like talking to outer space because the principal cause isn't there to begin with.

If we want realizations, we have to put some energy into creating the cause for it. I think we want to try to be as consistent as we can in creating the causes for understanding, progress and improvement in our mind, but we shouldn't get impatient for the results to come. If the causes are created, the results will come. When you plant the seeds in the ground and you add water and fertilizer and there is ample sunshine, you know that the seeds are going to grow. You don't have to stand over them and say "Come on ... grow!" or "Why aren't you growing?" or "I planted you a whole week ago [laughter], now where are you?" We know that if we put all the causes there, the flowers are going to come.

Similarly, with our practice. If we are content to create the causes, to try and avoid the negative actions, to work out a kind and gentle motivation, to try and take care of others as much as we can, then these kinds of actions will automatically bring results. We don't need to get impatient, "How come I am not a Buddha yet?!" Just create the cause. The result will come when all the causes are there assembled.

4. Actions don't go to waste without yielding a result

The last of the general qualities of karma is that the actions we do leave imprints on our minds and these

imprints don't get lost. We might do certain actions, but the results may not come about instantaneously. It might take some time for the results to come, but they will definitely come. There are many things we do in our life that we know won't bring result for many years, but we do them anyway. We know that eventually, the result will come. You might make some kind of investment but you don't collect the interest for another thirty years. But the result is going to come. It is not going to get lost, unless the economy goes real bad. On a material level, things can still be very uncertain, but karma is never uncertain. [Laughter.] In other words, if the actions are created, the karma will never go to waste. The action eventually brings fruition. This is important to remember.

That doesn't mean, however, that karma is cast in concrete. There is a lot of flexibility in karma. Let's say you steal something. That will bring a harmful result some time in the future unless we purify it. A seed will eventually bear fruit unless you take away the water or the fertilizer, or burn the seed or take it out of the ground. In other words you can interfere in some way.

Similarly, we can interfere with the karmic imprints on our mindstream. This is where the process of purification comes up. We learned the practice of Confession to the Thirty-Five Buddhas. Doing this is like taking away the water and the fertilizer so that our negative karmic imprints won't ripen so well. They're going to ripen later, or when they ripen they won't ripen as strongly or they won't last very long. In other words we are interfering with the ripening

process of it. As we purify more and more, and as we begin to understand emptiness, we will actually be able to burn the karmic seeds so that they can't bear fruit. Eventually, we will be able to pull them out completely and eliminate them. This is the real value of purification. It helps to stop the ripening so that we don't receive the kind of results that we don't want.

Similarly, our constructive actions can be interfered with. We might be very kind and go out of our way to act constructively. Those imprints are on our mind and we may even dedicate them. But then if we ...

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

It is like taking away the water and fertilizer of our constructive actions so that they can't ripen. Anger and wrong views also do this. When we generate very obstinate wrong views, we're interfering with the ripening of our positive karma. This is why it is important not only to put effort into acting constructively and to dedicate it so it goes in the direction we want, but also to avoid anger and wrong views. These negative attitudes run counter to the effort we've been putting in.

Karma is Not Linear

Karma, as we talk about it, might sound very linear in some ways. You do this and you get this; you do that and you get that. But really, there is an incredible amount of flexibility within karma making it not fated and predetermined. We might act destructively. This

leaves an imprint on the mind which might bring rebirth as a cow, or a donkey, or a horse, or a frog, or a pigeon, or others—there is a whole variety there. It is not cast in concrete. It is not “You step on a worm deliberately therefore you’re going to be reborn as a worm—this particular kind of worm!”

For a seed to ripen, you need to have the principal cause—the seed, and you need to have the cooperative conditions that affect how the seed grows. If you provide lots of water, fertilizer and sunshine, it grows huge. If you use a certain kind of fertilizer, it may grow in one way. With another kind of fertilizer, it may grow in another way. Or it may grow a little bit and then fizzles out. There is lot of flexibility. You have the potency in the seed, but you can’t predict exactly how big the apples are going to be, because it depends on a lot of other factors too: the cooperative conditions.

Similarly, the karmic seeds in our mindstream has a certain potency, a certain energy that produces a certain kind of result. But exactly what that result is and how it works, is going to be influenced by many other factors. Things are not predetermined; they are not fated to happen. We can’t control the results. According to the situations we put ourselves in, we encourage either the ripening of our constructive or destructive karma. If we put ourselves in situations where we’re around a lot of people who really don’t have much ethical grounding or aren’t very responsible and are reckless, we’re setting the stage for our own negative karma to ripen. If we put ourselves in other situations we’re setting the stage for our positive karma to ripen.

That doesn't necessarily mean that if you go on a certain environment, for sure your negative karma is going to ripen and if you go on another one, for sure your positive karma will ripen. It doesn't mean that. But it does mean that there are other conditions that work that are going to affect how things ripen, when they ripen, and how big or small the results are going to be.

Although things are not fated and predetermined, we cannot go beyond the scope of causality. It is not all that fixed and rigid, but on the other hand, things don't happen out of chance for no reason at all. Even on a scientific level, nothing happens by chance; things all have causes. In terms of our lives, too, what happens to us, who we are, the situation we're born in, what we experience—they don't just happen out of clear blue sky. It doesn't happen just by chance. If there were no cause and effect and there were just chance, then you could plant daisy seeds and grow corn. If you plant daisies, it is just chance what you will get. That doesn't make much sense. Things are not beyond the scope of cause and effect. On the other hand, it isn't so rigid that things are fixed and cast in concrete.

Questions and answers

Before I go on, let's see if there are any questions so far.

[Audience:] What about things that happen that affect a whole group of people—how does it relate to karma?

There is what we call collective karma and individual karma. Collective karma is an action that we do together with a group of people. And because we've done it together with a group of people, we experience the result as a group. For example, we're all sitting here as a group. This is a result of some kind of karmic action that we did together in the past, that was obviously something positive, constructive, virtuous, because we find ourselves in good circumstances where we have the ability to listen to teachings again.

Yet within that, each one of us sitting here is experiencing something slightly different. This is our individual karma. What we are doing now is a result of something we did together in the past, yet it is also a result of individual things we did in the past. We're each experiencing something slightly different. Somebody might have a stomach ache. Somebody might be encouraged hearing the teachings. Somebody else might be really restless. That's an individual thing.

From the point of view of creating a cause, we're gathered here for a constructive purpose, and this is going to create a collective karma for us to experience a similar situation again in the future. In addition, we are also creating our individual karma. People are thinking different things, we are acting in different ways, and that is going to bring individual results that we each will experience as an individual.

We experience things together as a group because we've created the cause together as a group. This is why it is important to be careful what groups we put ourselves in. If we are in a certain group without any

choice, we should decide whether we agree with the purpose of that group or not. For example, you are drafted into the army or somebody comes to your house and makes you go to the army. You don't have any choice. You don't have any choice about whether you are going to go into the army, but you do have a choice about whether you agree with the purpose of it or not. If you go in and you say, "Yeah, yeah, rah rah, I want to kill the enemy!", it creates that kind of imprint on the mind. If we are in the army but we're saying, "I don't want to be here! I don't want to kill anybody", then you don't get that collective karma from being in that group of people that's designed for that specific purpose.

You brought up racism. It applies equally to genocide or other things. Let's say you're in a concentration camp, be it at Auschwitz or the ones that we made in Arizona during World War II. You are there with the others because of a collective karma. You are experiencing the result together as a group from having created the cause together as a group.

Now, it could be that the people who are the victims in this life were the perpetrators of the harm in a previous life. In the context of the Middle East, the Palestinians could have been Jews before and the Jews could have been Germans before. Or consider that the blacks in America could have been white slave-owners before, or that the whites could have been blacks before. When you think about these, it is silly to cling on to our identity even as groups. Groups change too.

[Audience: inaudible]

What you're saying is that your own thinking in relationship to the group is going to determine what karma you create. That is very true. If you agree with the purpose of the group, you get the karma of the actions that the group does according to its purpose. If the Americans go to war and you say, "Ra Ra America, I'm all for the Americans!" and you rejoice at all the people that the Americans killed, you get the karma that is related to killing. You are rejoicing at the actions that fulfill the purpose of this group.

If, in your mind, you're very clear, "I do not agree with taking other lives. I am not for this at all," then you don't get the karma of those people killing even though you might have an American passport. In fact, you probably get a lot of good karma because of taking a non-violent stand and being very opposed to killing.

There are a few things to take note here. First is that when we are in groups, to be aware of whether we agree with the purpose of the group or not. Also, to be aware of how we rejoice. We also accumulate karma from the things we rejoice at. If you read the newspapers and you say, "WOW! So and so just got his reputation completely smashed. I'm so glad this jerk got it!" [Laughter.] Even though you didn't do it, you created the karma of destroying somebody else's livelihood. If we rejoice at other people's negative actions, we create the karma that is similar to doing that. We have to be careful what we rejoice at.

In a more positive vein, a Dharma group is formed for the purpose of attaining enlightenment for the benefit of sentient beings. When we are here doing something together, again because of collective

karma, we are sharing in each other's positive potential. In the same way as the soldiers all share in each other's negative karma, we share in each other's positive karma. We agree with the purpose of the group. If we see other people doing constructive actions, even though we haven't done them or can't do them, if we rejoice and have a sense of happiness and gladness, then we create a lot of positive potential simply by rejoicing in that.

[Audience:] What is fate? How is it different from what we're talking about here on karma?

Fate ... it's a hard thing. I imagine it is one of those things that everybody you ask is going to have a different definition of. Some people might see fate as something coming from outside. It is fated. It is God's will or it is pre-planned. Here, with karma, we are not talking about something that is outside; we are talking about our own actions bringing the results. Also, fate has the implication of something fixed and rigid, where there is no leniency, there is no way to get around it. Whereas with karma and its results, there are ways to affect it. Like I was saying, you can purify negative karma. Also the ripening of positive karma can be interfered with by anger and wrong views. It isn't so fixed and rigid. Maybe these are two ways in which they are different.

[Audience: inaudible]

How fixed are our negative actions? You see, we are again talking about very fine points here. Only the

Buddha is going to be able to answer this question, so my excuse is ignorance. [Laughter.] But what I can tell you is that some things may be influenced by the culture and some things may not be. You gave the example of animal sacrifice. From the Buddhist viewpoint, that would be something where the motivation was ignorance, not understanding that taking lives is harmful and causes pain to others. The people may have thought that what they were doing was good. But because of the ignorance involved in it, they are still creating negative action, in the same way that you will die if you mistake poison for maple syrup and drink it.

Actions like killing are what they call naturally harmful actions. In other words, there is something about taking the lives of others that makes it very difficult for anything good to come out of it. There are other actions that are called declared prohibitions. These are actions that are not naturally negative. They are negative because the Buddha said to avoid them. For example, on the days when you take the eight precepts, then singing, dancing and playing music become declared prohibitions. They are not naturally negative—there is nothing evil in singing, dancing and playing music, but on those days when you've taken a vow not to do it, that becomes a provision to respect. Therefore whether an action is negative or not may also depend on whether you've taken vows or not.

In terms of sexual misconduct, I would really like to clarify it with some of my teachers but it is so difficult to talk about the details of this topic with them. They spell it out, they don't even say it. [Laughter.] When the teacher is teaching this, they

would say “When you do s-e-x [spelling it out] misconduct, then ...” [Laughter.] I have a question about having multiple spouses. To me (this is only my personal opinion based on my ignorance), it seems like this is something that would be culturally defined. On the other hand, maybe the lamas have a good reason why that has nothing to do with culture.

Other actions under ‘unwise sexual behavior’ may not have to do with culture. For example, going outside one’s committed relationship. Or if you know you have Aids and yet deliberately sleep with somebody without letting them know—such action definitely causes harm to somebody. To me that has nothing to do with culture. That to me seems like it would be a naturally harmful act. There are probably other actions which are negative due to the culture of the people, but I can’t state that as a fact.

[Audience:] Is there a tendency to be reborn in similar circumstances again and again, like white people being reborn white, or black people being reborn black?

With the scenario of white people being reborn white and black people being reborn black, I don’t think so. Whereas in other scenarios, there is a possibility. For example, if you have practiced the Dharma diligently in one lifetime, I think it increases the probability of being reborn in a place where you can encounter the Dharma again by the force of that habit. Why? Because your mind was busy during your life thinking about the Dharma, directing your mind in a certain way; it’s forming a habit. Therefore you are likely to

encounter that environment again. Whereas you are not putting a lot of energy into creating the cause to be reborn white or black. You are not putting mental energy into perpetuating being white or perpetuating being black.

[Audience:] Would somebody be reborn in a culture that is very different?

Again it is hard to say because I think if somebody creates a lot of karma with a particular group of people ... it depends also how they have been dedicating their prayers. If you dedicated your prayers “May I be reborn as an American,” [Laughter.]it increases the livelihood of that. On the other hand they say that we have been born as everything there is in cyclic existence—every possible kind of rebirth, every possible kind of experience, we have had it all. There is nothing new in samsara. Something out of samsara is quite new to us, but within samsara we’ve done it all, highest to lowest, many times. I think it depends a lot on the individual.

[Audience: inaudible]

There are certain stories implying that but I think they tell those stories because it is convenient and it makes sense; it is easier for people to link up with. But then there are also some far-out stories in the scriptures of people going from a human rebirth to one as a sea monster with eighteen heads. There are a lot of disparate things too.

[Audience:] What is the relationship between the action and the imprint on the mind?

First comes the action, and then as the action ceases, it leaves an imprint on the mind.

[Audience: inaudible]

Yes, we do. One of the results of our actions is that it forms a habitual imprint to do it again and again. That is one of the results of an action. Actions have many different kinds of results (we will be getting into that later on). There is the action that leaves an imprint which becomes the cause for other kinds of actions, which then leaves other imprints on the mind. There are different kinds of results that a particular action produces—it has to do with our rebirth, with the environment, with what happens to us, and with how we behave or our habitual behavior pattern. This is actually the most serious of all the results, because by creating this pattern, this imprint to be a certain way, it becomes a habit. If we do it in a positive way, it is very good. We're forming a good habit. If we do it in a negative way, it becomes quite serious.

Again, the imprints aren't things we can see and touch. It is not like our mindstream is something physical and bam! There's your thumb print in it. [Laughter.] Our mindstream is formless, not made of atoms and molecules and so definitely the imprints associated with it aren't things that can be seen. But they definitely bring results.

[Audience: inaudible]

What about at the time of death? Now, during our lifetime, we are putting all sorts of imprints on our mind. We are acting all the time. Even in one day we have many constructive thoughts, we have many destructive thoughts, many positive actions, many negative actions. All these are getting imprinted on the consciousness. Now at the time of death, what ripens?

First of all if we created a truly heavy negative or positive karma, that one is going to be the most likely to ripen at the time simply because it is so heavy and so dominant. (We will be talking about what makes an action heavy or light later on.) It is like opening your refrigerator and there is a big pineapple there that grabs your attention right away. [Laughter.]

In the absence of some dominant positive or negative karma, then it is the action that we have done frequently, that we are very habituated with. Maybe it is not such a big thing but we've done it a lot, like eating chocolate. It creates a powerful imprint on the mindstream.

Also what we are thinking about and feeling at the time of death is creating the cooperative conditions for the ripening of either the positive or negative actions. This is why it is really important when we die, as much as possible, to try and be in a calm and peaceful environment. If you are in a calm and peaceful environment, it helps the mind to be calm and peaceful, which then creates the conditions for constructive imprints to ripen. If we are in a really chaotic state of mind, then chaotic imprints ripen and influence us.

It is not like things are predetermined. It is not that

at the time of death, this one imprint is definitely going to ripen. Again we have this whole system of inter-play. This is what we are referring to when we talk about dependent arising. Things arise out of many causes and conditions. You look at any situation in your life, and you will see that there is a whole array of factors that go into creating that one unique situation. And if you change any of those factors, you would change the situation in either a subtle way or a very gross way.

It is helpful to think about this. Think about the whole array of different causes and conditions for your getting here tonight—it depends on your job; it depends on your car; it depends on what you ate because maybe if you ate something different for breakfast, you would be sick and you wouldn't be able to come. It depends on all the people you met in the past who got you linked up with the group, and that, in turn, depends on other factors. Many things! There is definitely a principal cause in these, but then so many other things will have to come together. It is mind-boggling, when you think about it.

It is helpful to think about this. Take something physical like a clock. Think of all the different parts of the clock and the causes of all those different parts. Where did each part come from? Who invented the plastic? Who invented the digital thing? What did they have for breakfast? Where did the little red knob come from? If they had had a fight with their spouse, they might have used a blue knob instead of a red knob. [Laughter.] If we start thinking of the different things that go into the making of one small physical thing, we get this feeling of dependency and how

things can be altered. Small things you do can make substantial changes.

[Audience:] How does purification interfere?

It is interesting that you bring this up because I was just writing a letter to this man. He had come to some teachings I gave in India, and we've kept in contact over the years. He is going back to India to do Vajrasattva retreat (this is a very strong purification practice). I was writing him a letter telling him about my Vajrasattva retreat.

I was then at Tushita Retreat Center [in India] and the conditions were much worse than now. The mice were running around on the concrete floor, everything was musty, and the scorpions were falling from the ceiling. I would go into the session and all I saw was this incredible re-run video of my life. I had no difficulty at all visualizing it all in my meditation—looking at all my possessions, rearranging them and throwing them out, and buying some new ones. I had no difficulty remembering all the people who had ever harmed me and generated lots of regret for all the missed opportunities that I had to retaliate. [Laughter.] Very clear concentration on all of these. And once in a while I got distracted and actually thought about Vajrasattva. [Laughter.]

This was going on for three months. And during the whole process I kept wondering how purification worked, [laughter] because it felt like my mind was going from bad to worse, not better! [Laughter.] “So what is going on here? What is this purification?” And then right after the retreat, I went to Kopan for

teachings by Lama Zopa Rinpoche. I was so surprised because I was listening to the teachings and saying, “Is this what Rinpoche has been teaching the last year? I didn’t hear this before. It didn’t mean this the last time I heard it.” Everything sounded completely different to me. Something went in on a deeper level. Something clicked; something made more sense.

In retrospect, I was thinking, “What is this purification that is supposedly happening?” A lot of it has to do with the power of our regret and our wish to purify. This wish to purify, this wish to change, this wish to let go of our garbage energy, it impedes with the previous energy. You can see that. If you create a pattern and you have your energy going like this and then you start thinking the exact opposite, it’s going to put up some interference. This is very much the way the purification works, by the power of our determination not to do that kind of action again. That cuts the karma to habitually act in that way. By the power of our refuge and our altruism, that cuts others’ negative energy towards us, because we are interfering with the negative energy of our motivation that we projected towards them. All these different things in the purification process have a way of interfering with the different steps of our negative actions.

[Audience: inaudible]

For example, when we get sick, we can say “This is the result of my own harmful actions in the past.” Now, given that I’m sick, I can either get angry, depressed and belligerent about it, in which case I’m

creating more negative imprint and increasing my present suffering. Or I can say “I’m sick. Wow! This is how other people feel when they’re sick”, and generate compassion. This then makes us feel better now, and it has a way of cutting that continuity of negative energy in our mind.

There is a really good book called “The Wheel of Sharp Weapons”, otherwise called “The Boomerang Effect”. [Laughter.] I would actually like to teach it some time. This book is great because it talks about if you are experiencing a particular result, it’s because of having created a particular cause. It’s an incredible book for meditation because in all the results, we see all the different things we experience in our lives. When we start looking at their causes, we start seeing how we’ve acted and how we’ve created more karma to have that experience again. This wakes us up to the effects our actions are going to have. It also helps give us some sense of why things happen the way they do, so we can learn from our mistakes.

CHAPTER 10

Destructive Actions and Their Results

There are ways of thinking, speaking and acting that lead us to unpleasurable, painful and miserable results. People are going to have various reactions to this. Many things we've heard, I'm sure, are values that we grew up with, but what we're getting here is a much broader view. I'm going to go into these things a lot more in depth. It's not just: "Don't do this and don't do that. If you do it, you're naughty and you're going to hell!" That's not the Buddhist view.

Buddha didn't say: "Don't do these things or I'm going to punish you!" Buddha didn't create positive and negative actions. He just described what actions bring what results. Buddha had no wish to punish anybody. There's nobody running the universe.

We're going to get a little more into the details about the destructive actions so that we have some tools with which to assess our own actions, including hypothetical actions, or actions of other people, as well as to get more of a feeling for the differences in actions.

After we talk about these ten destructive actions, we're going to talk about what makes an action heavy or light. This is important. Sometimes people say: "Well, there's got to be a difference between stepping on an ant accidentally and going out and shooting a person. But you're saying that all killings are bad!"

I'm saying this (maybe I'm getting defensive!)

because it's clear, isn't it? There's a big difference between stepping on an ant accidentally and going out and shooting somebody deliberately. There's a huge difference! So of course there will be differences in the result. As soon as we understand the different components of a negative or positive action, we begin to see what the differences between actions are and we begin to recognize the differences. The whole idea is to get us out of our black and white mind that's judgmental about ourselves and others.

Also, going over these, somebody might say: "Why don't you go over the ten positive actions?" "You talked about death. You talked about the hell realms. Now you're talking about the harmful actions. Why doesn't Buddhism talk about the positive ones?" Well, we'll get to those. Be patient!

I don't know about you, but one thing that I had to come to terms with when I first got involved in Buddhism, is when I started looking at my actions or what I had done most of my life, most of my actions were negative. I began to understand why the Buddha talked about negative actions first. I was much more familiar with those than the positive ones!

I could "tune in" to what he is talking about. I had 100 million examples of them from my own personal experience. I think it was helpful for me to be honest with myself instead of whitewashing my actions: "I'm really good. I feel guilty but actually, I'm really good." We never work anything out when we do that to ourselves. But when we're able to be honest at a very basic level and then begin the purification process, then we're able to change and to let go of many of these emotions that we've been holding on to.

The one that everybody goes most berserk about is the unwise sexual conduct. They also go berserk about wrong views and idle gossip—every person looks embarrassed and hopes I’ll shut up.

The ten destructive actions are very basic general categories of putting many different things into a simplistic arrangement in order to get some handle on the material.

There are:

- three physical ones
- four verbal ones
- three mental ones

Three Destructive Actions of Body

The three physical ones are killing or taking life, taking what hasn’t been given to us, and unwise sexual behavior.

Four branches of a negative action

Each of the negative actions has four branches, and these four branches go into making a complete harmful action. They are:

1. The object (I’ll tell you what the object for each action is as we go through them.)
2. The complete intention. This is subdivided into three:
 - a. a correct recognition of the object
 - b. the intention to do the action

- c. an affliction that is accompanying it
3. The action itself—actually doing it
4. The completion of the action

If any of these are incomplete, if you're missing any of the four, then you don't get an 'A plus' negative action. But when we do have all four there, we get 'A pluses'. This gives us some way of evaluating what we've done.

Taking somebody else's life

This is negative because a being's life is what they cherish the most. Just as our principal baseline value is to stay alive, so it is for all other beings. Killing is the most harmful of all the destructive actions, interfering with the happiness and well-being of others.

The first branch, **the object**, in killing, is any sentient being other than yourself. Already, you can see that suicide is not a complete action of killing. This doesn't mean suicide is good. It just means that it is not 100% complete because the first branch—the object of the action—has to be a sentient being other than ourselves. It can be any sentient being—insects, animals, spirits, human beings, etc.

The second branch is the **complete intention**. Under this, remember we have three parts. The first part was the recognition. In other words, you have to recognize the sentient being that you want to kill. If you want to kill a grasshopper but you kill a gopher instead, it's not going to be a complete negative action.

Or if you want to kill John but you kill Harry by mistake, it is not a complete one. In other words, we have to actually kill the sentient being that we have intended to kill.

Then there has to be the motivation, in other words, the intention to actually do it. If we do the action by accident, then this part is missing. There is no intention to do it. The motivation element is missing.

One of the three afflictions—the initial motivation or the causal motivation that makes us kill, can be due to:

1. Desire—for example, due to a desire to eat meat, you kill animals
2. Anger—for example, wanting to harm somebody you are angry with
3. Ignorance—for example, animal sacrifice

Any of these three afflictions can be the affliction that motivates the killing. This is the initial motivation. Killing is usually completed with the motivation of anger. There's some kind of wish to destroy. But it might start out with the initial motivation of attachment or ignorance.

The **actual action** is killing a sentient being. In other words, killing a sentient being by poison, weapons, magic or mantras. It also includes helping somebody commit suicide. This is an interesting one. Also, if we incite other people to kill, even though they do the killing, we will get the negative karma as well since we told them to kill.

The **completion of the action** is that the other

sentient being dies before us. If they die after us, then it's not a complete action. In other words, you may intend to kill somebody, you may be unsuccessful and they don't die, and then you die first. Or they don't die because you only managed to injure them. The action of killing is not complete.

Like I said, suicide is not a complete action, first of all because the object isn't there. The object of taking life has to be somebody else besides ourselves. Also the branch of completion isn't there—the other sentient being has to die before us. In the case of suicide, that doesn't happen. Suicide is missing two of the things.

Killing somebody accidentally is not a complete action of killing. Since the motivation is the chief, prime factor that's going to determine the weight of an action, you can see that killing by accident is not a complete action.

Similarly, if you are coerced into killing, if somebody else makes you kill, then you don't have the motivation to kill. Somebody else has coerced you. They're forcing you to do it. Definitely the motivation isn't: "I want to kill!" You're being pushed into it. It is not a complete action of killing.

Eating meat

[Audience:] What about eating meat?

In terms of eating meat, what they say is if you kill the animal yourself, definitely that's killing. If you ask somebody else to kill it for you, that's definitely killing. If you know that somebody else has killed the

meat for you even though you didn't ask them to, you shouldn't eat that meat. For example, somebody invited you over to dinner and you knew that they went to the store and got live chickens especially for your dinner. Then, it's not good to eat that.

In the case of buying food at the grocery store, the party line is that (and it's up to you whether you want to believe in the party line or not) you didn't ask for that animal to be killed. The butcher killed it. You went in the store and bought it. You don't have the negative karma from killing it yourself or asking somebody to kill it.

Now, most of us think: "But there is supply and demand and if you're on the demand end, even though you didn't ask directly for it ..." and I completely agree with that. But to me, I do see that there is a difference between killing the animal yourself and the fact that the butcher killed it, it was put on the shelf and you happened to walk in to buy it. There is a difference in what's going on mentally. There's a different impact on your mind when you actually lift the knife up and kill the animal. I can see that there's going to be a difference in the karma. But, personally speaking, somehow if you're on the demand end, there's got to be some karma involved. That's my personal opinion. All the Tibetans who eat meat don't agree with me.

It's very interesting that each Buddhist tradition has a different position on the issue of meat. The Buddha did not say: "Don't eat meat." In the Theravada tradition, you're supposed to go around with your begging bowl from house to house and the people give you alms. The idea in doing this is to

develop a sense of detachment from your food and eat whatever you are given. Whether people give you meat or vegetables, you're supposed to take it all and eat it, instead of being fussy and say: "Look, I don't eat chicken. How about those string beans over there?" That doesn't look so good when you're trying to be humble and non-attached to your food. For that reason, the Buddha allowed them to eat meat.

Also, one of the reasons the Buddha allowed it was because at that time in history, a lot of the people thought that if you ate the right food, you would become spiritually enlightened. A lot of people today think that too, and one becomes a fundamentalist vegetarian, thinking that your spiritual realizations are what you eat. The Buddha, I think to make the point that gaining realizations was a mental thing, didn't make any specific dietary restrictions for the monks and nuns at that time. He only said to not kill the animal, not ask for it to be killed or not eat it if it's killed directly for you.

Now, that doesn't mean that what you eat doesn't affect your practice. What you eat obviously affects your practice. If you eat a lot of sugar and your sugar level is going up and down, it's going to affect how you meditate. They say that eating meat does affect your meditation. That's why in the Mahayana tradition, they emphasize vegetarianism. The emphasis in the Mahayana tradition is non-harmfulness of others. Out of kindness to others, they do not eat meat.

In the Chinese monasteries, the people are very strict vegetarians. The monks and nuns take strictly vegetarian food. There are all these mock pork, mock

chicken, mock this and mock that. It's amazing. I can't eat some of them because they look and taste so much like meat. It's so funny because people think that if you're vegetarian, you really want to eat meat, but some of us really don't.

In the Tibetan tradition, the monks and nuns are not on a vegetarian diet because, first of all, Tibet is above the tree line so it is very difficult to have vegetables. Second of all, in the case of very advanced tantric practitioners, they are doing very subtle meditations on different channels and energies in their body. For that reason, they need to keep their body elements very strong, and have to take meat. But that's only for very high level practitioners. In Tibet, most of the Tibetans ate meat because of the climate and the altitude. Now that they live in India, His Holiness encourages them to eat vegetables. But they don't always put into practice what His Holiness says.

The basic thing is to look at ourselves instead of looking at other people, and make a decision for ourselves of how we want to be. If somebody does eat meat, there are mantras to say that can help the animal. His Holiness, for example, says that he would like to be a vegetarian. He was a vegetarian for some time, then he got sick and the doctor told him he had to eat meat. Now he eats meat. I think there is also a difference, whether you do it for medical reasons or whether you do it for taste reasons.

Abortion

Before we move on from killing, we will take a look

at the Buddhist viewpoint about abortion. If the consciousness joins with the fertilized sperm and egg in the womb, then abortion is a form of killing. That doesn't mean that as Buddhists who believe in compassion, we go out on a rescue operation. I think in the abortion debate nowadays, there's a lot of anger and hatred on both sides.

Whenever people ask His Holiness about the abortion issue, he just says: "This is very difficult." And it is very difficult! There is no easy answer. Our American mind wants a nice, easy answer: "Tell me it's okay because then I won't have to think about it." Or: "Tell me it's not okay." But some of these things, it's like whichever way one does it, it is going to be negative. The thing is to at least try and modify the action in some way. Try and avoid the action altogether. But if one decides on abortion, at least try to not do it with whole-hearted rejoicing.

Other forms of killing

You can see that euthanasia does involve taking life. It is a difficult issue. Again there are no black and white answers. What about if you get worms? Do you take medicine and kill the worms? It's a very difficult decision to make. Some people say that the worms die anyway when they leave your system. But what about our motivation? Again there's a big difference in motivation between: "I'm going to kill those worms. I can't stand them!" and a sense of: "I really wish I could offer my body to these worms but I can't. And so I do this with an incredible amount of regret and I really wish I didn't have to." You make some prayers

for the worms.

You see, when you know more about these different branches, at least you can modify your actions. You can see the difference that it makes when you do that. The thing is, we're alive and we do move and we do kill. We have to keep on living. We do the best we can. If we don't have the intention to kill, it will not be a full karma. If we know there's definitely going to be animals in a particular place, then we try not to walk in that place. We modify what we do. When we have animals in our house, there're ways to deal with it. We don't always have to take out the Raid [insect repellent], contrary to the advertisements. We don't always have to do that. There are many ways to deal with it.

I found, when I lived in France, that we have an interesting kind of flying ants, ants with wings. They made a home right by our sink. During summer, they would always come out just after dinner and were all over the place. There was no way you could turn the water on without killing them. So what we did was, we just left our dishes there in the sink. The flying ants would all go back home in about an hour or an hour and a half, and then we wash our dishes. We worked out an agreement with them. There are many things to do along this line, to avoid killing. With cockroaches, you can put boric acid around and they don't come back. With ants, you can use lemon juice, or you can put things in water.

You try and do the best you can.

Taking what has not been given to us

The next one is taking what hasn't been given to us. Here, the first branch, **the object**, is something that doesn't belong to us. It can be something that belongs to another person or something that is not owned. It can be something somebody lost but maybe they have some attachment to it. If they lost it and they've completely given up on it, it's one case. But it's a different case if their mind is still attached to the object.

This also includes taxes, fares, tolls, fees, and things that we're supposed to pay that we don't pay. That's considered taking what hasn't been given to us because actually, these things belong to others.

In India, when you take computers into the country, they were charging about 250% customs. I was in Singapore at one time and somebody in India wrote and asked me to get a computer and take it into India. That meant getting it through customs without paying the duties, and I wasn't prepared to do that. Amchog Rinpoche was there at that time and I asked him about it. I said: "I don't want to avoid paying the duties, but on the other hand, the Indian government charging 250% is outrageous! That's just out of sight for a duty!" I said if somebody does smuggle one in to give to a friend or something, is that stealing? He made the remark: "Maybe you get 50% of the negative karma and the Indian government gets 50%."

Another form of stealing is when someone forces another to give a penalty that is more than what is reasonable or more than what is written in the laws. This is very touchy. Like in the previous example, it's stated in the law that the customs is 250% but it seems like a very unreasonable amount. Again it's one

of those very ambiguous things—what do you do?

Or you go to a country where everything is done on baksheesh. Everything! The whole government is run on bribes! Do you bribe or don't you bribe? This is accepted policy! You do business through bribing. It's one of those sticky things that I think everybody is going to have to look at themselves and see how much they want to get involved in it.

The second branch is **the complete intention**. The first part is the recognition. This means we have to steal what we intend to steal. In other words, if you take a radio when you intended to take a TV, then it's not a complete action. Also, let's say you gave something to somebody, but you forgot you gave it and you took it back thinking it was yours. That's not a complete act of stealing. Or if you borrowed ten dollars but you forgot how much you borrowed and repaid only five. Again, this is not complete.

[Audience: inaudible]

Jonathan came up before dinner and asked me if he could have some water. He didn't need to do that because I think in our culture, things, for example, in the bathroom that are left out on the shelves are generally offered. If you're staying in somebody's home, the things that are open, like the soap, shampoo, Kleenex, toilet paper—they're meant for everybody's use. Water, too. But if you go into somebody's cupboards and start rummaging through it, it's a different thing.

I always try, when people come to stay, to say quite clearly to them: "If you need anything and I'm

not around, just go ahead and take it and tell me later.” It’s good to be clear like this. Otherwise, things like paper clips and rubber bands could drive you crazy. With other things, I think it is good to ask and not just assume. Sometimes we take something that belongs to somebody else and we forget to tell them, and then they don’t have it. We borrow a pen, we don’t give it back, and then they’re rummaging all over because it’s their only pen. It’s good to be aware. One nice thing about this kind of guideline is that it makes us extremely aware of how we treat other people’s property, what we think could be used communally, and what we feel is good to ask for.

The next part is intention, if you intended to steal the object. If you only repay five dollars instead of ten because you forgot that you borrowed ten dollars, you’re not intending to steal the other five dollars. Or if you gave something to somebody but forgot that you gave it and took it back, you didn’t intend to steal it.

The third part is our motivation. You can steal out of anger, for example, plundering after a war and just wanting to devastate somebody else, wanting to harm the other person by stealing things. Stealing out of attachment is the most common one. One steals something because of wanting it for oneself. Stealing out of ignorance is, for example, thinking: “Oh, it’s perfectly all right to steal.” Or “I’m a Dharma practitioner. It’s okay if I steal, because what I’m doing is important.”

Also, we often think there’s nothing wrong with stealing from the government. Or there’s nothing wrong with stealing from big companies. We don’t

like somebody so there's nothing wrong with stealing from them. Check up! Now, if somebody, let's say, doesn't want to pay the portion of their taxes that goes for military means because they don't want other beings to lose their lives, my personal view is that is not stealing. However, if you're using that as an excuse so that you can keep the money, then that's not so good.

The third branch of **action** refers to actually doing the action. It could be threatening somebody by force. It could be breaking into their houses. Or it could be what we most commonly do—we cheat a little bit here, we cheat a little bit there. We borrow something and we don't return it. We use the things at work meant for work use but we use it for our private use without getting permission for that. Like doing hundreds and thousands of photocopies on the company machine. We make long distance calls from the office when it's clear they don't want us to do that. If that's one of the perks of our job, it's okay. But if it's not a perk of our job, then it's considered stealing. Or we could use fraudulent weights, or overcharge somebody, or other ways of taking what hasn't been given to us.

Also, we are taking what hasn't been freely given if we coerce somebody into giving us something. We oblige them to give us money, even though they don't want to. We put people in positions where they can't turn us down. And for people who are ordained, if the benefactors pass out the offerings and you take twice your portion, it's stealing. In Dharamsala, sometimes people make offerings to all the monks and nuns attending the teachings by His Holiness. They'll go

around and offer each monk or nun some money. If you sit in one place and collect the offering and then move to another position before the person who distributes the money gets there and collect some more, that's stealing.

And then the fourth branch is the **completion of the action**, feeling: "This thing belongs to me. This is mine." This refers to having a sense of ownership over the object.

Unwise sexual behavior

Now we're going to go on to unwise sexual behavior. There're four basic types of unwise sexual behavior: with an improper person, in an improper way, in an improper place, and at an improper time. Like I said last time, I'm not sure exactly how many of these are culturally determined and how many of these are naturally negative.

In terms of the **object**, it can be somebody who is celibate, somebody who is in the custody of their parents, somebody who is related to you, or even with your own partner: if it is done in front of holy images, or on days when you have taken precepts.

They also say in the day time—I have yet to understand why they say that. It could be because in ancient India, everybody was supposed to be working in the day and not messing around at home. It could also be because everybody—mum, dad, grandma, grandpa, aunts, uncles, and the chickens—all live in one room, and in the day time, it might be a little bit embarrassing. [Laughter.]

But the chief, principal unwise sexual behavior is

going outside of your own relationship. This applies even if you're single, if your partner is in another relationship. This is what is commonly called 'adultery'. This is the principal thing to avoid, basically because it causes a lot of pain and confusion in people's lives. It's very clear, and I kind of marvel at our society: everybody is in much pain and confusion because their partners sleep with other people, but then when they want to go sleep with somebody else, they don't think twice about the effect it has on their partners. If you want to make confusion in your lives—this is a real 'good' way to do it. Look at your own life. Look at your friends' lives. What do people talk about all the time? This is one of the big things that is very problematic in their lives because the mind is jumping around from person to person.

It is especially problematic if there are children involved. It creates incredible difficulties for the kids. His Holiness tells people to really check up well before they get married, and when they have kids, to recognize that the marriage commitment is definitely beyond just the two of them. And to really have the wish to take care of the children, not having the attitude of: "Oh well, my husband/wife is just a pain in the neck. So ciao! Good-bye! Sorry, kids." I think those of you who come from divorced families know how painful it is. Knowing the pain from one's own experience, then at least try to avoid the pain and confusion for one's own partner or children.

The first part of the second branch (**complete intention**), recognition, means you have to have sex with the person you are intending to. If you intend to

rape Joan and you rape Mary instead, it's not a complete action.

There has to be the recognition of the person, then the intention to do it. And then the motivation is usually attachment. It's always completed with attachment though it could be initially motivated by anger. I think a lot of rape might be motivated by anger. It can also be initially motivated by ignorance. For example, coercing somebody into having sex, thinking that this is some great spiritual practice.

The **action** is the meeting of the organs.

The **completion of the action** is when one experiences delight, in other words, orgasm.

What is very interesting about these seven negative actions of body and speech is to see whether you can have them complete by telling somebody else to do them. In other words, if I tell you to go and kill, then when you kill, both you and I get the negative karma of killing. But with unwise sexual conduct, if I tell you to go sleep with somebody, I don't get the negative karma of unwise sexual conduct—I didn't get the bliss at the end. [Laughter.] This is the only one of the seven actions of body and speech that you can't do by telling somebody else to do it. But of course, encouraging somebody to go outside a relationship isn't a good thing to do.

I'll tell you a story here. When I went to Hong Kong, the Dharma center put a little announcement that I was coming. One man called and invited me out to lunch. This is kind of common, people offering lunch to the ordained. We went out to lunch and he started telling me how he had just gotten involved with this new group and they were using sex in

spirituality and so on. He thought since I was a religious person, I would be really in tune with this. I was thinking: “Get me out of here!” [Laughter.]

This is a good example of having ignorance as the motivation. A lot of people in the West hear about tantra, but first of all, they don't know that there's a difference between Hindu tantra and Buddhist tantra. And they don't know that there's a difference between real tantra and flaky tantra. And so they get all involved in: “Oh look! You can have Dharma and sex at the same time. This is great!” Buddhism isn't anti-sex, but this mind that rationalizes and says: “We're going to turn this into some high, great, mystical, spiritual experience to rationalize doing it as much as possible with whomever we want to, without any kind of responsibility.”—this kind of rationalizing attitude is an example of ignorance.

Four Destructive Actions of Speech

We have been talking about karma. Karma means intentional actions, actions we do with the intention to do them. This teaching on karma is one of the most important teachings that the Buddha gave. It is laying the groundwork for all further practice that we do. In other words, the first principal thing we have to do when we start practicing the Dharma is to get our ethical conduct together, which means to get our daily life together. Ethics is not separate from our daily life. Ethical behavior relates basically to how we relate to other people, how we relate to ourselves.

When some people come into Buddhist practice,

they don't want to hear about cause and effect. The last thing they want to hear is about the ten destructive actions. They want bliss and void. [Laughter.] "Give me the highest class tantric initiation. I want bliss and void. I want to visualize myself as a deity. I want to play a drum and a bell and [deepens voice] chant in Tibetan in a big, deep voice. [Laughter.] I want to look very holy. I want to look like a spiritual practitioner, but please don't tell me to watch how I talk to other people. [Laughter.] I don't want to hear that."

With that kind of attitude, there's no way we can get anywhere on the spiritual path. Spirituality isn't something airy-fairy in the sky. It is a basic feet-on-the-ground way of living with people. For this reason, karma is an important teaching. It will make us look at how we have been acting since the day we were born.

The last time we met we covered the three destructive actions that we do physically—stealing, killing and unwise sexual behavior. Tonight we are going to get to the four destructive actions of speech. They are lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, and idle talk. It's amazing that one small mouth can do so many things. [Laughter.] And as with the actions of the body, these actions have four branches:

1. Basis
2. Motivation:
 - a. Correct recognition of the object
 - b. Intention
 - c. Affliction
3. Action
4. Completion of the action

If we have all of these branches intact, then that's an 'A' number one, super-duper, perfect negative action—a "Ph.D." negative action. [Laughter.] If one of the branches is missing, then we just didn't do it so good, and it is not a complete karma.

Lying

Lying is classified under the destructive actions of speech because we usually do it verbally. But it can be done physically: we can make a gesture that tells something false with our hand or with our head, for example. Lying is basically denying something we know is true, being very clear about that and knowingly misleading others, knowingly giving the wrong information; or inventing things that are false in order to harm others. These are all included in lying.

1. Basis

The *basis* is another human being whom we lie to, who understands what we are saying in our human language. I don't know, it doesn't talk about lying to your dogs. I suppose you could lie to your pets. You could tell them you are going to give them food, then they follow you to where you want to lock them up and you don't give them food—except we usually give them food and we usually don't lie to them.

Usually, lying is in relationship to another human being. I suppose you can do it to an animal as well.

2. Motivation

Then, in the second branch about the *motivation*, we have to recognize that what we are about to say is false. We know very clearly in our mind that what we are saying is false. In other words, it is not accidentally saying something we think is true that we later find out isn't true. It is actually knowing something isn't true when we say it; recognizing what we say as false.

The second part of that second branch is the *intention*; in other words, intending to lie, intending to deceive the other person.

The *affliction* underlying the action of lying can be attachment, anger, or ignorance. When we lie out of attachment, we're lying to get something for our own gain, our own benefit. Or we lie out of anger: we lie in order to harm somebody else. Lying out of ignorance is thinking that it is perfectly okay to lie and there is nothing wrong with lying. "Everybody does it, so why shouldn't I? Everybody cheats on their taxes, why shouldn't I? Everybody else punches up the time clock this way, why can't I?" We think that there's nothing wrong with lying.

3. Action

The *action* is lying, telling something false, usually verbally, sometimes through a gesture. Or it can be done in writing.

The most serious kind of lie is lying about our spiritual attainments. This is very serious. It is very, very harmful to other people if we claim to have spiritual realizations we don't have. We are misleading them. If we don't know what in the world

we are talking about, yet lying and proclaiming ourselves to be some glorious teacher while people in their naïveté follow us, then this lie becomes very harmful to them.

It's also very harmful to lie to our spiritual teachers or to the Sangha, to the Triple Gem, or to our parents, because these are very powerful objects. Our teacher and the Triple Gem are powerful in terms of their qualities. Our parents are powerful in terms of what they have done for us. Our parents are probably the chief ones we lie to [laughter], especially when you are between the age of twelve and twenty. [Laughter.] It is something to think about. Lying is definitely heavier if it costs somebody's life or if it harms somebody in a serious way.

Of course, there is a big difference between lying which gets somebody killed, and telling a little white lie. There is a difference in gradation there. But telling a little white lie is included under lying, and so is knowingly exaggerating the facts of a situation. This is real interesting. For me it made me look at how very sloppy my speech is, and somehow I haven't managed to correct that. "Everybody liked that."—Everybody? "I can't do anything right!"—Anything? We make these incredible black and white statements that are in fact exaggerations. We say them to other people, we say them to ourselves. They are a form of lying. It's a form of exaggeration. "You never listen to me!" [Laughter.] You see what I mean; it is definitely an exaggeration. There are many things to be aware of here. How we use the words reflects how we think. It reflects how we think in this categorical, 'all or nothing', 'always or never', 'everybody or nobody'

way.

4. Completion of the action

The *completion* of the action of lying is that the other person hears us and they understand and believe us. If they don't believe us, then it's not lying, it's just idle gossip. It's not quite as bad. But if they believe us, then we have done a number one, perfect action of lying.

We can see a lot of disadvantages from lying in our lives. One reason I always find it difficult to lie, is I can never remember what I have told whom. I get all tangled up. I tell one story to one person and another story to another person. Then I can't remember, "Oh, did I tell them *this*, or did I tell *that* to them?"—how to make it all fit together so that the lie holds together. When we get involved in lying, it creates a lot of anxiety in us, because we have to keep track of the lie. We have to put a lot of energy into continuing to lie to make sure that the other person continues to believe our lie. Lying takes a lot of energy. Then there's the underlying anxiety, "Maybe he is going to find out that I am lying. What do I do if he does?" It creates immediate problems for us. You can see this. If we look deeply, we will see that a lot of the anxiety, tension and pressure that people feel comes from this mind that likes to cover things up or lie.

Divisive Speech

The next destructive action of speech is divisive speech, or what is sometimes called slander. This is

the kind of talk that we use that causes other people to not get along. We can be either telling people things that are true that makes them quarrel, or telling them things that are false that makes them quarrel—in which case, it becomes not only divisive speech, but also lying.

1. Basis

The *basis* for this action is either people who are friendly with each other or people who have already quarreled. In the case of people who are friendly, we use divisive words to make sure that they don't continue with their friendship and they go separate ways. For the people who are already at odds, we make sure they don't get reconciled.

2. Motivation

The *recognition* is recognizing the parties involved, making sure that if we want to divide Jack and Jim, it's Jack and Jim that we cause the schism between and not two other people.

The *intention* is to destroy their relationship, to make them quarrel, to stir up trouble, to create division.

The motivation behind this action, again, can be any of the three *afflictions*. We can use divisive words out of attachment. For example, we do it out of attachment to people who are friendly with each other. This often happens with romantic relationships; we are attracted to one of the persons in the relationship. We want to say things that cause them to

break up, so that we can have that person as our partner.

We can use divisive words out of anger. We are angry with a colleague, so we speak negatively about him to the boss in order to make the boss upset with him. In addition, if we want to get the promotion by doing this, then we are also motivated by attachment—attachment to getting a promotion for ourselves.

Lying out of ignorance would be using divisive words and thinking that there is nothing wrong with it. “It’s perfectly okay. It is for my benefit.”

Also, we quite often use divisive words when we are jealous. Two people are getting along quite well. We’re jealous, we want to create a schism between them because we can’t stand their being happy. They could be a couple; they could be our boss and colleague; they could be our spouse and our child. Somehow we can’t endure their being happy and getting along well together. We have to do something to disrupt it, motivated by jealousy.

3. Action

The *action* can be done in a variety of ways. One way is that, with both people there, you just start stirring up trouble. Another way of doing it is subtler. You go to each one individually: “I think you should know that, blah, blah, blah ... You shouldn’t trust him, you know.” And then you go to the other one: “Did you know ...” You talk with them individually and create a schism, doubt and mistrust in their relationship.

4. Completion of the action

The *completion* of the action is when the people we are trying to divide don't get along. Or if they are already not getting along, we make quite sure that they will not reconcile. In other words, we make their schism quite serious. It is a very strong action if we cause divisiveness between a spiritual teacher and his or her student. To divide a teacher and a student of the spiritual path is very heavy. They are having a special relationship. It is potentially a very beneficial relationship. We are impeding somebody's spiritual progress if we alienate someone from his or her teacher.

It's also very heavy karma if we use speech to divide a spiritual community, creating schism and getting everybody all riled up and broken up into factions. A spiritual community that is supposed to be harmonious and supportive of the members' practice now becomes divided and split into separate groups. Also, feeling animosity towards the other group is very heavy negative karma.

The *completion* is that they believe you and decide not to get along. In other words, we got what we wanted. We also got a lot of negative karma with that! [Laughter.]

Harsh speech

1. Basis & action

The next destructive action of speech is harsh speech. Harsh speech is any kind of speech that hurts another person's feelings. If we are not intending to hurt their feelings but what we say hurts their feelings, then it's

not harsh speech. It could be that they are just being supersensitive and very touchy. Harsh speech is when we are fully intending to hurt somebody else. It ranges the whole gamut from yelling and screaming and telling somebody everything they did wrong over the last five years—like somebody loses one piece of paper and all of a sudden, everything we have been storing up for five years comes out—to being sarcastic or teasing people, especially about something they are sensitive to. Making them confused so that they feel like an idiot.

We do this a lot. Sometimes, adults do it to kids. They use this kind of sarcastic teasing to make kids confused. For example, the adults will tell the kids, “The bogeyman is going to come get you!” I think it is very cruel—making kids afraid when they don’t need to be afraid.

There are lots of ways to use harsh words. It also includes swearing at people. Or insulting them, putting them down. Anything that is going to make them feel lousy. Harsh speech is one of my ‘favorites’. It’s really something. It comes out so easily.

2. Motivation

The *recognition* for this verbal action is another sentient being that we want to harm. Sometimes we can get abusive towards the weather or towards our car when it won’t start. [Laughter.] I used to work in a laboratory. When the machine wouldn’t work, I used to kick it. That is abusive, but it’s not the full-blown thing. It has to be a sentient being. The recognition is that you insult, lie, abuse, harm, tease or are sarcastic

towards whomever it is you're intending to direct it to.

The *intention* is that you want to hurt him. The sneaky thing about this is that sometimes we aren't very aware of our intention. Or we rationalize it. We sugarcoat it with, "I'm telling you this because it's for your benefit." Or, "Really? Did I say something that hurt you?" when we know real well that we did. Or, there is a wish to hurt, but we aren't being very frank and honest with ourselves; we're not looking at our own intention to hurt. But the intention is still there. Often, we aren't aware that we had the intention to hurt them until after we've hurt them.

We can do this out of any of the three *afflictions*. If we use harsh speech out of attachment, it could be, for example, to get in good with a bunch of people who use harsh speech. Your whole group of friends is sitting there attacking somebody, or a group of colleagues is bad-mouthing somebody. Out of attachment to your reputation or wanting these people to like you, you jump in and bad-mouth the person they're bad-mouthing. It's real easy to do this.

Most of our harsh speech is of course done with anger, resentment, belligerence, holding grudges—with a harmful attitude, wishing to strike out at somebody.

We use harsh speech out of ignorance when we think that there's nothing wrong with it. "I'm doing it for your benefit." "I'm doing this because I care about you." "It hurts me to say this to you, but ..." [Laughter.]

At this addiction conference that I went to, one priest was talking about religious abuse. He was

talking about people who quote the bible before they beat their kid: quoting the bible, “It’s for your own good,” and then laying into somebody. It’s a similar kind of action, although here, we’re talking about laying into people verbally.

3. Action and completion of the action

The *completion* of the action is that the other people hear, they understand and their feelings are hurt. Like I said, the action itself can be done in a variety of ways. It can be done with a nice, smooth, calm voice; it can be done with a really harsh voice; it can be done with all sorts of voices, all sorts of means.

[Audience: inaudible]

Any sentient being. Telling your dog off. You can look at some of the animals, they certainly pick up the tone, don’t they?

Idle Talk

The next destructive action of speech is idle talk. We don’t need to talk about this one, do we? [Laughter.] Idle talk is yak, yak, yak. [Laughter.] They say that idle talk is one of the biggest hindrances in our spiritual practice. Why? Because it wastes so much time. “I’m going to sit down and meditate this evening, but first I’m going to make a quick phone call.” And then two hours later, “Oh, I just got off the phone. I’m too tired.” Time spent yakking and yakking.

That's why we often do our retreats in silence—at least we get to the meditation session! [Laughter.] If you have a talking retreat, people never come on time. They are too busy talking in the middle of the session. When they are meditating, they're thinking about what they're going to talk about after the session. The mind goes berserk. When we sit down and meditate, we can see that we are distracted by the conversation we've just had or we're planning what to talk about next. These thoughts are going through our mind the whole time we're trying to watch the breath.

1. Basis

The *basis* of this action is something that has no great consequence in the matter of affairs, but we're treating it as if it's important and meaningful.

2. Motivation

The *recognition* of that is thinking that what you say is important and meaningful. [Laughter.]

The *intention* is that you want to talk.

And then the motivation is quite often out of the *affliction* of attachment. We just want to hang out and relax, waste time and make ourselves seem important, and think that we're great because we can entertain somebody else. Or we want to be entertained, so we sit and listen to somebody else talking.

We can do it out of anger, for example, doing idle talk with the intention of preventing somebody else from doing something. Or out of anger, we definitely want to interfere with what they're doing, we take up

their time talking to them.

Again, we do it out of ignorance when we feel, “There’s nothing wrong with idle talk. Let’s do it.”

Now, it doesn’t mean that all of our casual talk is idle talk. Sometimes we might have quite a good motivation for doing idle talk. For example, you visit somebody in the hospital. They’re depressed. Or they’re sick and they need their spirits to be lightened up. You chitchat with them. You don’t get into a heavy, philosophical discussion. You chitchat. You do something to lighten the other person’s spirits. Or if the atmosphere is heavy and tense, or somebody is very depressed, then, with a kind motivation towards them, you can start cracking jokes or switch the topic to something lighter. You’re doing it with a very clear understanding of what you’re saying. We intentionally try to benefit the other person.

It is idle talk if it’s done out of attachment to wasting time and making ourselves seem important or if we want to be entertained. What’s suitable for talking with your neighbor? Often, it’s just chitchat. Or with your colleagues in the office? It’s just light stuff. But you’re aware when you’re talking about this light stuff. You’re doing it because this is the way to make contact with this sentient being; this is the way to keep the door of communication open with them. The motivation in this context is out of care and concern and to make an honest relationship with the other person, not just out of attachment to our own ego or for our own amusement.

3. Action

Getting back to the times when we speak out of attachment, there are different types of speech that are considered idle talk. This is real interesting. The *action* itself is speaking the words. This can include just monopolizing the conversation—on the phone for forty-five minutes, while the other person is desperately trying to hang up because they have to do something. But we won't let them hang up. Or talking about legends, myths, prayers and gods that are non-existent. Doing spells, praying for terrible things to happen. Talking with an attempt to persuade somebody. Talking about a wrong philosophical belief.

Also, gossiping about what people are doing—telling stories about what the person on the right or on the left does, what the person upstairs or downstairs or across the hall is doing. Telling stories from our past—“Oh, on my vacation, I went here and I went there ...” Doing it out of ego, making ourselves a big shot. Telling stories or jokes that draw attention to ourselves.

It's also considered idle gossip when you teach the Dharma to somebody who's not interested. Isn't that interesting? That's called true idle gossip. [Laughter.] Somebody has no interest in and no respect for the Dharma, but you stop them on the street corner and you talk to them about the Dharma.

Also included in idle gossip—bickering, speaking behind other people's backs, reciting liturgies of other religions for no good reason. That's a real interesting one. I often wondered about it. When I lived in France, I became quite good friends with some Catholic nuns and sometimes we would visit them. Sometimes we stayed overnight. One day we were

attending prayers with them, and we were singing the prayers. They were very surprised that we sang Christian prayers. They would never say Buddhist prayers. But in our minds, we were very, very clear about our purpose in singing the prayers. Although I was using their vocabulary and their words, I was translating it all into Buddhist meaning. I think in that kind of case, it wasn't idle talk. But if I were saying it and thinking about the meaning, not in terms of Buddhism, but in terms of another system that I myself didn't believe in, then it would become idle gossip for me.

Sometimes when we're with our family, they want us to go to a religious service of our former religion. Last year, I went to Passover dinner with my parents. (They are Jewish.) That may happen, and that's perfectly all right. I think it's good to spend time with our family. But the thing is to keep our mind real clear, and if we don't feel comfortable saying prayers, we shouldn't say them. When I was at this Passover dinner, whenever there was a prayer about God I didn't say it. When they had other prayers about kindness or whatever, those I said. We can attend, but be very clear about what we're doing, be very clear about what we're believing and not be wishy-washy, "Do-I-believe-in-this?" or "Do-I-believe-that?" Or believing in this but praying to that, because then our mouth isn't matching our mind.

[Audience: inaudible]

The purpose here is to keep our mind clear about what we're doing. It's not to detach ourselves from

other people or make ourselves elite. Whether it becomes idle gossip or not depends upon whether or not our mind is clear.

Other things considered idle gossip: singing jingles. [Laughter.] We have all the commercials memorized and we chant them, don't we? Humming, singing, whistling—this kind of speech, done for no particularly good reason, filling the environment with lots of noise, like when we walk around the office humming.

If you're doing it for a specific motivation—for example, you whistle or crack a joke to cheer somebody up—fine. But if you're just going around whistling and you're completely mindless/oblivious to what you're doing, or you whistle because you want everybody else to know how well you whistle (because you can do those really neat kinds of whistle) then the motivation is questionable. [Laughter.]

Also considered idle talk is complaining, grumbling: “Why doesn't this happen? Why don't we do that?” (That's my favorite one.) Telling stories and gossiping about government leaders, politics, sports, fashion for no good reason. Just being busy-bodies and bad-mouthing other people. If you're talking about politics for a good reason, for example, because you're trying to get some information about what's going on in the world to carry on conversations with other people, that is fine. That is great. We should know what's going on in the world. It becomes idle talk only when we're doing it not to have basic information but to fill the time or to complain about other people, or to distract ourselves. Spending lots of

time talking about sports—how much time people spend talking about what others do with little round balls! There is an amazing amount of time spent on that. Or speaking stupidly. Just being silly for no good reason. If you're silly for a good reason, that's fine. There are situations in which it's very good to be silly. But again it's being silly mindfully.

Idle talk in conjunction with the five wrong livelihoods

Any kind of talk that is done in conjunction with any of the five wrong livelihoods is also considered idle talk. For example, *flattering* other people. We flatter people not because we really want to tell them something good they did. Praise—we should definitely do—is not idle gossip. But flattering people so that they'll give you something or do something for you is idle gossip. Also considered idle talk is speech that we use to hint at what we want other people to give us. Actually, *hinting* is called being polite in America. We're not supposed to ask directly. We're supposed to drop hints. But this is actually idle talk. Talking to *coerce* somebody into giving you something is also idle talk. Putting them into a situation in which they can't say, "No." Or you *bribe* somebody. You say a little nice thing for them, and they'll say a little nice thing for you. Or you say a little nice thing for them and then they'll give you something—that kind of bribery. Or talk where we're basically being *hypocritical* ...

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

Also included in idle speech is saying to someone else, “You go tell somebody else off.” Or, “You go call him a name.” Telling somebody else to do it and engaging somebody else in idle gossip. In this case both parties create the negative karma.

4. Completion of the action

Just expressing the words out loud is the completion of the action. The most serious type of idle talk is distracting someone who is practicing Dharma.

Questions and answers

Reading and Idle talk

[Audience: inaudible]

I think that would probably be considered idle talk. Even though you may not be reading them out loud, you’re filling your mind with idle talk. If you’re reading a novel for another motivation, then it doesn’t become idle talk.

There’re lots of ways to read novels. There’re lots of ways to watch movies. You can read or watch TV where your greed, ignorance, jealousy, anger and everything is completely involved with the situations in the character’s life, so that your mind is generating a lot of negative action; or you can read or watch TV, and it becomes a meditation on the gradual path.

You can clearly see the disadvantages of the afflictions in the movies, novels, and newspapers. It’s very clear, because you read what happens to people.

You read the stories in the novels and see what happens to the characters. You come to see clearly the disadvantages of destructive actions. Reading the newspapers is like reading a column on karma. It's incredible. Read the newspapers and think about karma. Think, "What kind of causes did these people do to get the result that they're experiencing now?" Think of the kind of causes that people do to experience that, and then watch what they're doing now and think, "What kind of results are they creating the cause to experience?" You see the event both from the viewpoint of it being a result of past karma, and of it being the karma or the action that's going to cause a future result. It helps you develop a very good understanding of karma, a lot of appreciation for karma as well as giving us a much stronger motivation to be aware of what we're doing.

If you read a novel, watch the TV, or chitchat with somebody, but you do so with an awareness of karma, it's quite productive. But if you're doing that same action with a different motivation and different emotional cognitive processes, it can become a destructive action.

[Audience:] Is it possible to give a short definition of mindfulness?

The word "mindfulness" is used slightly differently in the Theravada tradition and in the Tibetan tradition.

I quite often use it in terms of the Theravada way, where mindfulness means just being aware of what you're thinking, what you're feeling, what you're saying, what you're doing. In other words, being in

the present moment, and being aware of what's going on with your body, speech and mind.

In the Tibetan tradition, mindfulness has more of the connotation of being mindful of how you would like to be with your body, speech and mind. In other words, being mindful of the constructive actions, holding those in mind and then trying to live like that. That's more the connotation in the Tibetan tradition. In the Theravada tradition, mindfulness is more of just being aware of what is happening at the moment.

[Audience: inaudible]

Actually, the Tibetans have another word for the Theravada meaning of just being aware of what's going on—"introspective alertness". In the Tibetan tradition, they talk about having that same aspect of being aware—what am I saying, doing, and thinking; do I need to apply an antidote or not? That is called introspective alertness.

The Tibetan meaning of "mindfulness" would be more like before you go to work, making a strong determination, "OK, today, I don't want to do any of the ten destructive actions, and I'm going to keep in mind what these ten destructive ones are and what the ten constructive ones are. I'm going to keep them in my mind and use them to check up what I'm doing, saying, thinking and feeling during the day."

What is a Buddhist friendship like?

[Audience:] What would a friendship between two Buddhists be like?

I think they'd probably get along real well.
[Laughter.]

[Audience:] Would they have casual conversations?

Oh, sure! "I heard this great teaching tonight on the ten destructive actions!" [Laughter.]

Being a Buddhist doesn't mean that all your conversations must be meaningful. You try and have meaningful conversations, but it means when you're talking to people, you're very aware of why you're talking to them and how you're talking to them, and the effect that your words are having on them. Your talk isn't just mindless; you aren't on automatic, letting whatever is coming out of your mouth come out. But it's thinking about what you're saying and being aware of why you're saying it. Perhaps reflecting, "Hold on. If I'm talking to make myself look good, or if I'm talking to make somebody else look bad, or if I'm talking and wasting my time or wasting the other person's time, well actually, that doesn't fit in with my goals in life. I don't want to do that."

Can you imagine having a friendship where people in the relationship don't try and divide each other's relationships with other people; you don't lie to each other; you don't waste each other's time; you don't speak harshly to each other or ridicule and make fun of each other? You don't talk to your friend to appear important and be amusing or get lots of attention to yourself. You don't talk to your friends so that they reconfirm all your garbage thoughts: "This person made me so mad. Don't you agree they're idiots?"

[Laughter.] Our friendships would be much healthier. We just talk simply and honestly. If the other person is down, you joke or say something to cheer them up, and you're aware of what you're doing. You're doing it for a good reason.

[Audience:] What's the role of humor?

I think the role of humor is quite an important one, and it stems very much from the motivation. Like you said, often we'll use humor as a way of masking our hostility, or a way of making an unkind comment to somebody else. That kind of humor is actually harsh speech. It's meant to hurt somebody. It's antagonistic.

The kind of humor that is meant to ease a situation, or make somebody laugh, or make a connection with other people, or the kind of humor where we laugh at ourselves—instead of taking everything we do so seriously, being able to laugh at ourselves and release tension—I think that kind of humor is truly healthy. In a Tibetan monastery, people laugh a lot. The Tibetans laugh a lot. You'll be in the middle of a teaching, and Geshela will crack a joke and everybody cracks up. Or something happens and things get all excited, and we're saying, "Geshela, you can't say that ..." and he'll say something and we'll all laugh. I think humor is very important. It's an important part of our practice. But it's the motivation with which we use the humor that matters. One of my teachers says that humor is a form of wisdom. That has always stuck with me. Being able to laugh instead of making everything like lead in our life; being able to laugh at ourselves so that we don't get embarrassed or self-

conscious; we don't try to lie to cover up our junk, but we learn to look at it and expose it—that's important.

I think laughter is also very good in preventing you from getting uptight and nervous—what the Tibetans call 'lung'. When you push too hard ... you're pushing and pushing—"I'm meditating so much. I'm going to be a Buddha!" "I'm doing so many prostrations." "I'm doing so many mantras." "I looked at the ten negative actions and I've done all ten!" Just this kind of worry and tension that we build up in the practice—humor is important so that we pull ourselves out of that.

[Audience: inaudible]

I think a comedian's humor is different from the humor that we use amongst each other. Often the humor you see on TV is derogatory, whereas often when we joke amongst ourselves, it is not to put somebody down.

Action and motivation

[Audience: inaudible]

In Buddhism, *why* you do something is much more important than *what* you do. What you do is important, but why you do it is the real critical thing. Why you do something can make it positive or negative. Why you do it can make it light or heavy. The *why* is really important. And that's why at the beginning of all our teachings, I say "Now, let's

cultivate a good motivation.” We make sure that we’re here out of a good motivation. Even if you have to consciously, with effort, create a good motivation, it’s still very beneficial.

[Audience:] A lot of our speech is just unmindful; we’re not consciously aware of our motivation although our motivation may be quite conscious. So how does that influence the karma?

If you premeditate whatever it is you’re doing, it will be much more forceful than if the intention or motivation just comes at that moment when the event is happening. In other words, if you sat and planned how to get your revenge on somebody else, and you thought, “Oh, they’re very sensitive about this. I can just say this in a certain tone of voice the next time I see them. It will really get to them.” If we think about how to do it and say it, that’s going to be a lot heavier than if something just came out of our mouths spontaneously and we hadn’t spent time thinking about how to hurt them. Why? The motivation is strong. There’s a lot of energy behind it.

Of course, we might make a very sarcastic remark to someone and not realize it. When we check up later, and if we’re honest with ourselves, we might discover that at that moment, we did intend to hurt the person. But we weren’t aware of it at that moment because we’re so spaced out at the time. That’s why I think it’s good to spend some time at the end of the day to reflect about what’s happened. Go back over what happened, see what we’ve said to whom and why we said it. Our motivation often becomes more

obvious to us. Or sometimes at the end of the day we might be feeling a little bit uneasy about an encounter we had with somebody. We're not sure exactly why, but when we go over and we start looking, remembering what we were thinking and feeling doing it, then we can find harmful motivations, the wish to harm, the wish for revenge, or the wish for power.

This is why going over something at the end of the day is valuable. We are much more aware of the kinds of things we do habitually, but which we aren't aware we are doing. By becoming aware of them in the evening, it makes us much more attentive and mindful during the day. We can catch it sooner when we do it.

Regret influences the heaviness/ lightness of karma

[Audience: inaudible]

You hurt somebody, and immediately after the words came out of your mouth, you said, "Oh, I wish I hadn't said that." That's going to be much, much lighter than if we say it and then think, "I'm so glad. I hope they're really hurt!" Our response to our own action—whether we rejoice or whether we regret it—is going to definitely make our karma heavier or lighter. If we rejoice, it's beefing it up. If the regret comes immediately after, you have completed the action but it's not going to be as heavy. It might happen that in the middle of doing it, your motivation changes. In this case the action will not be complete. For example, you start to kick your dog and your foot is almost there, but you think, "I really don't want to do this. This poor dog." But the momentum is there

and the dog gets kicked, but your motivation has changed in the middle.

[Audience: inaudible]

That's when we become more sensitive to these things and we start examining, "Why am I doing that?" That's when we start getting to know ourselves. I think actually, that would be like what people do in therapy. "Why am I doing this? Why am I thinking this way? Why do I want to hurt somebody?" Asking ourselves these questions, we will come to understand our own anger and jealousy better. By recognizing the harm done to the other person and the harm done to ourselves putting all these negative imprints in our mind, it gives us much more impetus to clean it up. We can then either stop the action verbally and physically (even though the motivation may be there) or, going a step further, work on the motivation and stop it, which is really what we have to get to. First we have to at least stop ourselves before it gets out of our mouth or out of our body. Then we have to work with the mind and try to let go of the energy that's motivating it.

Guilt is completely useless

[Audience: inaudible]

That's a very good point. Guilt distracts us from the purification. It distracts us from understanding what we are doing in life. We get so caught up in our own little spinning that we lose the ability to look at what's really going on. That's why from the Buddhist

viewpoint, guilt is completely useless. It is something to be abandoned.

Three Destructive Actions of Mind

Let's get back to the ten destructive actions. We discussed the three that we do physically and the four that we do verbally. Now we will talk about the three destructive actions that we do mentally—coveting, maliciousness, and wrong views. These mental actions are actually the result of the three afflictions carried out to the full extreme. We can do these mental actions without saying anything or doing any other action. We can do them when we are lying in bed, we can do them when we are sitting in perfect meditation posture, we can do them in front of the Buddha, we can do them while walking around Green Lake. We can do them anywhere because they are purely mental actions. This is why it is important to observe, or watch, the mind. By learning about these three mental actions, we can see how important the mind is and precisely how the mind is the motivator for all the other actions. We can also see how the destructive actions of coveting, maliciousness, and wrong views develop quite easily in our minds. As I said, we don't need to move a muscle to do them. These actions (or defilements) get into our minds and then motivate us to do the other seven destructive actions.

[Note: The three destructive actions of mind are discussed using the framework of the four branches that make an action complete:

1. Object or basis
2. Complete intention:
 - a. Correct recognition of the object
 - b. Motivation
 - c. Having one of the three poisonous attitudes or afflictions (attachment, anger, or ignorance)
3. Actual Action
4. Completion of the action]

Coveting

The first destructive action of the mind is coveting. This is an attitude of “We want!” This is the one that the American economy is built on. [Laughter.] We are taught to covet from the time we are children. It’s good for the economy. “Try to get more, try to get better, increase your wants, plan how to get what you want and then go out and do it!”

Let’s look at coveting in terms of the four branches that make a destructive action complete. The first branch is the object, or basis, which can be anything we desire. The object that we covet can belong to other people, it can belong to someone in our family, or it can be something that nobody owns, although nowadays there aren’t too many things that nobody owns. We can covet any kind of possession, including a talent, a quality, or an ability that belongs to someone else.

The worst type of coveting is coveting something that belongs to the Triple Gem—the Buddha, Dharma, or Sangha. An example of this is if someone places an offering of chocolate brownies on the altar, and you

think, “Hmm ... I wonder ... nobody is looking, maybe I can take one.” This is the mind coveting things. Another example of coveting things belonging to the Triple Gem is someone going to a temple and thinking, “This temple has so much stuff. I wonder if I can take this, that, and the other thing.” It is especially harmful to covet things that belong to the Triple Gem.

The second branch that makes a destructive action complete is the complete intention. This branch has three parts—first, we recognize the object for what it is, then we have the intention or the wish to get the object, and finally, we have the affliction which motivates our action, which in this instance is attachment. The complete intention might include these thoughts: “Gee, wouldn’t it be nice if I could have this,” or “I sure wish I could have that.”

The third branch is the action. Here the thought is developing. We might be thinking, “Hmm, I’m going to get this! I will do it!”

The fourth branch is the completion of the action, and the thought might be, “I am definitely going to get this, and this is how I am going to do it!” We start planning exactly how we’re going to get what we want, “I am going to the store and I am going to the section where they are selling this thing, and I am going to get it and I’ll pay for it with my VISA card, and ...” You know how it goes. It is interesting to see that the last three branches—the complete intention, the action, and the conclusion of the action—all belong to one thought flow.

Now, someone might ask, “Does that mean we can’t buy anything?” [Laughter.] I don’t want to be

too hard on the economy, you know. [Laughter.] Of course we can buy things. There is a difference between recognizing the things that are useful for us, and developing a mind that covets, wants, craves, plans, schemes, and connives. There is a difference; you can see this. If you look in your refrigerator and it is empty and you think, “I have to go shopping to get some food,” and then you go buy the food, there is no problem with that. We need food for survival.

Coveting is when we go to someone’s house and they have this incredible cheesecake and there is some left over, and we think, “I want the rest of that cheesecake. I hope they give it to me. How can I drop a hint so they will give me the leftovers? And if they don’t give it to me, we will stop at the store on the way home and get some cheesecake.” This entire series of thoughts is imbued with the energy of coveting. That’s what coveting is. Do you understand?

[Audience:] What’s the difference between coveting the qualities of the Triple Gem and aspiring to develop these qualities?

The thoughts that occur when we covet the qualities of the Triple Gem might be, “I should have the love and compassion; the Buddha doesn’t need it. Everybody will then make offerings to me and not to the Buddha.” Coveting is very different than aspiring to get something. Aspiring is when we recognize the value of something, we recognize it accurately, and our heart moves us in that direction. Coveting is when we overestimate the value of something, especially overestimating its value in relation to ourselves. And

we're left with this clinging, grasping mind wanting and craving the object.

[Audience: inaudible]

[Laughter.] Right, but when we aspire to have bodhicitta, we are not overestimating the qualities of bodhicitta. Our mind is responding with faith and aspiration, which is a very light, hopeful quality of the mind. On the other hand, when we covet bodhicitta, we are not understanding the qualities of the bodhicitta. What we're wanting is the respect and offerings that come with bodhicitta rather than bodhicitta itself. Our coveting thoughts might be, "I don't want other people to have bodhicitta because then they get some benefit. I want the benefits for myself." As you can see, aspiring and coveting are two very different mental actions.

Maliciousness

The second destructive action of the mind is maliciousness. Maliciousness is thinking about how to harm other people. We might want to harm others out of sheer hatred and for revenge, or because we are competing, and we are in rivalry with them. Or we may be holding a grudge against them. Although they may have apologized, we are still angry and want to hurt them. Planning how to harm someone else is maliciousness.

Now, the first branch in completing a malicious mental action is that there needs to be an object, which, in this instance, is any sentient being. This is

followed by the complete intention—we recognize the sentient being, who it is, and we recognize that they could be hurt if we did whatever it is we want to do. Our intention is, “I wish I could harm them. Wouldn’t it be nice if I could harm them?” This is the opposite of the four immeasurables—the malicious intention might go something like this:

“May all sentient beings have suffering and its causes [laughter], especially this person whom I can’t stand!”

“May it happen as soon as possible with no delay and obstruction.”

Okay? Do you understand this way of thinking? The intention is, “Wouldn’t it be nice if they had some misfortune,” or “I wish I could get my revenge.” The action is, “Hmm ... that looks really good. I’m going to do it! I’m definitely going to harm this person.” The completion is when we start thinking about exactly how to do it, and our intention becomes very firm. We think, “I am really going to get this guy! And this is how I am going to do it.” You can see the flow of one thought moving from the intention to the action to the completion.

You can see that with both coveting and maliciousness, we don’t just have the passing thought, “Wouldn’t it be nice if I had this. Wouldn’t it be nice if somebody else had some misfortune.” Coveting and maliciousness put energy into that thought, feeding the thought so we get to the point where we are determined to act on it. This is why it is so important to catch the afflictions before they develop in our

minds. If we don't, then they gradually worsen and soon become coveting or malicious thoughts.

Self-respect and consideration for others

With both coveting and (especially with) maliciousness, we're in the process of getting to the point of deciding. This is the premeditated part of any crime, where one is premeditating how to steal or how to kill. In the process, we're completely ignoring or abandoning two very positive mental factors, self-respect and consideration for others. Although self-respect and consideration for others are overlooked when we covet or act maliciously, they are also overlooked whenever we do any of the other destructive actions.

When we have self-respect, we observe an action and decide, "I can act better than that. I'm not going to do that (negative action)," or, "I'm a Dharma practitioner, and I don't want to get involved in this." Out of respect for our own integrity as human beings, respect for our own practice, we decide not to get involved in thinking this way or acting out our destructive thoughts.

When we are considerate of others, we abandon thinking or acting harmfully by taking others into account, "If I speak that way, I might hurt someone. It might affect their family, too. I really don't want to do it," or, "If I act that way, other people will lose faith in me. I am trying to cultivate other people's trust. I am trying to be a reliable and honest person. I don't want other people to lose faith in me or make them lose faith in the ..."

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

... we're completely ignoring these two other possible mental factors. In fact, we are lacking self-respect and consideration for others. These are two very important mental factors to try to develop because they help us avoid not only the physically and verbally destructive actions, but also the mentally destructive ones.

Now, we have to understand what self-respect and consideration for others mean. We often misinterpret self-respect to mean self-judgment. For example, if we have self-respect, we might think, "I am a Dharma practitioner. I don't want to do this," or, "I have the Buddha nature. I don't want to pollute it by acting negatively." But if we are judging ourselves, our thoughts might be, "I shouldn't do this. I am a real jerk if I do it, and I'm really proving to myself that I am awful." When we have self-judgment, we have a heavy, critical voice. Self-judgment easily masks as self-respect, but it's not. Self-respect and self-judgment are two completely different mental factors.

Similarly, consideration for others, where we truly consider the effect of our actions on someone else and decide not to do them, can be subtly twisted. We might think we are being considerate of others, but instead we are attached to our reputation, "I'm not going to do this because if I do, no one will like me," or, "I'm not going to do that because if I do, everybody will criticize me. I want them to like me. I am attached to and want people's approval." Attachment to reputation is an affliction, whereas consideration for others is not. We should cultivate

consideration for others because it allows us to calmly and precisely see the effects of our actions on others and then decide not to do the harmful actions. Do you see the difference between these two attitudes?

This is something quite important because if we are not aware of these differences, we can go a long time in our practice thinking we have self-respect and consideration, when actually what we have is self-judgment and attachment to reputation. [Laughter.] It is important to be able to distinguish between being attached to reputation and really caring about the effects of our actions. Likewise, it is important to know when we are judging ourselves versus when we honestly have a sense of our Buddha nature and therefore want to act according to our potential.

Wrong Views

The last of the ten destructive actions is wrong views. Wrong views, as discussed here, involve denying something important that is true or accepting something as true that, in fact, is not true. Wrong views pertain to our philosophical beliefs, to our outlook on life. We are not referring to wrong views in the sense that we vote as a Republican or as a Democrat. Wrong views involve matters of major importance, such as the existence of cause and effect, the existence of the Buddha, Dharma, or Sangha, the existence of Enlightenment, or the possibility of attaining Enlightenment.

Having wrong views is harmful because it sets the basis for us to get involved in the other nine harmful actions. For example, people who have no moral

conscience, who have no sense of ethics whatsoever, do not see the effects of their actions. They might think, “I can do whatever I want. I can kill, I can steal, I can hurt others because there are no consequences. There is just this one life, so I can do whatever I want. As long as I don’t get caught, it’s perfectly all right!” This view denies past and future lives, denies cause and effect, denies the possibility of becoming Enlightened. When we have wrong views, we actively think about something and decide, “I do not believe in this and I am going to refute it. I am going to deny it!” The mind that holds this wrong view is a very strong, stubborn mind full of misconceptions.

[Audience:] Having doubts is not the same as wrong views, is it?

No, it isn’t. Having doubts is perfectly normal. In our Dharma practice, especially when we first begin, we are filled with many doubts. First, we think, “Well, maybe. I am not sure. No, I don’t think so.” Then later we think, “Well, maybe. I am not sure, hmm ...” And finally, “Well, maybe. I’m not sure ... well, it could be.” We all start with doubt and disbelief and then progress toward a deeper understanding.

To resolve our doubts, we can ask questions, participate in discussions, hear teachings, or get more information. We can take as much time as we need and be patient while doing this. When we have doubts, we have some openness, although our preconceptions may still keep us from seeing reality. There is also a wish to enquire.

When we have wrong views, however, we have strong, stubborn views such as, “There are no past and future lives. They absolutely, positively do not exist!” “There is no such thing as cause and effect. I can do whatever I want. There is no consequence,” or “It’s impossible for sentient beings to become Enlightened. Why even try to act positively because it is totally impossible. We are born sinful. No way to do anything about it. Human nature is completely miserable.” You can see that if we hold wrong views, we are mentally giving ourselves permission to do whatever we want and to completely abandon any kind of ethical restraint.

[Audience:] A Catholic nun who is living ethically but doesn't believe in karma, is that negative?

Although she may say she doesn't believe in karma, in actuality she probably does. What's in her mind may be, “It's Jesus' teaching that ‘thou shall reap as thou sow.’” In other words, you reap the crop you plant. For that reason, she may abandon harmful actions. Also, because she sees the results of the harmful actions on other people, she has some consideration for them. However, if you ask her, “Do you believe in karma?” she might say “no” because she thinks karma is something funny that Asian people believe. But if we consider the meaning of the word “karma,” her thoughts indicate she probably does believe in it. As we watch and listen to people, we begin to understand the power of wrong views. We see very clearly how they get people way off track and how they make the mind stubborn and very obscured.

So, let's review the four branches that complete a destructive mental action, this time in terms of wrong views. First, the object is something that is true, that exists, and that we are denying. As I said, the object could be the existence of cause and effect, Enlightenment, the Triple Gem, past or future lives, or anything of an important nature. The intention is knowing clearly what we should believe but denying it, and the affliction is ignorance. So the intention is, "I don't believe in this." The action is, "I don't believe in this. I definitely don't believe in cause and effect." And the completion is completely deciding this is the right view, "Yes, I am absolutely, positively certain. There is no cause and effect! I am not only going to think that, but I am actually going to promulgate that view among other people and teach them." That view then becomes a very firm, hard, wrong view.

General Comments about the Ten Destructive Actions

Now I want to talk a bit more generally about the ten destructive actions. Any of the destructive actions can be initiated with any of the three poisons (anger, attachment, or ignorance) and completed with another.

For instance, we could begin to covet someone's possessions out of anger and then complete the action with attachment. The motivation we start with is called the causal motivation, and the motivation we have at the time we are doing the action is the timely

motivation.

Killing, harsh words, and malice are always completed with the motivation of anger, though they may start with other afflictions.

Similarly, stealing, unwise sexual behavior, and coveting may start with a particular affliction, but the timely motivation we have when we complete the action is attachment.

With wrong views, we complete the action with ignorance.

The destructive actions of speech—lying, divisive words, harsh words, and idle chatter—can be completed with any of the afflictions.

As I said before, of the seven actions of body and speech, six of them can be committed by telling others to do them, and the seventh, unwise sexual behavior, you have to do yourself.

The three destructive actions of the mind can't all exist in the human mind at the same time. They are in different mind moments. Our thoughts may move from coveting to maliciousness and then to wrong views, and to any of them again, but the three are never in our mind simultaneously.

Wrong views is the strongest of the destructive actions and the worst because it sets the stage for doing the other nine. Killing is the next most harmful action.

Of the three destructive actions that we do physically, killing is the most harmful, stealing is next, and then unwise sexual behavior.

Of the four destructive actions of speech, the order from most to least destructive is lying, divisive words, harsh words, and idle talk.

The most harmful of the destructive actions of the mind is wrong views, followed by malice, and then coveting.

So, this concludes our discussion of the ten destructive actions. Let me pause here to answer any questions you have about what we have talked about tonight.

Questions and answers

[Audience:] Could you list again the four branches of a complete action?

The four branches of a complete action are the basis or the object, the complete intention, the action, and the completion of the action. As I said previously, the second branch, the complete intention, is subdivided into three parts. The first part is recognizing the object—the thing, the person, or whatever—that we are intending to act upon. The second part is intending to do whatever the action is. And the third part is that we have one of the afflictions, which motivates us to take action.

You may have heard Buddhist teachers or practitioners talk about the three parts of a complete negative karma: the preparation, the actual action, and the completion. If you ever hear this, don't get confused. They are actually referring to the four branches but looking at them in a different way. The preparation, which is the first of the three parts, includes the first two of the four branches, the basis and the complete intention.

Again, knowing all the branches is helpful because

it gives us the ability to look at our actions and put them into perspective. I know that when I have done only part of a negative action, my karma is not as heavy as when I have done a complete, absolutely perfect negative action.

This awareness also helps us in the future. We are not able to completely change and abandon all of our negative actions right away—it would be nice, but things just don't work that way. By knowing the branches that complete a destructive action, when we act harmfully, we can at least make an effort not to complete all four branches.

[Audience:] Is coveting like desire?

Coveting is similar to desire. But coveting is the kind of desire that is clinging, grasping, and possessive. It is the kind of desire that carries the thought, "I'm definitely going to get that!" You might call coveting first-class desire. [Laughter.]

[Audience:] Could you explain ignorance?

Ignorance is an unknowing or an unawareness in the mind. When we are unaware, we misconstrue how we, other people, and other phenomena exist. Let's use the analogy of walking into a dark room. The darkness is the obscuration, the thing that limits our ability to see. There can also be obscuration in our mind. But there is not only obscuration, there is also active misinterpretation. This would be like going into the dark room and seeing something in the corner that's coiled and striped, and thinking, "Ahh, it's a

snake!” But in fact it’s a rope. Because of the darkness, we project something that is not there, become afraid, and start screaming.

It’s the same with ignorance in the mind. There is a foggy obscuration, and we project what we call inherent or independent existence onto phenomena. We make the objects of our thoughts into something solid and concrete, existent in and of themselves. This is the primary ignorance. There is also a secondary kind of ignorance, which is the ignorance of cause and effect. This is an ignorance of how things function on a relative level, for instance, not realizing that if you kill something, that action affects what happens to you later.

[Audience: inaudible]

Let’s say you have the basis and the complete intention (the first two branches), but you don’t have the action (the third branch). You have the thought, “I would like to go buy a new pair of skis.” In this instance, you are not really mulling it over or thinking seriously about it, so it is not a complete action.

When we bring attachment into a manifest state in our mind, it is, nevertheless, habituating our mind with attachment. The more we bring attachment into our mind, the more attachment will keep coming.

[Audience: inaudible]

Yes, definitely. We have many desires and defilements regularly during the day, but we only notice them when we are sitting and watching the breath. You are

right that sometimes the desire seems to increase when we put ourselves in an environment where we are not allowing our desires to run rampant. For example, when you let your dog run wherever he wants, he doesn't make a fuss. But as soon as you put him in a yard, he starts barking and yelping, making a big fuss. This is what our baby mind does. Our mind yells and screams when we put it in an environment where it can't fulfill every wish that pops into it.

About ignorance

[Audience: inaudible]

Yes, ignorance is the mind that believes everything is fixed and solid and real and existent in and of itself. It's like saying, "I am a horrible person; that's all I am! There is a *me*, there is a very definite *me*, and its nature is completely horrible." Making that thought completely solid, without any space in the mind at all when, in fact, there is no solid, concrete person there to start with. We are creating something where there is nothing.

Similarly, if we think about money, it is just paper and ink. But we superimpose on top of this, "MONEY, I've got to have it!" We make it solid; it isn't just paper and ink anymore, "This is real, inherently existing stuff that is very, very valuable, and all my self-respect depends upon it!" So, ignorance is believing that everything is concrete, existing in and of itself, when in reality all things are made of parts, and things arise and fade away because of causes.

[Audience:] Could you elaborate on the two kinds of ignorance?

There are two kinds of ignorance, ignorance regarding the ultimate and ignorance regarding the relative.

Ignorance regarding the ultimate is the belief that all things are concrete, independently existing, and solid when, in fact, they are not. Everything depends on parts, causes, and labels for its existence.

Ignorance regarding the relative is not having an understanding of cause and effect, completely denying the existence of cause and effect, actions, and their results.

Both types of ignorance are inborn, although they can also be learned. Society teaches us many wrong philosophical systems. When we follow such systems, over time our thinking becomes skewed, and we then live according to that ignorance.

Evaluating our thoughts

[Audience: inaudible]

[Laughter.] I think you are right. Our mind is quite unreliable. Within our mind there are many different kinds of mental factors that can arise or manifest. Very contradictory mental factors can actively manifest in our mind at different times. So the mind might, at one moment, have a wrong conception, such as, “There is no cause and effect.” And then later, the mental factor of wisdom might arise, “I think there is cause and effect.” At one time we might have self-respect, “No, I’m not going to act negatively because

I have human dignity, and I am not going to undercut that.” And at another time, we may completely throw our self-respect out the window and do anything we want.

So, we have all these different thoughts, many of which oppose each other, and they occur at different times. What we are trying to do in Dharma practice is learn to identify our thoughts and feelings, “Oh, that is consideration for others!” “That’s lack of consideration for others!” “That’s mindfulness!” “That is confidence!” “And that is anger!” “That is grudge holding!”

This is why it is very important to listen to teachings, to think about them, and to meditate on them. The teachings give us guidelines on how to evaluate the quality of our thoughts. Instead of having the all-encompassing belief, “I think it, therefore it is true,” we begin to question and evaluate what is true and what is not.

[Audience: inaudible]

I was talking with someone today who said that whenever she meditates on the four immeasurables, she tries to include George Bush because she feels he is trying to do his best but somehow he is obscured. [Laughter.] And I said, “Well, yes, I think Saddam Hussein, from his point of view, is also trying to do what he thinks is right! He acts with what he considers to be a good motivation.” She replied, “Yes, it’s just amazing how people can think they are right when they are really out of touch.” I responded, “Yes, but when we are right, we are really right, aren’t we?”

[Laughter.]“We’re definitely right! No other way to look at it.”

What the Dharma does is bring a bit of doubt into all of our “certainty.” Instead of assuming that, “I think it, therefore it is right,” let’s not take our thoughts and feelings so seriously. Let’s step back and look at our thoughts, “Well, is that right or not? Am I acting properly or could my behavior be improved?” or “Is this really an honest relationship or am I fooling myself and the other person?” Dharma practice is about being observant and asking ourselves questions. We may not get instant answers, and sometimes we will have difficulty identifying our thoughts, but this is the value of continual practice and meditation over a period of time. Through practice, we become more familiar with what’s going on inside our minds. Things become clearer.

I’ve often had the experience that while something is happening or right after something has happened, I can’t tell whether I was angry or just being practical. Maybe a few months later, when there is more space in my mind, I realize, “Oh, that was anger, wasn’t it?” or “No, actually it was okay what I was doing.” Sometimes we don’t really know at the time what we are thinking or feeling. When our mind is too confused or we’re too involved in the situation, it is difficult to analyze. Again, if we practice meditation over a period of time, we begin to look back on events, see them clearly, and learn from them.

We have to develop the attitude of, “Yes, I am going to make mistakes, but there is no other way to do it!” When the critical mind says, “I have to have everything clean and concise and in its proper box.

From the beginning, I have to be able to do everything perfectly,” or “I should be Enlightened tomorrow!”—don’t bother to recycle those kinds of expectations. Just put them in the garbage dump, okay? [Laughter.]

[Audience: inaudible]

[Laughter.] That’s why, again and again, we try to understand through analysis, “This hundred-dollar bill is just ink and paper. That’s all. There is nothing else to it. It becomes valuable simply because my mind gives it importance.” If you gave that bill to someone from another culture or to someone from a culture where paper money isn’t used, they might use it to light a fire. Why? Because the paper money has no inherent value. It exists completely because we give it the concept of value.

[Audience:] When I’m meditating, I know the \$100 bill is void of inherent existence. I’m not attached to the paper, but I’m attached to what I can get with that paper.

[Laughter.] Yes, in that situation, you’re seeing not only the money as inherently existent, but you’re also seeing the thing that you want as inherently existent. For instance, we might say, “I want this glass, this really beautiful, fantastic crystal glass!” Again, the glass doesn’t exist as a glass. It doesn’t exist as valuable. It doesn’t exist as beautiful. The glass does not actually have those characteristics; our mind simply projects those concepts onto it. You were saying that when you meditate, the thought keeps

occurring, “When is the food coming?” [Laughter.] That thought gets very big. The food is definitely inherently existent. But if you take a moment to think about the food, you see that, basically it’s just manure, water, [laughter] nitrogen, carbon, oxygen ... What the big deal? [Audience speaks.] We do need food to live. But it is our minds that give the food qualities that, in reality, do not exist. You could say, “I need food to live,” or “I NEED FOOD TO LIVE!”—there’s a very big difference there. [Laughter.]

The Broader Implications of the Ten Destructive Actions

When we talked last time about the ten destructive actions, we discussed the four parts: the basis, the complete intention, the action, and the completion of the action. This is very useful because it gives us some kind of tool with which to look back at our own actions, to see what we’ve done that’s really serious, that needs to be purified, and what we’ve done that does not have all four branches complete. It also helps us look ahead to the future to be able to keep our ethics straight, to try not to create destructive actions with all four branches complete.

However, we shouldn’t get locked into a very legalistic view of ethics. We shouldn’t get into this whole thing of, “OK, I stole something but I only had three of the branches complete, so phew! That’s OK.” [Laughter.] “I started to lie but the other guy didn’t believe me, so it wasn’t so bad.” Or, conversely, “Oh,

I killed that grasshopper, all four branches complete. Woe is me!” And we get into a legalistic, technical way of understanding ethics.

As I said, the legalism and technicality is going to be quite beneficial, but we should take it the right way. We shouldn't get locked into it and just see ethics as a legal system, because it's not a legal system. Ethics are guidelines the Buddha set out that we can use as mirrors to look at our own life. And we can take those guidelines and expand them much wider than just the legalistic version with the four parts.

So, for example, killing can be expanded to how do we interact with living beings? Do we honor other people's physical integrity, or do we sometimes impinge upon that? Do we hit other people? Do we slap people? Do we kick dogs? Do we throw things at cats? How do we relate to other people's bodies? Do we really honor life, or do we strike out when our buttons get pushed? And similarly, do we really honor our own life? Do we take care of our own body properly? Not in a selfish way, but in a way of recognizing that we have a precious human life and it's something to honor and to protect. Do we treat our own body properly? Or do we beat up on ourselves? Do we eat improperly? Are we really hard on our own body? So that one thing about killing can have a wider implication. And I think it's good to reflect on this. It'll give us a lot of information about ourselves.

Similarly, we can expand on stealing. How do we relate to other people's material possessions? Do we respect other people's things? Or do we abuse them

without caring? When we borrow things from other people, even if we return them, do we return them nicely, or do we return them in worse shape than when we borrowed them? When things aren't ours, do we not treat them as nicely? When we're in a hotel or somebody else's home, or in a public place, and we spill something, do we just let it be, "That's their rug; they'll clean it up," or do we take care of other people's property?

Also, how do we care for our own property? And again, I'm not talking about caring for our own property with this self-centered grasping, but do we use our resources in a wise way, or do we fritter them away? Do we use our food wisely? Do we use our house wisely? Do we use our money wisely? Do we use our car wisely? How do we relate to things like that? What about recycling, and how we use our possessions? Do we do that? Do we take care with that? Do we drive only when we have to? Do we get in the car and drive when we don't have to?

So, this can be expanded to much broader things. And I think this is good. When you go home, take an inventory. You might even write some things down, about the things that you do take care of, and the things that may need some improvement. And then do the same thing in another six months, and see how you've changed. It can be quite useful.

If we go on to unwise sexual behavior, that can be expanded to just basically, how do we relate to other people sexually? When we meet somebody, are we automatically tuned in, "Oh, that's a good-looking person." What's going on? In other words, do we always relate to people in terms of sexuality? Are we

always doing little flirting games with people? Are we moving our body in certain ways or using our speech in certain ways to communicate all these subtle sexual things, or are we completely direct with other people? And how do we feel about our own sexuality? Is it something we're peaceful with? Or is it something that causes us a lot of anxiety?

If we go on to lying, if we expand that, how do we use our speech? Basically, do we speak things that are true? Do we exaggerate? Do we build up stories and make them look the way we want them to look so that it suits our own purposes? Or are we honest in the way we speak? Are we honest to ourselves? Do we overlook faults that we have and rationalize them, which is dishonesty? Or do we blame ourselves for things that aren't our responsibility, which is also lying? Do we feel guilty about things that we have no responsibility for? That's self-deception as well. So doing some inventory along this line is useful.

“Divisive words” can be expanded to, how do we relate to other people's friendships? Can we rejoice when other people are harmonious and when they're friends? Or do we always want a piece of the pie? Do we always want to be the center of attention and draw the attention to ourselves? Or can we accept when other people have happiness? Can we accept when other people do things better than we do? Or do we always relate to other people in the sense of competition, that we have to be better, and we're always subtly competing over every little thing in how we interact with them? Can we let go of the competition and rejoice in their talent and appreciate it, and let ourselves learn from other people's talents?

Or do we try to split up people who are harmonious, cause people bad reputation, and disparage their talents so that other people won't like them?

Harsh words. Do we dump on other people? Especially the people we're closest to. I think those are the people that harsh words come out more directly towards. Because with people we're close to—our parents, our children, our partners, our very good friends—somehow we feel we can go beyond normal human manners. “I'm so close to this person, so I don't have to take care about how I speak to them. I can just sit and spew out all my anger or all my dissatisfaction. I can blame them for things, and then I can go back and apologize later, because anyway we're married; it doesn't matter.” [laughter]

I think the people we're closest to, those are the ones to whom our harsh speech really goes wild. We don't restrain very much there. Do we dump on people unnecessarily? Or if we are feeling agitated and we need to talk, do we go explain that to somebody, “I'm agitated. I'm angry. I need to dump, but I also am coming to you so that you can help give me some good perspective on this because I want to go beyond my anger.”

Do we make sure that when we tell the people our problems, that that's the time and place to tell them? Because maybe they have something pressing on their mind, too, and we don't even let them say much more than “Hello” before all of a sudden we let out all of our complaints. Or we have a hard day at work and we come home and take it out on somebody. Or we had a hard time at home, and we go to work and take it out on our colleagues.

Also, do we do a lot of teasing and things like that, that are subtly picking on people? There's hostility, like we were talking before about humor with hostility in it, or teasing with hostility. That's a form of harsh words. Do we do that, or do we speak directly, honestly and pleasantly?

In terms of idle talk, are we aware of who we're talking to and what's going on and why we're talking? Or are we just babbling because we like to hear ourselves babble? Because we've all been on the other end of a conversation with somebody who can't stop talking. We all know what that's like. It's like you have to go to the bathroom real bad and you can't go because this person won't be quiet? Or you have something to do the next day and you can't do it because this person is just going on and on about the sports, the weather, the neighbors, etc. Are we ever that person? Not us! [Laughter.] So do some inventory on that.

And then also when we do speak, do we speak earnestly? For example, do we make the effort to praise people? Do we use our speech in a proper way? Do we make an attempt to notice people's talents and good qualities, and praise them sincerely? Or when we say something good to someone or about someone, are we actually flattering them because we have some ulterior motive and we're trying to get them to like us so they will give us what we want?

Do we hint for things? This would come under both the stealing—how we relate to possessions—and also the idle talk. Do we ask for things directly? Or do we hint? It's basically manipulation, not being direct and honest with people, but it's having an ulterior motive

and trying to come across in a certain way so that we hide our real motivations. Do we use our speech in that way, hinting instead of being direct? Or do we put on airs and pretend to be great this and that, so knowledgeable about this and that; people have to listen to us. When we're with a group of people, do we have to control the conversation? Or do we listen to others?

Do we use our speech to coerce people, to make people uncomfortable, to make them embarrassed? Or do we take the time and effort to use our speech to make people comfortable, so that if we see somebody in a group who looks like they feel uncomfortable, we use our speech to go over and welcome them and make them feel that they can join in. When people ask us for directions, do we take the time to give them directions? Especially if they don't speak English very well. How we speak affects all sorts of areas of our life.

Coveting. Again, how do we relate to things? Every time we go somewhere, are we looking at the environment in terms of "I want"? It's interesting. You may notice that when you go into someone's home, your mind is already in the frame of, "What do they have here that is enjoyable that I can get for myself too?" [Laughter.] Are we always involved in this mind of "I want more. I want better. I'm not satisfied with what I have," so that everything we see, we frame it in those terms?

Maliciousness. When we're alone, are we constantly with our inner dialogue about what this person did to me and that person did to me? "This is totally unacceptable and I have to put them in their

place!” Are we all the time going on and on about how terrible everybody else treats us, and how we have to take some strong action to make sure this doesn’t go on? Or do we have the capability to let go and to forgive other people when they make mistakes? Or does the idea of forgiving other people almost give us a heart attack? We feel so threatened. Forgiveness is not on the ten most popular words nowadays. [Laughter.] But how much do we try to develop that, or do we use our mental energy in the opposite way?

And when we have wrong views. Do we take time to clarify our doubts? Or do we just let ourselves stay stuck in doubts that may eventually lead us to wrong views? Or do we take very stubborn positions on things? Are we completely attached to an opinion that’s ours, even though some very wise people may be trying to give us some other ways of looking at something? Or do we just shut down into, “This is what I believe. This is right and everybody’s got to accept it.”

When I was teaching at Kirkland, the subject of vegetarianism came up and I said that we don’t need to become born-again vegetarians. So again, it’s a thing of our views and also our speech. Do we take some kind of solid view, be it a right view or a wrong view, and get so entrenched that we can’t see beyond it?

What I’m getting at here is that it’s especially helpful in our life to sometimes look at the ten destructive actions very closely with the four component parts, and other times to look at them in a very broad way, to figure out our overall general

purpose. And to do an inventory in our life from time to time, as I was saying, maybe even writing things down—what we do well, what needs to be improved—and then doing a similar inventory in another six months. Because it gives us a much clearer direction about the things to work on; it gives us the ability to check up in our life, to identify even the small things we do well and the small things that wouldn't take much to improve on. It's very, very helpful. So, the ten are not ten commandments (“Thou shall not”). Rather, they're guidelines for improvement.

Distinguishing Factors Making Actions Heavy or Light

Now, I will go on to the next topic, which is the factors that help make a particular action either a very heavy one karmically or a lighter one karmically. And, again, these factors give us a lot of material with which to examine our own mental processes.

1. NATURE OF THE ACTION

The first factor is the nature of the action. I talked about this a bit last time. Of the three destructive actions of the body, the most harmful one, by its nature, is killing; after that is stealing, and then unwise sexual conduct. Just by the general nature of the act, killing is much heavier karmically than having unwise sexual behavior.

Similarly, the four destructive actions of speech are in order, according to their heaviness. So if we lie, it's

much heavier than idle talk. Or if we use divisive speech, it's heavier than harsh words.

The destructive actions of the mind are in reverse order. Wrong views is the most harmful one, then maliciousness, and then coveting.

In general, we say that wrong views is the heaviest because it can lead us to do all the other ten, especially if we negate cause and effect, and say, "There are no results to my actions, so let's just do what I want," then we mentally give ourselves permission to do what we want, and that becomes problematic.

2. BASIS OR OBJECT

The second factor that determines the karmic strength of an action is the basis or the object. This has to do with who the person is that we are doing the action with, or what the material substance is that we're doing it with.

The heaviest things to do something with—and this applies both positively and negatively—are our spiritual teacher and the Triple Gem. So, for example, you'll see it's included in the bodhisattva vows not to lie to one's spiritual teacher. Why is that worse than lying to your neighbor? Because teachers are the people who can help us on the path. Similarly, stealing things from the Triple Gem or stealing from a Sangha community, or using harsh words against any of them. All these things are very heavy. On the flip side, making offerings, praising, speaking well, offering service, generating any kind of positive attitude towards the spiritual teacher and the Triple Gem

generate very strong positive karma.

Also, the karma we create with our parents is very strong. The karma regarding the Triple Gem and our teacher are strong because of their qualities and their ability to guide us. Our parents are strong objects with which we create karma because of their kindness to us. When we look at how much we bad-mouth our parents ... I mean, who do we lie to most of all? Normally our parents. Who do we criticize a lot? Our parents. If we look closely, we see that we create a lot of incredible karma in terms of our parents. And sometimes society encourages it. If you talk with your friends and they are saying, "Oh, I went to this meeting and I'm a wounded inner child because my parents did this and this and this," then we feel like we also have to somehow criticize our parents so that we fit in with the conversation. I think it's quite damaging. We all did it. I can write you scripts because [laughter] I did it, too.

But we definitely should look at this because it involves an incredible change of attitude towards our family. Instead of looking at everything they didn't give us, we start looking at everything they did give us. And if we rejoice at that, the anger, the impatience, these kinds of things don't arise so strongly.

I'm not saying to wipe out or whitewash unpleasant things. What I'm talking about is this incredible blaming attitude we have toward our family. It's very clear. When we were a baby, if our mama didn't take care of us and feed us and bathe us and clothe us, we would have died. We were completely helpless. We couldn't do anything for

ourselves. It's because of the kindness of the people who brought us up that we're still alive. So try to appreciate that.

By the way, giving mother's day and father's day presents with a good motivation is strong, because it's in relationship to our parents. Or helping them out, doing small things for our parents. If we can't help in any way, at least we can try not to harm them.

Another group of important people in terms of the creation of karma are the poor and the needy. If we steal from someone who is destitute, that is much worse than stealing from someone who is rich. It's clear, because the poor person has more need. If we help someone who is sick or poor or homeless, the action is much more powerful than helping someone who is healthy or already has material wealth.

I'm not saying don't help the middle class and the upper class. Those people have incredible psychological suffering. [Laughter.] It's amazing. You go to India, and the Tibetans think this country [United States] is so marvelous. I tell them about the psychological suffering people have here. Incredible. Amazing! So, helping people who are needy mentally, who are poor emotionally, is also important.

Also, killing an elephant is going to be more damaging than killing a mouse, because the elephant is a bigger animal, and especially if you inflict a lot of wounds on it, it's going to have much more suffering because it has a much bigger body. Stealing large and valuable things is much worse than stealing pencils. Stealing Dharma materials is also much worse than stealing a pencil. [Laughter.] And lying about meaningful things is worse than lying about trivial

things. All of these things work on the flip side. In other words, if we take care of our relationship to these things, it puts a much more positive imprint on our mindstreams too.

3. STRENGTH OF THE INTENTION

The third factor is the intention, the strength of our motivation. This is a very important factor, which has two parts. The first part is the motivation, and the second part is the strength of the motivation. An example is being really angry when we tell someone off versus being mildly irritated. Another example is our mind being completely greedy and stuck in possessing something when we take it versus having a passing interest in it.

That's why we make an effort at the beginning of our sessions here to create a good motivation. We try to have a good motivation rather than a bad one, and we make our motivation as strong as we can, because if we have the altruistic intention very strongly, again, it's much more weighty, it's much more constructive than if it's just kind of blah, blah, blah. So, take some time to create the good motivation. That's why I suggested when you first wake up in the morning, try to sit and cultivate a good motivation, because that kind of motivation influences everything else that happens the rest of the day. Then if you can renew that motivation throughout the day, it makes it stronger so that everything you do becomes more powerful.

4. HOW THE ACTION WAS DONE

The actual action, in other words, how the action was done, the manner in which we did the action, this is the fourth factor. Here we mean, in terms of harming someone, how much they suffered while we were harming them. An example is killing or executing people versus torturing, maiming, or humiliating them, taking away their human dignity before they were murdered. I keep thinking of what we did when we were kids—did we just squash the spider or did we pull all of its legs off? Because the way we did something, the amount of harm inflicted in the process of doing it determines the karmic strength of our actions. So, in any of these actions, how did we do it? Did we do it in a way that made the other person suffer a lot? When we used harsh words, did we completely blow up and yell and scream and make a huge horrendous fuss, or did we just say what we had to say and be done with it? Did we make an attempt to bring up everything the person did wrong for the last five years, or did we just say what was bugging us at the moment? These are the kinds of things to look at.

5. FREQUENCY

The fifth factor that determines an action's strength is the frequency of the action. If we do something again and again, repeatedly, the karma is much heavier. We keep talking about habits. Habit of destructive actions. Habit of constructive actions. When we do something frequently, it becomes quite heavy, even if

it normally were something light, like let's say, ridiculing somebody with hostility. It may not be that bad, but if we do it week after week after week, it becomes quite strong.

Similarly, if we offer things on our altar, it might be a small thing we're doing, but it becomes very strong when we do it day after day after day. Or if we get up in the morning and we cultivate a good motivation day after day. Or if we go out of our way in the office to help someone, and make it a habit, then it becomes more constructive. So, the frequency with which we do actions influences their karmic weight.

6. WHETHER AN OPPONENT WAS APPLIED OR NOT

The final factor is whether we've purified or not. Whether we've used some kind of opponent power to counteract the force of that karma. That influences whether it's heavy or light. So let's say we lie to our parents with a strong motivation. But then we make an effort to purify. We generate regret, and we take refuge and generate altruism, we make a determination to try not to do it again. We do some kind of counteractive behavior, some kind of practice or service, and we do this often; we purify it, and then that karma becomes much lighter. This is the importance of purification.

Similarly, if we've done something constructive and then get angry afterwards, we impede that constructive karma from ripening. Or if we generate very strong, stubborn wrong views afterwards, we mitigate the effect of that karma. That's something to

be aware of, because that would make it much less potent, much less able to bring a positive result.

Before, I was talking about reading the newspaper as a lesson in Lamrim. This is interesting to do. Take out the front page. You see that the Serbs are bombing Sarajevo, so you make some examples. It's an action of killing with a strong motivation, or so it seems, because they aren't relenting and aren't paying much attention to calls for ceasefire. How is the action being done? It's causing people a lot of harm, a lot of fear. They went through a lot of psychological torture before they were killed. Are any of the people that are getting bombed holy people? Are people doing this repeatedly day after day, getting into the habit of being soldiers and killing? Are they going to have any kind of regret and do purification?

Just take something from the newspaper, and think about it in terms of karma. It gives you some idea what people are doing. You look at the karma that people are creating, and when you begin to understand, it becomes virtually impossible to be angry at those people. Because it's clear how they are creating the cause for their own pain and misery in the future.

When I went to Tibet, I remember going to Ganden Monastery. This is one of the three largest monasteries. It's on top of a hill and there's this incredible trail (there's a road now) that goes up there. At the time of the cultural revolution, I don't think there was a road. I don't think they drove vehicles up there because the trail wasn't too good, and I was thinking, how much effort the people must have made to climb that mountain to destroy the monastery!

Because the monastery is virtually leveled. It had about four thousand monks in it before. You go in there and see that the monastery walls were made of enormous rocks, and the rocks were pushed over. It took a lot of effort. It's a powerful object. People were killed. People were harmed, prevented from doing their practice. It was done quite often. They had to put a lot of energy into doing it. It wasn't an easy thing. In fact, if I had as much energy for practicing Dharma as they had for destroying it, I probably would have some realizations by now. [Laughter.] Because it really took a lot of energy.

I was thinking about this as I was going to Ganden, and there was no possible way I could be angry, because when I thought about the karma the people created in doing this, it was so clear the kind of rebirth that they were going to have. How could I possibly wish any kind of sentient being to suffer that much?

Similarly, if we apply it to things we read in the newspaper, or people we know who are doing very negative things, instead of getting angry at them, and irritated, if we look at what they are doing in terms of the karma they are creating, and in terms of these factors that make it heavy or light, again we get a much better understanding about how things are, what effects things will have. And it helps a great deal to develop compassion for other people. So reading Newsweek is an excellent lesson on karma.

Not only newspapers, but also the TV, and going to the movies. As I was saying before, we create karma when we rejoice at what other people do. So, if you're watching a movie, and it's about this couple and the woman goes off with somebody else and the man goes

off with somebody else, and the kid is sitting at home, confused, and meanwhile, you're really identifying with one or the other of them and saying, "Oh, this is nice. This is wonderful." [Laughter.] We are creating karma just by what we're rejoicing in, even though there's no real person.

It would be much worse if real people were doing this and we were rejoicing, rather than just TV here, but still, rather than watching a video and letting all these afflictions arise, it'd be much better to watch it in terms of karma. What kind of karma are they creating? I haven't seen movies in a long time, so it's hard for me to use examples [laughter], but just look at different movies. What kind of karma are the characters creating? If they were real people, what's going on here? And what things are heavy and what things are light? And what am I rejoicing at?

Questions and answers

[Audience:] When we think we have the right intention, but we don't, is this a wrong view?

Well, wrong views is much more like disbelief in karma, or disbelief in the potential to become a Buddha, something like that. But if, let's say, I sit down and I have a good talk with you about the things you're doing, and I tell myself that I'm doing it for your own good, but actually if I were to step back for a minute and be a bit more aware of what's going on, there's some hostility and aggression in my mind, then psychologically, we would call that rationalization. Even though I was saying, "I'm doing this for this

person's own good," it would be negative.

But it could also be a combination of things. Is this "I'm-doing-it-for-your-own-good" a complete rationalization, where it wouldn't take long to discover that underneath, we're pretty aggressive? Or are we, somewhere in our heart, really looking out for that person's good? And that in spite of trying to look out for that person's good, our own anger is also getting mixed in?

[Audience: inaudible]

Killing in the name of religion. To me, that would be one of the worst kinds, because that's taking something sacred and completely bringing it into the mud. That was one thing I remembered from majoring in history. Because it struck me. It's one of the big things people fight about. And I think as soon as people do that, they totally miss the point of their religion. Completely miss the point of their religion.

[Audience: inaudible]

So in the case where in a Buddhist country the people are getting massacred, to try and take up arms in order to preserve the religion—this is one of the things His Holiness would look at and say, "Difficult." [Laughter.] Real difficult! I thought about this kind of thing too. Now I'm giving you my personal thoughts about it. If you start killing to preserve the religion, then in one way, you lose the essence of the religion. Because the basic, fundamental thing of any religion is to abandon harming others. Killing is the most

forceful way of harming others, and yet we're doing that in the name of religion. It seems like you might preserve the religious institution, but create an incredible amount of negative karma.

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

[Audience: inaudible]

But then the question is, are you really preserving it for other sentient beings or not? I don't know. It's hard to say. I look at His Holiness's example. His Holiness, besides the fact that the Tibetans were completely outnumbered and it was just pragmatism also, I think on His Holiness's part, it wasn't just pragmatism, because there were a lot of Tibetans who were quite angry and upset and wanted to fight. They had a whole guerrilla movement going on and different things, and even some of the Tibetan young people nowadays are saying, "Look, if we were terrorists, we would get much more international attention than we are getting now. So we should do this." But His Holiness remains completely steadfast in the nonviolence. In my heart, I think that is where I would go too, because I feel that if you start transgressing your basic ethics, then you lose everything. You really lose everything.

Also, it's a thing of understanding karma. If societies are getting destroyed, we can't just say it's because of this political party or these external enemies that are doing this. It's also because we've created the cause as a group and as individuals to suffer this result, so it's something to look at

karmically. It's something to look at: how the Buddhist institutions, as in Burma or Tibet, contributed to the weakness of the country so that it could be overrun and destroyed? Were the religious institutions being very blind, just preserving their own institution and not meeting the needs of the people, thus allowing another force to come in and take control?

So there are a lot of complicated things to look at here. And I somehow feel, too, that if people are genuine practitioners, even if they die in this life because of persecution, they will definitely be born in another place where they can contact the teachings and teachers. Why? Because the karmic cause is there. Whereas if you completely get involved in anger and aggression and killing and harming, you may preserve something, but you've destroyed your own karma to again meet the teachings in future lives.

So it's a complicated thing. It's not simple. It's one of these things where there's no one perfect answer like we wish there were, that would solve all the problems and eliminate all doubt. It's one of those situations that's just really, really difficult. Each person is going to look at it individually according to how they feel they can handle it, according to their own abilities, their own understanding. Some people will have broader views and see things over a longer period of time, and some people will have narrower views.

[Audience: inaudible]

So situations where, for example, you lie in order to

protect someone, again, it's going to depend a lot on the reason you lied. In other words, if you lie out of love and compassion for that person—impartial love and compassion, not just favoritism or something like that—then it's not a complete negative action. There might still be some trace of negative karma, but it's not going to ripen very strongly.

When the Buddha was a bodhisattva in a previous life, he killed someone who was going to kill 499 others. He did it out of compassion for this person and to save the other 499 people, and he was willing to take the negative karma of killing upon himself. It was said that he actually went very far ahead on the path by the power of that compassion.

Different people have different views about this. Lama Zopa says there's no negative karma in what the Buddha did at all. Serkong Rinpoche says the action of killing is by nature negative, so there was a tinge of negativity, but the compassion motivating it was so overwhelming that there was no comparison. In other words, if the lie or action that looks harmful was done but it was done out of compassion for everyone in the situation, not just for one party or the other, then it doesn't really become a negative action. It becomes part of the bodhisattva practice, if your motivation is clear.

On the other hand, if your motivation isn't clear, and you lie out of partiality to protect someone, then things get a bit more complicated. "I'm lying to protect someone's life, and that's good because I don't want this person to get killed, but I don't want this person to get killed because they mean a lot to me, and I don't care at all about the guy who's

threatening them. In fact, I wish someone would shoot him as quickly as possible.” [Laughter.] If you have that kind of attitude and you’re lying to protect someone, it’s going to be very different. So I think it depends a lot upon the nuances, the tone of the mind, what are all the different factors going on in the motivation.

And some things become mixed because you start off with a good motivation, but by the time you get into it, it’s not so good anymore. It gets very muddy. Like one thing people do is say, “I’m going to take a job that earns a little bit more money, and I’m going to give the extra money to charity.” That is really their motivation when they start out. That’s a very good motivation. But then when they get the job, and they get the bigger pay checks, all of a sudden, the motivation changes, and the money doesn’t go to charity. It goes into one’s own holiday, or speedboat, or something like that.

Or we start out with a very good motivation to do charity work, “I want to help these people,” but midway through, we become very conscious of, “Have these people told me ‘thank you,’ and have they written me down on the list of donors? Am I getting some recognition from the group for having been so generous?” The causal motivation was one of genuine generosity, but because the person wasn’t mindful, the motivation degenerated at the time of giving and became a different one, so it becomes something that’s rather mixed.

Or some actions we do have a bit of constructive motivation and a bit of destructive motivation. And so there will be a mixed result.

[Audience: inaudible]

Again, this has to do with the strength of the motivation. If we're very clear that something is a destructive action and yet we do it, we've had to generate some extra, added boost to our motivation to get over the hurdle of that part of our mind saying, "Now, really." [laughter]

But on the other hand, having heard all of this, it gives us the possibility of mitigating our actions when we're in the process of doing them, because we know the different factors. So if we're catching ourselves in the middle of doing something, we can say, "I'd better change my motivation. I'd better make my motivation less intense," or, "I'd better purify afterwards." Or "This is something I do very habitually, very frequently. Maybe I should consider not doing that."

Killing out of self-defense

[Audience: inaudible]

There can be different motivations for self-defense. It can be done out of fear. It can also be done out of a calm mind. If you take the self-defense that is done out of fear, it's very much based on attachment to one's own body, isn't it? It's attachment. Attachment to our body. Attachment to our life. This gets real sticky. People don't always like to hear this part. But it is true. If you look at it, we're very attached to our bodies. Attachment to our bodies can motivate us to do a lot of harmful things.

That doesn't mean that we become dissociated

from our bodies to overcome the attachment. It doesn't mean we just dissociate—I'm up here and my body is doing something else. It doesn't mean we start to hate our body either. I think the kind of attitude we want to cultivate is an attitude that would be very beneficial at the time we die, which is, "Well, it's nice while I have it, but if I'm not going to have it anymore, that's okay, too." And if we can cultivate that kind of attitude toward our body, then when it comes time to die, we're going to be able to go. No problem. No fear. No misery. But if we have this kind of clinging to our body during our life, we create a lot of negativity at the time of death, then death becomes a very traumatic, tortuous, painful thing.

So what we're trying to do is to have a more balanced view of the body. We take care of it because it's the vehicle for our Dharma practice. We can defend it. Nothing wrong with protecting our life and defending our body, but if our instant reaction is doing it out of fear, which is based on attachment, we can try, if we're a little bit mindful, to expand that and say, "I'm not going to just cling to my own body. I recognize that this person is creating negative karma trying to harm me, so for his benefit also, I'm going to try to intervene and stop him so that he doesn't get the negative karma." So it is also important to think about the other parties involved.

And then if we do defend ourselves, we use the minimal amount of force inflicting damage to the other person. If we're really terrified, we're likely to just kill them. Maybe the person didn't have the intention to kill us. They were just going to mug us and take our money. But out of so much fear and

attachment, you kill the person. Maybe that wasn't even necessary. Maybe it would have been good enough to scream or kick them, or something else. But see, if we have a lot of the attachment and fear, we don't think clearly. If we can slowly, over a period of time, develop a healthy relationship with our body, then when those things come up, we'll have some mental space to be able to better assess the situation and do something more effective. Does that make some sense?

Domestic Violence

[Audience: inaudible]

Yes. Why stay in a situation where you're getting beat up?

[Audience:] A lot of people do.

A lot of people do. And most of them do it, again, out of attachment. Because they are getting something from that situation. But I think if it's possible to detach themselves from what they are getting from it, they can leave. And they may be able to take action beforehand.

I was talking with one woman who works with battered women and domestic violence. They run a support group. One woman in the group had incredible violence in her home. Members of the group asked her, "Well, what is your safety plan?" And she said, "I don't need one." She was not dealing with the situation, completely denying the danger that

was there.

So, I think that in many of these domestic violence situations, people can look clearly and see the danger that is there and then take effective steps beforehand to create safe situations or create alternative plans if somebody does come home drunk and violent.

If we have clarity in our minds and if we stop and think a bit, we can develop more clarity. But so often people just react and don't have the tools like the Dharma, or don't have the time, or don't have the interest to sit and look a bit closer and see some other things that could be done for their own benefit.

Purification

[Audience: inaudible]

If we don't take the time to purify (our negative actions), it does build up. It stays with us. There's this whole movement now to be kind to ourselves. One way to be kind to ourselves is to be able to acknowledge our mistakes and then purify. Because if we go to the other extreme of "It's always somebody else's fault. I don't make mistakes," then we never purify and there's always this residual, underlying something eating away at us. When you do prostrations and you're there on the floor, we can say, "OK, I'm going to stop making excuses. I'm going to stop lying to myself. I'm just going to clean this thing up."

Let's sit quietly.

The Results of the Ten Destructive Actions

Now we're going to go into the results of karma. Karma is the intentional action. It's the cause. And now we're going to talk about the results of these actions. There're three kinds of results, but one kind of result is broken into two, so there're four kinds of results:

1. Maturation result
2. Result similar to the cause:
 - a. in terms of experience
 - b. in terms of habitual behavior
3. Environmental result

The intentional actions we do that have all four branches complete, and that aren't purified—they bring all of these results.

MATURATION RESULT

The maturation or ripening result is the rebirth that we take, the body and mind that we get. If one has acted negatively, then the body and mind, in other words, what they call the aggregates of the being, are in an unfortunate realm. If it's a karmic seed that ripened or a set of karmic seeds that ripened that are positive, then the result is rebirth in a fortunate realm. So the unfortunate realms are first, the hell realm—that's the short way to say it. A more polite way to say it for Westerners, so they don't freak out, is *life forms of intense misery and suffering*. We can hear that better than we can hear *hell*, can't we? And then second, the

life form of intense dissatisfaction. And then third, animals.

The three fortunate realms are human beings, demi-gods and gods or celestial beings.

Strong negative karma results in rebirth in hell realm

In terms of negative karma, if it's a very strong negative karma, then it tends to bring the maturation result of being born in the hell realm. In other words, it makes our mind attracted to the body and mind of a life form that experiences intense pain and suffering. You can see how this works. For example, a soldier in a camp rounds people up and then tortures them and kills them. You can see that psychologically, by what they're doing, they're putting themselves in the position of getting a body and mind that are very susceptible to pain because of the kind of pain that they're causing.

Medium negative karma results in rebirth in hungry ghost realm

If it is medium heaviness in terms of the karma, then the result tends to be rebirth as a life form of dissatisfaction or frustration, that's often called hungry ghost. That's what the Chinese call them. The hungry ghost realm includes these hungry ghosts that have big bellies and thin necks that run around looking for food and they can't find it. And if they find it, it turns into garbage before they can eat it. Or if they eat it, it burns all the way down.

The hungry ghost realm also includes a lot of spirits. It's interesting. When people talk about mediums and channeling and this kind of stuff, a lot of these beings are spirits from the lower realm. Some of them may be gods, but many of them are spirits. This is why we say that they aren't completely trustworthy objects of refuge, because they're exactly like us, stuck in the cycle of confusion.

Small destructive action results in rebirth in animal realm

If the action is a relatively small destructive one, then it leads to rebirth as an animal.

So what realm we're born into is influenced by the six factors that make the karma heavy or light by the strength of the motivation and what the motivation is, to start with. It also depends on whether the action is complete with all of its parts, because if it's a complete, heavy-duty, perfect one, then it's like a confirmed reservation. [Laughter.]

RESULT SIMILAR TO THE CAUSE IN TERMS OF EXPERIENCE

Now, let's go on to the result similar to the cause, which is broken up into two: in terms of the experience and in terms of our behavior.

The result similar to the cause in terms of our experience is really the illustration of "what goes around, comes around". The kinds of things we do towards other people create the experiences that we have ourselves later.

Killing

In terms of killing, it produces a short life with much sickness. This is very helpful to think about whenever we have any of these results. Whenever we get sick, to think, “Ah! This is the karmic result of killing, or assaulting people, or beating them up, or some kind of violence towards others.” It’s helpful to think about this, because then instead of just going, “Woe is me! I’m so sick. Why does this happen?” It’s like, “Hmm. Well, maybe I made a mistake myself.” Not in the sense of masochistically blaming ourselves, like “Oh! I’m so negative. I killed somebody in my past life. I *deserve* to have this happen to me!” Not that kind of very screwy, psychological thing, but just recognizing that we made our own mistakes that put us in situations where we experience unpleasant results.

So the thing to be learned from that is that if we don’t like the result, let’s get our act together and stop creating the cause. That’s really why we’re studying all of these in so much detail. It’s not just a bunch of nice, “Oh-isn’t-this-interesting” information, but it’s something for us to think about and apply to our life. When we hear about these results and we don’t like them very much, then we say, “Oh, well, I don’t like this so I’m not going to create the cause.” It’s like if you think of what it’s like to be in jail, you think, “Oh, I don’t want to go there, so I’m not going to create the cause.” Or if you think of what it’s like to play with fire-crackers and have your hand blown off, then you think, “I don’t want that result. I’m not going to create the cause.”

This is something we do a lot in our regular life.

We think of causes and results. We make an effort to avoid the causes of unpleasant results. So here, it is the same thing. It has nothing to do with guilt or deserving things. But it has to do with learning from previous mistakes instead of feeling sorry for ourselves, and then making an attempt to do something different in the future. Is that clear to everybody? Anybody stuck on this point?

Sickness in the context of karma

[Audience:] For example, when I get a flu, why do I have to think it's due to my own negative action rather than just having caught a virus that's going around? Also, if it's because of karma, does that mean I don't take medicine?

It's true. It is just a bug going around. But if we think it's just a bug, then it's very likely we're going to get angry at the person who's sitting next to us who sneezed, "who was so inconsiderate that they kept sneezing! They didn't stay home." And we just put all these anger on them blaming them for our sickness. And then when we're angry about being sick, not only do we have the physical discomfort of being sick, but our minds go bananas on top of it. So we get more unhappy.

Whereas if you think, "Oh this person sneezed. That's true, but, why I get sick this particular time is because I have that seed in my mindstream from a mistake I made in a past life. So, rather than blame the other person, I should recognize that if I don't like this result, then I should try in the future to lessen my

attachment, my anger and belligerence, so that I don't continually create the cause to get sick like this." In that way, we learn from unfortunate experiences instead of just wallowing in the many horrible things that happened, and constantly asking, "Why?"

As to whether we take medicine when we're sick. In Christianity, they say it's God's will. And so they don't take medicine because it's meant to be. But in the case of Buddhism, this is not Buddha's will. Buddha doesn't want us to get sick. Buddha has been trying for eons to teach us how to avoid creating the cause to get sick, but we don't listen so well. So nobody else is putting it on us. Also, karma is not fatalistic. It's not like, "I got a cold and this is my negative karma, so I just have to live out this karma and suffer." It's "Well, there's medicine, so you take the medicine." Why not? [Laughter.] Makes you feel better!

From a Buddhist viewpoint, there's no intrinsic virtue in making ourselves suffer. The reason we think like this is because even though we try and avoid suffering, it comes anyway. Considering that we can't avoid it except by purifying, then either we should purify first, or, if the results ripen and we get sick and have unfortunate experiences, then at least we can feel that it's serving some purpose, that it's ripening that karma and finishing that karma. So if you're sick, you can say, "OK, this is that karma finishing. I'm glad."

But that doesn't mean that if you take medicine, you're interfering with that karma. And it doesn't mean that you should deliberately make yourself sick so that you can purify more karma. It's just that we

try not to suffer, but since we spend our whole life trying not to suffer, and it comes anyway, then if we can somehow look at it in a different way, we can at least stop the mental suffering.

Wanting to stop creating the causes by practicing Dharma

I often tell you this story of when I got hepatitis in Nepal, because this is when the whole thing came really strong to me. It was my first year of learning Dharma, and I got hepatitis and I was just lying there. Going to the bathroom was the major event of the day. It's all I had energy to do. [Laughter.] I was completely miserable.

Somebody gave me the “Wheel of Sharp Weapons”, and up until that point, whenever I thought about Dharma, I was always thinking, “I should practice Dharma.” The “should” mind; lots of “should's”. And then after I read this book, I said, “OK. I have hepatitis. This is a result of my own negative actions.

Actually that makes sense, because if I'm truthful, and I look back on this life—forget previous lives—I've harmed other people's bodies. I've harmed animals' bodies. I've done lots of that as a kid. So what's there to freak out about when I experience some suffering now. Look at the suffering I've caused to others this life. Looking at what I've done this life, when I think I'm a relatively OK person, and then thinking what I could have done in previous lives—who knows what I was born as in a previous life—it's no big surprise that I'm sick.”

And then, all of a sudden, instead of saying, “I should practice Dharma,” I began to say, “I want to practice Dharma,” because it began to seem like, “This is a real worthwhile thing to do because if I practice Dharma, then I can purify these causes, which are already in my mindstream. I can train my mind and subdue the afflictions so that I don’t continually create more and more of the same stuff.” So then the reason for practicing Dharma changed from this incredible “should” to “I want to”. Does that help?

Imprisonment and karma

Another example is I talked to some of the lamas who were in prison under the Chinese after they took over Tibet. Can you imagine your whole society being destroyed and you’re thrown in prison? You’re locked up and you’re let out twice a day to go pee and that’s about it. And you get one bowl of tsampa a day, and everything you had was completely destroyed, your freedom completely gone. Most of us, we’d probably freak out and just sit there and be so totally miserable, perplexed, angry about the whole thing, that our mental state would just be one of complete suffering. Moreover, the body is incarcerated, and the negative mental state would probably make our body very sick. Because when you get really negative mentally, you stop taking care of yourself, you lose that bounce, and then disease comes much more readily.

But many of these lamas, they told me what they did. They practice a variety of techniques—thought-training techniques. One of the techniques was to

think, “This is my own negative karma ripening.” So rather than sit there and get so angry at the situation, at the guards who have locked them up, and at the Beijing government, and just sit there and stew in their anger and misery and feel totally frustrated because they couldn’t do anything about it, they thought, “Oh! This is the result of my own negative karma. No reason to blame anybody else. No reason to be unhappy. I created the karmic cause of this result. I’m glad it’s happening now. It’s purifying this karma. It’s finishing it.”

And then they would do the taking and giving practice on top of that, and say, “As long as I’m enduring this, and I can’t get out of the situation because of my own negative karma, may this suffice for the suffering of all beings in similar situations, and may I take their suffering upon myself, and give them my happiness.” By meditating in this way, they kept their minds very happy, and that’s why you see amongst the Tibetan community far fewer numbers of post-traumatic stress syndrome than you do amongst other refugee groups who have had similar kinds of horrendous things happen to them. Because if you can keep your mind buoyant, you don’t get post-traumatic stress syndrome afterwards. You don’t get completely debilitated while it’s going on, and it begins to have some kind of meaning so that you can fit it into your life, and it makes sense and it seems worthwhile.

Like I said, this doesn’t mean that we cause suffering on ourselves. It doesn’t mean that we stay in suffering as long as we possibly can. There’s no kind of masochistic tendency in this. But it’s just when suffering is there, rather than reject the situation, and

in doing so make it worse, accept the situation and learn from it. And what we learn is that I can improve my own behavior, and then I won't get this kind of results.

Stealing

In the case of stealing, the result similar to the cause in terms of what we experience in the future is poverty. This doesn't mean just people who were born in poor countries, and it doesn't mean we say, "Oh look. Those people born in Ethiopia—they're so poor. It's because they stole from other people in the past. They're bad people. They deserve to suffer." That's not the way to think. You don't blame anybody for what their present experience is. We know when we experience suffering, we want others to help us. So we develop a compassionate attitude wanting to help people who suffer. It's not a judgmental thing.

Avoid being judgmental

I was thinking about it yesterday. Our society is so incredibly judgmental. We don't like others judging us. But even if others don't judge us, we judge ourselves, and then we start judging other people. It's like it's so hard for us to put down this paradigm of judgment, and yet from a Buddhist viewpoint, it's completely inaccurate and useless.

When we suffer, it doesn't mean we deserve it. It doesn't mean we're bad people. When we make a mistake, it doesn't mean we're bad people. It just means we've made a mistake. There's a difference

between a mistaken action and the person who does it. But as long as we equate a bad action with an evil person, then there's no way we can ever feel good about ourselves, no matter how many self-help books you read, and adult-child courses you go to. As long as you equate bad actions with bad persons, and you see yourself that way, and not only seeing yourself that way, you see other people that way, then the mind gets trapped in hatred and judgment. And there's no way out of it.

The only way out of it is to completely drop that whole paradigm of judgment. Because it's completely our conception, this conceptual garbage. People make mistakes. It doesn't mean they're bad. Everybody has Buddha nature. How can you say a person is bad if they make a mistake? How can we say we're bad if we make a mistake? If we act negatively, we put negative imprints in our own mind, but it doesn't mean we're bad people. When that negative imprint ripens, it doesn't mean we're bad people. It doesn't mean we're getting punished.

But you see, when we listen to Buddhism, we regress to being five-year-olds in Christian Sunday school. We're not listening to what the Buddha is saying, we're stuck back in Sunday school. Actually I don't even think this is what Jesus taught. I don't think Jesus would have been so judgmental. But we just get completely stuck in our own paradigm, which is putting glasses on a world and seeing it through our own afflicted views.

So, poverty is a result of stealing. Having your stuff ripped off. Being robbed. Being forced to give up or share your possessions. You're forced to share things

you don't want to share, or your things are confiscated from you, either justly or unjustly. Even things that are technically yours, you can't use. Like you get an inheritance, but then it gets stuck in the courts and you can't get the money, so even things that are legally yours, you can't get your hands on. Just so many obstacles in terms of material possessions and having the resources to live. Not having enough, and having difficulties with what we have.

Unwise sexual behavior

The result of unwise sexual behavior is that you have bad relationships with your spouse and friends. Makes sense, doesn't it? That happens this lifetime. [Laughter.] Your spouse is unfaithful. You get divorced. And then you get married. And then you get divorced again. Whatever intimate friendships you have, they don't last. Now some people, maybe they have a bad marriage the first time around, and their spouse is unfaithful or something happened, but then the second marriage works out OK. That could be because they had some karma in this direction, it got experienced, the result got used up, and then the opportunity for some other karma to have a good relationship ripened. It doesn't mean that once you have a bad relationship, all your relationships are going to be bad. We've had all sorts of karmic seeds, and all sorts of things can ripen at different times.

Lying

The result of lying is that we don't have very much influence on others. Other people don't trust us. They spread false stories about us behind our back. We're accused of lying even when we haven't, and when we do tell the truth, people think we're lying. Have you ever had that happen? When you told the truth and somebody said, "Why don't you tell me the truth and quit lying?" That kind of thing happens because we've lied in the past, so in this lifetime, people don't believe us. Or people lie to us and they deceive us. I think we've all had that experience.

Other people cheat us. They deceive us. We have a hard time establishing trust in relationships. Other people don't seem to trust us. Even though from our side we're acting honestly, but because of this karmic imprint, it prevents other people from developing trust in us.

Slandering

The result of slandering is that we have very few friends. You can see how it's exactly a result similar to the cause, isn't it? The result that is similar to what we've caused other people to experience. So here, if we use slander or divisive words to split up other people's friendships, the karmic result is we have few friends, or our friends desert us, or they don't want to be with us. Or we're separated from our spiritual teachers and our Dharma friends. We have a bad reputation. We can't get along well with other people. We have difficulty getting along with other people. Why? Because we created disharmony between other people. So here we are, trying to get along, and then

other people come, and they interfere with our relationships, they make us disharmonious with the people we live with. And our relationships tend to be really sensitive. They aren't long-lasting. They aren't very stable.

Harsh words

The result of harsh words is that we get criticized. People verbally abuse us. Sometimes we haven't even done anything. Have you ever been the object of somebody's venting? You didn't do anything, but somebody just needed to vent, so they picked you. Or all we did was burn the toast, and all of a sudden all the hostility they had been building up at work came out just because we burnt the toast.

Why does that happen? Because of our own abusive words. Our own insulting harsh words that we used on other people in the past. So we experience the result similar to the cause, we become the recipient of other people's harsh words, other people's blame, even when it isn't something that we deserve from our present life actions. We didn't make a mistake, but people will accuse us unjustly. And we tend to hear a lot of unpleasant news. We live with a lot of noise around us. Even if we say something with a good intention, other people misunderstand us and they get hurt.

That's an interesting one, isn't it? That even when we do speak with a good intention, still, other people hear it as harsh. So again, more friction in the relationship. This is very helpful to think about, because when this happens, instead of getting all mad

at the other person—“I was speaking really nicely, and here they are, dumping on me again. They don’t believe me. They’re misunderstanding me. Why are they doing this?”—and we just get angrier and angrier, and then of course we dump on them more, and of course they don’t like us more. If, instead of escalating the situation that way, we feel, “Oh, this is the result of my own negative karma from speaking harshly to others. I think I’d better watch what I say to other people.” And who amongst us doesn’t need to watch what we say to other people?

Idle gossip

The result similar to the cause in terms of idle gossip is we’re unable to keep others’ confidence, so we become the big blabbermouth of the community. Again, people don’t trust us, because we blab all the time. They laugh at us. They don’t take us seriously. They don’t believe what we say. Our words don’t carry any weight. Other people view us as just blabbermouth jesters. And you can see exactly how this follows from idle talk, because we’re putting that energy out in the universe, so it comes right back. That’s how people perceive us.

Coveting

For coveting, the result similar to the cause is that we can’t complete our projects. This is interesting, because when you covet things, what do you do? You want this. And then you want this. And then you want that. The mind is always jumping around wanting

many things, being continually restless, so the result is we can't complete anything. With a mind that is always involved in this coveting and dissatisfaction, we start something and then we want to do something else. Ever had that? Some people are really like that. Can't carry a project through. Do a little bit. Then do something else. Do something else. Lots of things begun. Nothing finished. Karmic result of coveting.

We can't fulfill our wishes and hope. We continually long for more than we have, so we're never satisfied. I'm sure all of us are like that to some extent, but some people really epitomize this. It's like no matter what they have, they can't be happy with it.

I had one high school friend, and we were very close friends from before high school. All he wanted was a Porsche. I went through high school hearing about "I want a Porsche. I want a Porsche. If I only had a Porsche. Blah. Blah. Blah." I could barely tell a Porsche from a BMW. But to him, the coveting mind was completely stuck on a Porsche. Completely miserable. He made me miserable and I was his friend. He made his parents miserable. He made his brothers and sisters miserable. He's in constant dissatisfaction because he didn't have a Porsche.

Well, finally, after high school, he got a Porsche. He was happy for one month, and then again, continual dissatisfaction. "Oh, this doesn't work. Why didn't I get this kind of Porsche? Oh, I don't want a Porsche. I want a BMW." The mind that is continually dissatisfied. Maybe because it happened while I was so young, and it lasted so many years, it had always remained in my mind as an excellent example of the result of coveting. He came from a nice family. It was

a middle class family. But he couldn't enjoy any of the things he had because of his constant frustration and dissatisfaction that had very little to do with the environment, but really, karmically created.

Also, another result of coveting is that whatever venture we do undertake fails. We can't bring things to fruition. Again, you can see this grasping, clinging mind, when we get grasping and clingy, we can't bring things together.

[Audience:] Is it alright if we covet an austere life instead of life's excesses?

If you're psychologically healthy, I don't think you would covet an austere life. If somehow psychologically, you have this idea of "I want to make myself undergo austerity," then you're not psychologically, completely together. [Laughter.]

I remember there was one monk, when we were living at Kopan in Nepal. Lama Yeshe walked into his room. He had been sleeping on just a simple mat on the cold stone floor. He thought, "This is great. Look how austere I am." And Lama walked in and say, "What are you on? Some Milarepa trip? Go get yourself a mattress!" [Laughter.] He just really cut through it. Because the monk was on a Milarepa trip.

Maliciousness

The result of maliciousness—this one is real interesting—is you feel guilty. Look at the psychological mechanism here. How karma works psychologically. What does a malicious mind do? It

attacks others. It thinks of how to harm them. It inflicts harm on others. It makes them feel miserable. So what's the karmic result in future lives? We feel guilty. We turn that maliciousness in on ourselves and feel guilty. We feel suspicious. Why? Because we've caused other people fear. We feel paranoid. Fear. Paranoia. Discomfort. Suspicion. Ill at ease. All of these things happening because of no apparent reason. This is the karmic result of maliciousness.

I had one other high school friend. I didn't know what happened, but at one point in her life, she could barely walk out of her flat, because she was just so afraid. She lived in a nice community. She was married to a nice guy. Externally, things were okay in her life. But she was just completely overwhelmed by fear. Why does that happen? Karmic result of maliciousness. Fortunately she isn't like that now. Karma doesn't last forever. Once you've experienced the result, it finishes. But we can even look in our own life, when we get fearful, nervous, tensed, suspicious for no reason at all. Because this is exactly how we've caused other people to feel in the past. So if we feel guilty about things when we haven't done anything, or we beat ourselves up emotionally when we haven't done anything at all—why do these happen? Why do we experience so much emotional torment? They are the result of maliciousness.

[Audience:] Besides karma, aren't our experiences and behavior influenced by psychological and physical factors in this life too?

That's completely possible. In other words, when we

say our experiences and behavior are due to karma, it doesn't mean that karma is the only cause of them. Because anything that exists, it has a principal cause, and it has cooperative conditions. The principal cause is the chief thing that makes that thing happen. The cooperative conditions are all the other things.

Like if we look at a flower. The principal cause would be a seed. The cooperative conditions are the water, the earth and the sunshine. Now, that doesn't mean that the water, earth and sunshine are irrelevant because they're merely cooperative conditions. We all know that there's no way the seed can grow without them. So those things do count, and they are important, and whether they are there or not, are going to influence things. But the chief thing, the propelling thing, is the seed.

So we can say that maybe one of the chief impetuses, the energy behind it, would be the karma. But then you're right, there're definitely things going on in this very lifetime psychologically that sustain the momentum. There's a psychological reason why an addict keeps shooting and shooting and shooting. So there's some of that going on too. But it's like the karma was the principal energy that created the circumstance so that the mind would go into that way of thinking so easily.

And then there also is a hormonal influence too, but that is influenced by karma, because karma influences the body we got born in. So it doesn't mean that the karma is sitting there and pushing your pituitary gland, and there is a hormonal influence, but then we're born into the bodies—it's like, you enter Honeybare Café for some reason, then once you're

there, you're going to hear the music, you're going to eat the food, you're going to meet the people. So the karma might propel us towards that body, and then once we're in that body, we'll live with that particular nervous system and genes and hormonal system and digestive system and everything else in it.

So when we say these things are due to karma, it doesn't mean it's only karma. There're definitely many other things going on. It doesn't mean that, like, if somebody is suspicious and paranoid, that you just say, "Well, this is their karma, so can't do anything. Psychology won't help because it's karma." That's clearly not true, because many times, some therapy or talking or this group or that group can really help.

But then like you said, why is it sometimes it helps and sometimes you go through it ten years and it's not helping? Well, that's because the karma is really heavy, really strong. That principal energy is like a bull-dozer, so until it gets weakened and exhausted, the mind can't click in to another way of viewing it.

This is why we're constantly emphasizing the importance of purification practice, because if you purify before the karma ripens, then you don't have the problem. Or if you have a problem, then it won't be as strong as it otherwise would be.

And then often times, even if the result comes, you can weaken the impact through purification practices. Of course it depends on what the result is—if you've broken your leg, you can't purify the karma of having broken your leg because your leg is broken already. You can't go back into the past and undo it. But let's say you got the karma to get cancer. That karma is ripening in the cancer, but then if you do a lot of

intense purification, it can purify that karma and enable maybe some of the medicine or diet or whatever you are taking to cure your body. So, often, in the Tibetan community, when people are still healthy enough, when they get sick physically, or sick mentally, but they're not too sick, then they're given purification practices to do. If somebody's completely flipped out, then difficult to have them purify, because the mind can't think straight. But if people are just suffering from a lot of sadness or guilt or this kind of thing, purification is very, very useful. But therapy and vitamins and these things help too. [Laughter.]

This is all coming down to dependent arising. That means that something happens not because of one factor, but because of a whole conglomeration of many, many different factors coming to make it. So again, you have to remember that although I'm saying this is a result of that, it doesn't mean it's a result of *only* that.

Wrong views

The karmic result of wrong views is that when we try and practice Dharma, we feel dull. Like you're feeling pretty good during the day, and you come to teachings, but the mind just can't hold it together. This is karmic obscuration.

When I was living in the different Dharma centers, sometimes a high lama would come, and would be teaching, and then of course, the day when you finally got to sit in the front row, you couldn't stay awake! You drank two cups of coffee before, and even though your mind was fine, this incredibly weird kind

of dullness just comes over. I see a lot of nodding heads. [Laughter.] Just out of the clear, blue sky, this fog. This dullness. You cannot, for the life of you, stay awake. But as soon as you dedicate the merits and get up, you're completely okay. Wide awake. I've seen this happen so many times. [Laughter.] So this is the karmic result of wrong views.

We're awake for worldly activities, and snoozing during the Dharma ones. No impetus. No interest in the Dharma. Or even if you actually go to the teachings, or you read a book, you find it very difficult to understand. You struggle with it. It's like your mind just gets contorted. "I can't get this!" You know? Like that? That's the result of wrong views. When it takes a long, long time to generate Dharma understanding. It's like you go to teachings year after year after year, and something is not sinking in. You know the words but your heart feels like this desert. The teacher talks about love and compassion and you just sit there and your mind is blank.

Or they talk about love and compassion and you just get so angry. Incredible anger! I remember there were times at the teachings of these high lamas when my mind got so angry, and I was wondering at that time, "How can my mind be so angry hearing teaching from a high lama?" But after you talked to other people, you realize that people's minds can be in all sorts of weird states in the middle of teachings and initiations. [Laughter.]

And I think actually, when that happens, in a Dharma setting like that, it's good to think this is purification. Not just the ripening of karma, but purification of the karma. Purification of karma

means the karmic seed would have ripened into something this big, but you're only experiencing a relatively small result instead, because you're purifying it. Often, when you're in a Dharma situation like that, and something unpleasant happens, it could be a very strong karmic seed ripening in a relatively minor way. This explains why you might sit in a teaching and be very, very angry.

One other thing that I've seen is, whenever we have an introductory course in Kopan, inevitably, almost everybody gets sick. Or when His Holiness teaches in the spring time, almost everybody gets sick. It's usually just colds. I don't want to scare you away. Maybe I shouldn't tell you this. But so many people get colds. I think this is negative karma ripening, because we're in a Dharma environment that provokes it to ripen quickly.

So a result of wrong views is the mind is dull. It's ignorant. You feel very stupid. You feel very heavy. You feel completely confused. So whenever that happens to our mind, and it does happen to all of us, then it's good to do some purification. Like when you're studying something, or you're reading something or you're meditating, and your mind is just stuck and confused, then get up and do some prostrations, and do it for a few days. Just really emphasize purification. It is very, very helpful.

I think I've told you the story of when I did the Vajrasattva retreat the first summer after I had met the Dharma. I sat in the retreat for three months. My mind went completely berserk, but I was trying to say some of the Vajrasattva mantras. And when I went back to Kopan the following year and listened to the

teachings, all of a sudden it was like, “Oh, was this what Lama Zopa was talking about last year?” It’s like I was understanding things in a completely different way the second year compared to the first, and I think that’s because of having done the purification practice.

Other questions and answers

[Audience:] It seems to me that purification is an unpleasant and painful process?

You shouldn’t think the purification caused you to suffer, because the purification didn’t. Our own negative karma did. The negative imprints are like the ink in an ink bottle. The purification is washing the ink out. It’s not putting the ink in the bottle. It comes up and then it flows out the top of the bottle, and it’s gone. If you understand this, then when the anger and weird states of mind come up in a Dharma situation like what we’ve mentioned, you don’t take them so seriously. You don’t jump in and really believe all those thoughts. It’s just your negative karma getting purified.

One nun I know, she was doing retreat. She got this incredible boil apparently on her cheek. A very painful boil on her cheek. It was during her break time and she was walking around, and she saw Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Rinpoche said, “How are you?” and she said, “Oh, Rinpoche, I have this huge boil.” And Rinpoche said, “Fantastic!” [Laughter.] “This is so good. You’re purifying so much negative karma. You would have been born in the lower realms for eons,

and now it's like all finishing by this boil.”

[Audience:] When we're in the middle of the day and our patience is being tried and we need to do some purification real quick, what do we do?

The breathing meditation, but what you do is, you imagine that whole tumultuous feeling inside, and when you exhale, you exhale that in the form of smoke and that comes out of you and the moment it goes out, it just dissipates. It just completely evaporates and it doesn't exist anymore. And then when you inhale, you imagine inhaling light, which has this nature of being peaceful and compassionate. So you're focused on your breath, and you're doing that purification exhaling the smoke and inhaling the light. That's really good to do. Can't say, “Hey! Can you be quiet? I need to prostrate.” [Laughter.]

[Audience:] How do we deal with the feeling of being threatened by this link between karma and result—that if I don't do this right, I get reborn in a lower realm?

It's not a threat. [Laughter.] When we're thinking that, we're going back to Sunday school. This kind of cultural feeling we have of a threat—“You'd better do it or else,” or “Be careful because you're going to get punished.” It's more just a thing of result. When you get a peach, the peach isn't the punishment of the peach seed. It's just the result. And the chili pepper isn't the punishment of the chili seed. It's just the result. So nobody is threatening us. And there's no ‘or

else', but it's like "If you like peaches, plant peach trees." And if you've planted chilies instead and you don't like chilies, then take the chili seeds out of the ground. So it's a feet-on-the-ground, 'let's just look at this reasonably' approach. We don't need threat and fear and guilt. That stuff we can leave somewhere else. This really involves a new way of thinking. This is a challenge to us to see things in a new way without all these judgment. It's coming back to the same judgment thing, isn't it?

No form of suffering is a punishment. There's no concept of punishment in Buddhism.

We've been talking about karma and the kinds of results that karma brings. Specifically, we were talking about destructive actions and the way they ripen, the kind of experiences they bring. They bring three kinds of results. One of the results is divided into two, so in total there are four results. They are:

1. Maturation or ripening result. This is in terms of the rebirth that one takes as a result of the destructive actions, which is rebirth in the lower realms.
2. The results similar to the cause:
 - a. in terms of experience
 - b. in terms of instinctive behavior
3. Environmental result

Any intentional action that we do that has all four branches complete is going to bring all three kinds of results. The four branches are:

1. The object, what you do the action with
2. The complete intention, which has three parts
3. The action
4. The completion of the action

This is very helpful to think about. When we do things, recognize that there is a definite link between what we're doing now and what we're going to experience in the future. Similarly, there is a link between what we are experiencing now and what we did in the past. What we're coming to is that things don't happen causelessly. Contrary to popular belief, things don't happen out of the clear blue sky. In other words, things happen because there are causes.

We talked previously about the maturation result, the kind of rebirth one takes. We also talked about the result similar to the cause in terms of what you experience. This basically means that you yourself will experience whatever you made other people go through in the past. This is very helpful to remember when we get criticized or blamed, when our possessions are ripped off, or our car is bashed into, for example. Similarly, when we're praised or promoted or something good happens, recognize that there's a link between what we experience and the actions we did before.

Tonight we're going to cover the other two: the result similar to the cause in terms of our instinctual behavior and the environmental results of actions.

RESULTS SIMILAR TO THE CAUSE IN TERMS OF OUR INSTINCTIVE BEHAVIOR

Here, we're still talking about the results of destructive actions that are similar to the cause in terms of our instinctive behavior. We'll get to the constructive actions later.

Killing

If we kill, it sets up a pattern to repeatedly kill. If you observe the personalities of very young children, you will see that certain qualities stand out, whether their parents encourage those qualities or not. Sometimes, the qualities are there even though the parents discourage them. This instinctual behavior, this patterned behavior happens because of this kind of result (the result similar to the cause in terms of instinctive behavior).

However, it doesn't mean that our personality patterns are cast in concrete. It doesn't mean that this is a karmic result and you can never, ever get out of that pattern. It just means that there is a habitual tendency. There is an energy that makes you go in a certain direction, so it might take some equally strong energy to counteract that. You'll find, for example, some young children taking so much delight in swatting insects and throwing stones at dogs—generally cruel behavior. Their parents don't teach it to them, the kids just possess those qualities. That's a karmic result of having killed, tortured, or assaulted others in the past. There is that tendency and habit to do it. But it doesn't mean that the kid has that personality characteristic forever. It just means that there is that tendency. Some special energy has to be put in to counteract it.

Stealing

The result of stealing is that one finds it very easy to steal. You find some kids who shoplift automatically. They'll just take in things that belong to other people. They shoplift, or snatch things when they go to somebody's home, or take things from their parents' wallet. If that karma continues to ripen, they'll grow up as an adult with this same behavior pattern.

Unwise sexual behavior

The result of unwise sexual behavior is the tendency to do that. For example, somebody who goes and sleeps around.

Lying

Habitual lying is a karmic result of lying. Some people are habitual liars. They don't even try, and automatically, the lies come out of their mouth, even from a young age. This has to do with karma.

[Audience:] Where does it originally come from?

We can trace the characteristics of this life to a previous life where people did certain actions motivated by ignorance or anger or attachment. There was no beginning to these delusions. They have always been there until now. We have the clear nature of our mind [which is like the sky], but together with it, we also have a bunch of clouds [the delusions] covering it. Even though the cloud and the sky are of

different natures, still, it has always been that way since beginningless time. According to Buddhism, there was no beginning. The ignorance has been there and out of the ignorance came these negative actions. To logically posit a beginning would be very difficult.

In Christianity, everybody was perfect and then somebody did something and then somehow, perhaps genetically, it was all passed down after that. How else was it going to get passed down? You run into some difficulty there. Whereas in Buddhism, it wasn't that everything was pure from the beginning and then the minds became defiled. If the minds were completely pure, there is no cause to become defiled.

As a result of our delusions and our karma, we get these habitual tendencies. Now, of course, on our mindstream, we might have many different kinds of karmic imprints from many different kinds of habitual tendencies. We can see that. There are different parts of our character that are quite opposite to each other. Different kinds of habits. Different kinds of mental factors.

Slander

The karmic result of slander that is similar to the cause in terms of instinctive behavior, is again slandering. Somebody who is a trouble maker, who is always interfering in other people's relationships. We meet people like this. Maybe we are one. [Laughter.] It has to do with this patterned behavior.

Harsh speech and Idle talk

Or people who are always losing their temper. Or always teasing, being very, very cruel. Again, you see young children having the instinctual behavior to be very cruel towards other people verbally. I'm highlighting this instinctual behavior in children to illustrate the point that it is coming not just from this life. But these results surely manifest in adults as well. For example, some people are always talking—blah blah blah. This is the karmic result of idle talk.

Coveting

This one is very interesting. We can look in our own minds. We have a certain coveting mind that is always wanting—wanting more, wanting better. Looking at this. Looking at that. What can I have? What can I get? Totally dissatisfied, greedy mind. Again, it's a karmic pattern. It's a mental attitude, but we have a certain karmic energy behind it because we've fed that very same attitude in previous lives.

My friend, Alex, gives the example of people who, when they walk into a house, have to pick up everything and examine it and ask how much it costs. You know people like that? People who can't walk by a store without going in and checking out the prices. [Laughter.]

Maliciousness

When we sit down and meditate, all kinds of incredible anger and malicious thoughts may come up. You are trying to watch the breath and instead you're planning how to get your revenge on somebody. It

keeps coming up. This is again due to karma. But remember, it's not cast in concrete. These things can be counteracted.

Wrong views

The result of wrong views is the tendency to have wrong views. For example, meeting wrong teachers who teach improper things and not being able to discriminate between a correct teaching and an incorrect teaching. You follow all sorts of weird philosophies that teach wrong ethics, for example.

Counteracting our habitual behavior

It is very helpful to think about these. By looking at our own personality and what's happening now, we can get an idea of the actions we must have done in previous lives. We also see that we have a precious human life with all the opportunities and leisure. Having such a rare opportunity to have access to teachings and the leisure to do that, it is essential that we use it to counteract those habitual tendencies, to do something about that karma. To purify. We get some feeling like, "I have the Buddha nature. These are karmic imprints that are obscuring my mind. I am overwhelmed sometimes by negative mental states, but I have a perfect situation now to do something about that." That gives us some energy to practice. It gives us some energy to go through whatever hardships may come up in the practice.

We're trying to work with the mind and counteract
eons and eons of habitual behavior. To do it requires

some energy on our part. There will be some obstacles. But if we are aware of these and yet have a sense of the preciousness of this life, then these obstacles won't seem so formidable. We'll have a courageous mind to go ahead and do it instead of a whimpering mind that feels like giving up and going back to sleep every time one small little thing goes wrong in our practice.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL RESULTS OF DESTRUCTIVE ACTIONS

This has to do with the environment that we're born in, the possessions that we have, the resources that are at our disposal. Although here we're mostly talking about the environmental result in the human realm, this karma can also ripen as the environment in other realms of rebirth. For example, somebody is born in a life form of extreme pain. Having that life form, having that body and mind is the maturation result, the rebirth they take. The environmental result is the horrible environment that's either freezing cold or burning hot with very disagreeable creatures all around.

Similarly for an animal. The body and mind of an animal is the maturation result, but whether the animal is born in a nice pleasant country or in a very unpleasant country has to do with the environmental result.

Here, we're going to talk about the environment for human beings.

Killing

As a result of killing, one is born in an unpeaceful place. I don't know about you, but as a kid, I always wondered why was I born? Why was I born as I was, the daughter of these parents in this particular community? Learning about karma explains that. Having the body and mind that I have is a maturation result. Being born in southern California, going to a particular high school and things like that are environmental results. I used to read the newspapers and wander, "Why wasn't I born in these countries where there are so much war and terrorism?"

At the moment, your good karma is ripening, being in a peaceful place. But of course, that doesn't mean you will be in the same environment your whole life. You might be in a peaceful environment for part of your life and a war-torn country in another part of your life. You have different karmas ripening at different points. Sometimes you meet refugees here and when you hear their stories in their countries, what they have experienced is unbelievable. That was a negative karma ripening in the form of the environment result as well as a result similar to the cause in terms of experience. Now, living here, they are experiencing the ripening of very different karma.

The result of killing is being born in a war-torn place. Being born in a low social class, you experience much hostility, living in a place where the medical facilities are very poor, where it's difficult to get medical care. Or a place where the food and the medicine do not have much potency. Even if you can get some medicine, it doesn't do much. The food isn't very nourishing. This is something to think about. When you live in different environments, think of the

kind of karma that is ripening at each place.

Stealing

The result of stealing is that we wind up living in a place where the crops fail a lot, and where the weather is not very consistent. You get a lot of drought, water shortage, crop failure, hailstorms, tornados. As a result of stealing from others in the past, depriving other people of their resources, then one is born in an environment where it is difficult to find resources. Or for example, (you're going to laugh at this, but you'll get the idea), if somebody gives you a cow, it gives you less milk when you own it than when somebody else owns it. [Laughter.] The resources fading away. Maybe somebody gives you a car, it gets worse gas mileage when you own it than when somebody else does. [Laughter.] This is the environmental result of stealing.

Unwise sexual behavior

As a result of unwise sexual behavior, we're born into very inconvenient, smelly, and dirty places, very unpleasant places. People find themselves living in those places even though nice housing is available. They just cannot get it together to get out of their lousy situation.

Actually, it is the same for the other destructive actions. For example, with killing, one may have the possibility to go to a place that is peaceful, but somehow, one just doesn't get it together to leave and do it. Why is it that people just get stuck in situations

even though there are options made available to them? It is due to the force of this very strong karma that they cannot take advantage of what the environment offers them.

[Audience:] What about if one volunteers to work in a refugee camp and has to live in a poor environment?

If you volunteer to work in a refugee camp, then it is a very different situation. You are being motivated by compassion, hopefully, to go and benefit others. In such a case, living in that kind of environment, if it winds up being inconvenient to you, you are probably purifying some of your negative karma that way. Let's say you go to a place out of compassion, but you wind up living in a place where it is very difficult to get proper medicine. You wind up getting sick. You lose a lot of weight. The food doesn't sustain you. The medicine doesn't keep you well. Your negative karma is certainly influencing that, but I think because of the quality of your motivation, you're purifying [your negative karma] because you're doing that for a very good reason. You're going there to help others.

Lying

The result of lying in terms of the environment, is that we're born into a place where people are generally dishonest. You're born into a country where there is a lot of corruption, where everybody bribes everybody else. Everybody lies to everybody else. That's just the way the environment is; to get anywhere, you have to

lie or give bribes.

What's tricky about all these karmas is that when a negative karma puts us in a bad situation, our mind reacts negatively to the bad situation, and we create more negative karma. It's a spiraling thing. That is why Dharma practice is important. That is why the thought training teachings of transforming bad circumstances into the path are important. Otherwise, when a negative karma ripens, instead of counteracting it with a positive attitude, our garbage mind arises and we do more and more destructive actions and get more and more garbage results.

That's why transforming negative situations into the paths is important. Understanding how karma works helps us to do that. When we're in an environment that's unpleasant, or when we have a bad experience, we can recognize it as, "Oh, this is a result of my own karma." Then instead of getting angry and taking it out on others, we accept it. We try to have an accepting, patient and tolerant attitude to go through it. We learn from the situation so that we come out better people instead of just acting out our same old behavior patterns again and again.

Slander

Environmental result of slander or divisive speech is we are born in a place that is very rocky and uncomfortable, with extremes of high and low places and lots of cliffs. A very uneven land. The place is very dangerous. Cliffs and crevices and lots of things like these. It is interesting, isn't it? In literature or poetry, we use physical examples to talk about mental

states. It is similar here.

Harsh words

The environmental result of harsh words is we're born in a place where there are thorns. There is broken glass. There are sharp rocks. The climate is very harsh. It is very arid. There is little water. There are many scorpions and snakes. There are large salt wastes. It's incredible, isn't it? The physical environment is just a reflection of our actions.

Idle talk

Result of idle talk is that we are born in a place where fruit trees don't bear fruit at the proper season. Where the trees have unstable roots and they won't grow. And listen to this one: where the parks, forests and lakes are overcrowded and they are spoiled. Isn't this an interesting one? Living in a polluted environment being a result of idle talk. When we talk garbage, we wind up living in garbage.

Coveting

Karmic result of coveting is that all of our belongings deteriorate quickly. Everything breaks. [Laughter.] It's incredible. In some places, everything you buy breaks! I have so many examples to give I don't know where to start. When you live in the Third World countries you really see it. Everything you get just doesn't last very long. Everything breaks. The first time we use something is the last time. Or we're born

in a place of extreme poverty and constant misfortune. One gets a poor environment as a result of one's coveting mind that's so greedy—wanting more, wanting more.

Maliciousness

Environmental result of maliciousness is that we're caught in war-torn areas. For example, you go to a place on vacation and civil war breaks out there. It happens, doesn't it? People were in the Soviet Union and all of a sudden, everything was upside down. Nobody knew what was going to happen. Or people in China during the Tian An Men Square incident. You go on holiday or on business and all of a sudden, you're in this incredible, dangerous environment. Or you go to a place and there are epidemics. Diseases break out. You can see how this relates to the mental state of causing harm and we wind up in an environment which is quite hostile to us. There are many wild animals, poisonous insects and snakes. The food is very bad tasting.

Wrong views

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

HOW TO MEDITATE ON THESE

Thinking about the results our actions might bring

[Front part of this teaching was not recorded.]

... I get the result similar to the cause in terms of my experience, result similar to the cause in terms of my instinctual behavior, I get the maturation result of being born in a particular environment. If you think about it and make examples of these things, then it makes it very easy to generate a determination to be very mindful and careful in the future not to continually engage in those harmful behaviors.

It is not a threat. Nobody is threatening us with a rebirth in this kind of environment. You can see how it works psychologically. When the mind goes in a certain direction, it creates a certain propensity for us to be born in a certain place, to act in a certain way again towards others, or to have other people act towards us in a certain way. If you go home and meditate in this way about the actions and the different kinds of results, it will be very effective.

Thinking about the causes of our experiences

Another way to meditate on it is to think about our experiences. Before, you started with the actions and thought of the results. Now, you start with the results, the different experiences you had in your life, and think what kinds of actions could have caused them.

I remember when I was in Turkey, I had a bladder infection and had to go to the hospital there. The hospital was completely filthy, and I was wondering how in the world I could get medicine from a hospital that's dirtier inside than outside. This is likely to be the environmental result of killing and harming others—filthy place, difficult to get good medicine.

In this way, think about the different experiences

in your life and think what kind of actions are the causes of these experiences. It is very helpful. It helps us make sense of our life. Instead of feeling like innocent victims of a big, bad world, we understand that our own confused energy got us in this situation. This energy can be purified and changed, but it hasn't been because we have been too busy eating ice-cream. This is very good to realize. Instead of feeling like a victim, we recognize, "Okay, my energy got me here. But I can do something to purify the other imprints on my mindstream and I can be very aware, from now on, of how I think and act and feel and speak."

Thinking like this helps us get ourselves together. It helps us feel some sense of power over our own future, instead of feeling victimized by haphazard things in a big bad world that we can't control.

I really encourage you to spend some time reviewing all the stuff that we have learned about karma and look at your own life in this context. Try and understand your own experiences. It will help you understand a lot about yourself and also help you make some determinations about the future.

We have learned the Prostrations to the Thirty-Five Buddhas, so people can start doing that. Or you can do the Shakyamuni Buddha practice like we do at the beginning of the session, imagining the Buddha and the light coming from Buddha purifying and inspiring us.

Generating compassion for others

We can think of other people also. In your meditation,

you might start out thinking about yourself and understanding your own experience, getting a sense of wanting to change and purify. You can then think about what other people do and the results or experiences that they are going to get. Or think about the results that they are experiencing and the kinds of causes they created. If you think about others in this way, compassion arises very easily. We see that people are basically victims of their own confusion. We keep coming back again and again, to ignorance, anger and attachment being the three root causes of the whole mess. Instead of getting angry at people for not getting their lives together, we understand it is a very strong instinctual behavior due to karma.

Or we can think of somebody who is born in an environment that is difficult to get out of. They may be born in a dysfunctional family or in a refugee camp as a result of their actions. This doesn't mean you're blaming them. We understand that just like us, these people want to be happy but because of having acted destructively in the past, wind up experiencing unfortunate results. Compassion for them will arise in our mind.

Some people are caught in very destructive behavior patterns. Even if you try to help them, they don't want it. You can see this is really the working of karma. It doesn't mean we give up hope. Of course it takes the right person and the right moment to change, but at least we begin to understand that there is this force of karmic habit that is influencing ourselves and the people around us.

Thinking about constructive actions

Although we've been spending a lot of time talking about the destructive actions and how they influence us, don't spend your whole meditation thinking only about them. Even though we'll talk about the constructive actions later, you can start thinking about them. Since the constructive actions are the opposites of the ten destructive ones, the results are also the opposites.

Think of all the good things that you've had in your life. We have been able to get an education. We have been born in countries where there is free public education. We took it for granted. We probably hated school. But it was an incredible opportunity that we had to be born in a place where this was available to us. I have met people our age who cannot read and write. What do you do with your life if you cannot read and write? If you're born in an environment where free public education is not available, it is difficult. But we are not in that situation. We have had that incredible fortune.

Similarly, we can think about all the other fortunate things that we've experienced in our life and reflect on the kinds of actions we must have done in the past to experience them, either as an environmental result, or a maturation result, or a result in terms of our experiences or in terms of our instinctual behavior. We do have many positive behavior patterns. Look at them, take notice, rejoice in them. Seeing that there is karma involved there, make a determination to keep that karma up. [Laughter.]

There is a lot of material here for reflection. I think it is very useful for understanding life, for developing more awareness and compassion.

Questions and answers

Let me now open it up for questions and some discussion.

[Audience: inaudible]

Being born as a human being with the body and mind that we have is the maturation result. The fact that we live in the country and place we do, with the resources at our disposal—that's the environmental result. The fact that other people treat us the way they do, or we encounter specific experiences in our life—that's the result similar to the cause in terms of our experience. The characteristics we have, certain tendencies—these are the results similar to the cause in terms of our instinctual behavior.

By the way, it is quite interesting to note that the result similar to the cause in terms of instinctual behavior is, in one way, the most serious of all the results. You might wonder why, because the maturation result is more painful. If you're born with a horrible, painful body and mind, that's more painful than anything else. Actually in the long run, that one is not so bad. On the other hand, the karma of the instinctual behavior makes you create more and more causes for all four results. It is the one that is really poisonous.

[Audience: inaudible]

Let's say you killed a human being with all four parts complete. You will get all of the results. They will not

all ripen in the same lifetime and at the same time. But they will ripen, unless they are purified. Let's say you killed in a past life and in the next life, you're born in a very painful body and mind, a very painful life form. After that lifetime, you are born as a human being because a good karma ripened. In this human life, you do a lot of purification practice. Due to this purification, you do not experience the results that you would have experienced from the killing done before. Or you may experience them, but they don't last very long and they're not very intense.

[Audience: inaudible]

Once the result has been experienced, the causal energy will be exhausted. For example, if you kill and as a result, you're born in a lower life form, that result has been experienced. That killing karma has been exhausted. But you might still have the other types of results to experience.

Purification must be done before you get the result. It's like you have to take the cake out of the oven before it burns. If you let the cake burn before you take it out of the oven, you will still have a burned cake. After you have experienced the painful result, the causal energy for that particular karma has been exhausted.

Karma is a very tricky, subtle thing, because like I keep saying, it's not like a one-to-one correspondence. It's not like you kill one time and you get born in that kind of body one time. Sometimes it requires many karmic causes to get one rebirth. Sometimes one karmic cause can produce many

rebirths. It depends on the severity of the action, the frequency, and things like that. It's not just a one-to-one neat correspondence. Things can get quite complicated. That's why they say that at the end of the day, only the Buddha knows all the subtleties about any particular individual's karma.

[Audience: inaudible]

Buddha wasn't always a Buddha. All the beings who were Buddhas were originally like us, but they purified and they developed their good qualities. They cleansed their mind so that things could naturally appear. The mind is just like a mirror. It has the possibility of reflecting or perceiving all existent phenomena. When the mirror is dirty, it can't reflect anything. When the mind is confused by afflictions and contaminated karma, it can't reflect. But as one goes along the steps of the path and purifies the mind, it's like cleaning the mirror, so more and more things become perceivable.

Buddha and God

[Audience: inaudible]

A Buddha is omniscient in the sense that a Buddha can perceive everything that exists. But a Buddha is not omnipotent in the sense of being able to do anything they want to do, independent of causes, independent of other factors. There is a lot of difference between God and Buddha. Huge differences.

[Audience:] When we think about karma, isn't there the danger of getting very ego-centric, "All this stuff is happening because of me and my karma," like I'm so important?

There is that danger but that comes from not understanding things well. For example, we share the environment we live in, don't we? This city is not created by just one of us. Even talking about this life, this city is not created by one person alone. Many, many people did. Similarly, all of our karma from previous lives is involved in creating the environment that we experience together. It's not necessary to become ego-centric or paranoid, like we are the cause of everything. It's not like that because everything is very interdependent.

[Audience:] Does karma or cause and effect occur independent of a Buddha's will?

For us, they say that the power of our karma and the ability of the Buddha to help us are equal. If we have very strong karma in one direction, the Buddha cannot overwrite that. We have to purify it.

The Buddhas, from their side, have this incredible compassion, wisdom and skill, and they have all sorts of abilities. They can intervene but only if we have created the karmic cause for some kind of intervention. Buddhas cannot function independently of our karma. If they could, they would have purified all of our minds and transformed this whole environment into a pure land.

That is why I said Buddha is not omnipotent. The

Buddhas cannot go beyond the force of our karma, but they can work within the force of our karma. For example, some of us are going down to Los Angeles to hear His Holiness teach. Not everybody who attends the teaching may believe that His Holiness is a Buddha, but for the sake of this example, please just assume that they all believe it. His Holiness cannot come in and rearrange all of our karma. But by going to Los Angeles and manifesting giving teachings, it is like the Buddha is appearing in a way corresponding to our karma. We have created the karma to receive the benefit of listening to teachings from somebody like His Holiness. A Buddha appears in this way so that we can get benefit from their wisdom and guidance. Or they will appear in other ways that we can benefit from. Maybe they will appear as your boss. [Laughter.]

[Audience:] Do animals have karma?

Yes, animals do have karma.

[Audience: inaudible]

All right, comparing human and animal behavior. We say that a human rebirth is precious because of our human intelligence and the opportunity that it affords. But there is a trick to it. Human intelligence gives us the incredible opportunity to practice the Dharma, to purify, to discriminate positive and negative actions, to think about compassion and consciously develop it, and to think about the nature of reality and develop the wisdom for understanding it. Human intelligence

has this incredible facet to it. But if we don't use the human intelligence that way, then like you said, in many ways, human beings wind up acting worse than animals. Human beings kill out of malice. Human beings kill when it's completely unnecessary. Whereas animals in general do not.

[Audience: inaudible]

Karma means intentional action. Animals do act intentionally. They do create karma. They are experiencing results in terms of their experience, their behavior, their environment, their body and mind. A human being can get reborn as an animal. If you have a human being who acts worse than an animal, the body very soon begins to correspond with the mind, and the person takes rebirth as an animal. They also have, implanted on their mindstream, imprints of all sorts of other actions they did when they were human beings. These can ripen while they are in an animal body. After that karma to be reborn as a beaver or a gopher or whatever it is, is exhausted, then other karma ripens and that mindstream can be reborn in a different body and a different environment.

[Audience:] How can an animal, for example, a shark, get out of that [realm]?

It is quite difficult. Which is why at the beginning of *lamrim*, there is so much emphasis on the preciousness of a precious human life. For once, we have so many opportunities in front of us. They say that just having a precious human life is like being

half-way to Enlightenment, because it is so difficult to get.

Let's say somebody has been reborn as a shark. How are they going to get out of it? They're going to have to depend on some kind of good karma that they've created in a previous life, maybe when they were a human. That good karma hasn't ripened yet because all the shark karma ripened in the meantime. But maybe when that shark dies, there's somebody nearby who says some mantra and sets the cooperative condition for their good karma to ripen.

That's why when animals are dying or anybody is dying, it is very good to say mantras around them. It's like setting the stage or the environment for their own good karma to ripen.

Some animals can create good karma but it's more through the power of the object. You probably noticed the Tibetans taking their dogs around when they do the circumambulations of the stupas and the holy objects.

[Audience: inaudible]

We're influencing their karma in the sense that we create the environment for their karma to ripen. Our environment influences us a lot. If you go to a smoky place, it influences you. If you go out in the clear air, it makes different things arise in your mind. If we can act in a positive way to influence somebody's environment constructively, then it can make more positive mental attitudes arise in their mind. It can make it easier for their own good karma to ripen. It's like you may plant a seed in the ground but it needs

water and fertilizer to grow. Saying the mantra is like giving the water and the fertilizer. But that person has planted the seed. They've created the action.

[Audience:] Is it egocentric to want to control things? Are we thinking that we are independent people when we want to control?

The word 'control' is really touchy because we can control things to a certain extent, but we can't control everything. In other words, I can control whether I come into this room or don't come into the room. If I'm standing on the porch, I can control whether I open the door and come in. But I can't control what is going on in this room at the moment I enter. Things are already going on. We have influence only over certain things. We don't have influence over absolutely everything. The trick is, with things that we don't have influence over, relax and stop trying to control, because it only makes us become uptight. But the things that we can control, then take the initiative and put our energy in a good direction, instead of just lying back saying, "Oh, I can't control everything ...". In other words, dependency does not mean that you can't do anything. The fact that things are dependently arising does not mean that you have no influence. It means you have influence, but it depends a lot on other things too.

Collective karma

[Audience: inaudible]

They're definitely collective karma. A whole group of people who have acted similarly in the past, experiencing a similar kind of result in the present. For example, you're born in a country where everything is corrupt. Every person who lives in that environment, their karma is participating in being in that environment. But still, within that, everybody has their own individual experience. Some people are completely overwhelmed by the corruption, while others find a way to deal with it. Some people act unethically within the corruption; other people don't. In that situation, you have a group karma, but you also have individual karma.

It's the same thing right now. We have a group karma where we are all sitting here together. And yet being here, maybe one person has a stomach ache while somebody else is completely blissful. One person says, "Wow, this teaching is incredible!" Another person says, "This doesn't make any sense to me at all!" And yet we're sharing the same environment. There's a common karmic result in the environment, yet there are individual karmic results experienced by each of us having our own individual experience.

Purification

[Audience: inaudible]

Purification is an active process. Purification is different than just experiencing the results of your karma. Also when you purify, you are getting it to ripen quickly. Let's say you have two people. One

person does Nyung Nay and gets very sick. [Laughter.] The other doesn't practice Dharma and they get sick. The person who doesn't practice Dharma is just experiencing the result of their negative karma when they get sick. The karma ripens. It is finished. What about the person who gets sick when they're doing Nyung Nay? Because they are deliberately trying to purify, it's probably incredible amounts of karma that would have produced lower rebirths for eons, ripening in this sickness for a short time. Why? Because you're engaging in the force of the purification process.

[Audience:] How important is it to eliminate the self-centered motivation behind this?

As much as we can, it's important to do that. The reason karma is taught towards the beginning of *lamrim* and it's taught in a very personal way, is that we tend to be very self-centered beings, and the one thing that's going to get us moving is thinking about ourselves. It's taught at the beginning because at the beginning of the path, our minds are gross and the only thing that's going to get us moving is thinking about *me*. But the more we can expand our mind and think about others, about liberation and enlightenment and things like that, and develop that kind of motivation for purifying, the more powerful the purification is going to be. One of the advantages of developing bodhicitta or the altruistic intention is that you're able to purify karma very quickly. Why? Because of the power of the motivation. You are doing it for the sake of other beings instead of just

doing it for your own benefit. The more you can broaden your motivation, the more beneficial it will be.

[Audience:] How do we enlarge our motivation?

You can do it two ways. You can start out with, “Let’s take care of myself and prepare for my next rebirth.” In addition, we can think, “If I get a good rebirth next time, I can continue to practice the Dharma. I can continue to benefit others.” You start out first with yourself and then expand it.

Or you can think, “I really want to be able to benefit others. In order to benefit others, I have to have a good rebirth to be able to practice the Dharma.” You first think of the benefit of others and then see how that includes your own good rebirth. It’s actually better to do it this latter way, but we start with where we are. We do it the way we can, and then expand it later.

[Audience:] Are there exact ways to purify specific kinds of actions?

I think we can work both in general ways and in specific ways. For example, with the thirty-five Buddhas, each of them, by the power of their promise and their vow, helps you purify a specific kind of karma more intensely when you think of them and reveal the negativities in front of them.

Also, I think certain kinds of actions can give us a greater sense of purification. With the four opponent powers, depending on what remedial action we

choose to do for the last power of remedial behavior, it can give us a little more impetus to develop the regret and determination not to do the action again. For example, you feel you've stolen a lot, especially from the poor. Then when you do the purification practice, for that fourth power of remedial behavior, you may want to deliberately choose to do some community service with the poor. Now, probably doing prostrations could purify it equally as well, but by choosing to do the community service, it increases the sense of regret and the determination not to do it again. It makes it very powerful for you.

They say that to purify breaking of bodhisattva vows, the practice of prostrations to the thirty-five Buddhas is very good. To purify breaking of tantric vows, the Vajrasattva purification is especially good. To purify breaking of commitments made to spiritual teachers, there is a practice called samaya vajra.

Let's sit quietly for a few minutes.

CHAPTER 11

Constructive Actions and Their Results

Setting a good motivation—how it helps

I'll get back into the subject of karma but first I would like to say something else, which actually does relate very much to the subject of karma. You all know how we start all of our sessions generating a good motivation. It might seem difficult to understand why we always put all of this effort into creating a good motivation and talking a lot about motivation. Sometimes you may even feel that it is too over the top, "I'm going to become a Buddha for all sentient beings, isn't that really far-fetched? How can I think of that? I don't really want to do that. I mean, I don't even know what enlightenment is, and all these sentient beings, it's just too much. I'm saying it, but I'm not really feeling it in my heart. Sometimes I can get myself to think it's a nice idea, but I don't really in my heart have the motivation to liberate all sentient beings." So there might come this feeling of uneasiness when we're generating this good motivation, that we're trying to cultivate something we don't really feel, and we might say, "Why even do this? Let's just scratch it. Forget about saying all these words that I don't really feel."

I've definitely had this thought [laughter] I want to tell you about my experience. I just attended another retreat. It was a beautiful retreat. The teacher was

very good. The practice was also very excellent. However, what I felt was missing, was that there was no talk of bodhicitta in it. I became more and more anxious because there was no talk of motivation. We were doing this incredible meditation practice, one of these great practices that the Buddha taught and it is really very powerful and very precious, but there was no talk about why we're doing it.

It was just kind of assumed that this practice was going to help us in some way. There was no real talk of why we're doing it. I realized that in my heart, what I was really missing was just even the words of talking about loving kindness and altruism and bodhicitta for other sentient beings. All these years, it seems like I was reciting these words but I didn't really feel them. But yet, when I stopped saying those words, I felt uncomfortable. I realized then that actually something had sunk in from saying those words. Even though I hadn't felt them, somehow, just by reminding myself again and again and again that this is not just for my own little happiness, but for a bigger purpose, that is, for the welfare of others, it has had an impact. Even though we don't really feel it inside, and it might just be an aspiration or something we admire, somehow the force of generating that again and again and again, with effort, even if it's artificial, somehow it has a very strong impact on the mind, which I wasn't even aware of until there was no talk of it.

So I went to complain to the guy who was leading the retreat. [Laughter.] I was a big headache to him. I kept complaining. "Where is the bodhicitta?" [Laughter.] I began to see why the first thing all of my

teachers would say at the beginning of a teaching, is to remember the motivation, that we are doing it for the enlightenment of all beings. When we hear this motivation, we tend to think, “Oh yes, it’s the same old words. All the lamas say the exact same words before all the teachings, so let’s finish that up and get to the interesting stuff in the teachings.”

Really, just this lack of it in this retreat really woke me up to how very precious just even the words were. To whatever degree that saying those words generated that feeling in our heart, it made it really, really precious.

I began to really understand why having a good motivation is continually emphasized in the Buddha’s teachings. It’s very interesting. We do get what we want. If you want enlightenment, you’ll eventually get enlightenment. But if you don’t want enlightenment and you don’t think about it, and you do whatever Dharma practice you’re doing with no particular motivation, or with the motivation that “Well, may I feel good,” then you’ll feel good, and that’s it. You get what you asked for.

I began to think that even if one does incredible meditation practice, and develops very high concentration, if there’s no cultivation of a proper motivation beforehand, then it becomes like any other worldly action you’re doing in your life. Because what you’re left with is your basic ordinary motivation, which is “I’m doing this because it makes me feel better right now.” There’s nothing wrong with this, but it just has the effect of only making us feel better right now. I began to really see that doing a Dharma action isn’t a question of knowing the

meditation technique only. It's a question of your motivation while you're doing it.

So that's why there is so much emphasis on motivation. That is why we start out with the prayers and why when we wake up in the morning, we take time to think, "Today, I'm going to do whatever I do for the benefit of others." Again and again planting that motivation on our mindstream because even if it is artificial, it will lead to that goal. Whereas if you do a whole practice and you don't have a spiritual motivation, it doesn't become spiritual. It becomes worldly, doesn't it? Instead of lying down for a nap, you meditate to feel better. Instead of taking a Librium or a Valium or whatever it is, you meditate to feel better. It's true. It's less expensive. [Laughter.] But that's all it gives you, if that's all you're doing it for.

That's why motivation is so important. This relates very much to karma, because the karma of what we do is dependent on our motivation, or why we do it. The whole thing is rooted in why we do something, not so much just what we do. Again and again we come back to this. The mind is the creator. Our intention is the creator.

Thinking about the positive actions

We are on this section about karma. Starting tonight we'll be talking about positive actions. Here again, we'll be talking about intention and motivation, because that's what karma is. It's the mental factor of intention.

The positive actions are generally, restraining

ourselves from doing the ten destructive actions by recognizing the harmful results that come from doing them. Simply just not doing a destructive action is not necessarily a positive action. In other words, you need the intention, the awareness not to do it in order to make it a positive action. It's real important. For example, our cat Mahakala comes in the room. He could be sitting right here, and maybe he's not stealing anything right now, but we can't say he's creating any positive karma because he doesn't have the intention not to steal. If you're just sitting here not stealing, you're not creating any positive karma. Having the awareness of the disadvantages of the negative action and the intention to abandon it—that is what creates the positive action.

A positive action has the same four component parts that the negative one has. They are:

1. Object
2. Intention
3. Action
4. Completion of the action

Abandoning killing

The positive action of abandoning killing is not just the cat sitting here sleeping on the cushion, or Joe Blow sitting there smoking his cigar, not killing. There's an object, for example, the mosquito that's on your arm. The positive intention is you recognize the disadvantages of killing. You recognize, "If I kill this, this sentient being is going to be hurt, and if I kill this sentient being, I'm leaving a negative imprint on my

own mind that's going to influence me in a harmful way in the future. Therefore, it's not really proper that I kill the mosquito. It's not conducive to my own or others' welfare." That's the intention. Then the third part, action, is your effort in restraining yourself from swatting the mosquito. That initial intention becomes stronger, and so you have the decision now, "I'm not going to do it." You're making an effort. The completion of the action usually follows very quickly after that. It happens when you're really quite definite, "Okay, I'm not going to kill the mosquito." Therefore, we have this whole sequence—the object, the intention, the action, and the completion—for the positive action.

Abandoning stealing

You might be running off some copies at work using the office copy machine. The object of stealing is all those pieces of paper that you used in the copy machine. The intention would be, "Ah, but if I do this, I'm taking something that belongs to others that hasn't been freely offered, and that is not conducive to my own welfare. If I do that, it leaves a negative imprint on my mind. It may not be a big harm to the company, but if enough people did this, it would be." There's an awareness that this is a harmful action, and that it's not proper to do this. The action itself would be your effort in not doing it, in saying, "Okay. I'm not going to do this." Then, "I could just as easily take five minutes during lunch break, go across the street and pay a nickel to use the copy machine." The completion of the action would be when you say,

“Yes, that’s what I’m going to do.” You’re quite definite about abandoning stealing. There’s this whole process, this whole awareness that’s coming.

As you can see, it’s really quite valuable. The more you become aware of the negative actions, the more opportunity you have for deliberately creating the positive ones. That’s why we went through so much effort and energy talking about the negative ones first. So that you can identify them, and that gives you the ability to do the positive ones.

Value of taking precepts

This is also one of the advantages of taking precepts. If you have precepts, for example, if you’ve taken the five lay precepts, then you have set the intention not to kill. You have that intention, and by the force of taking that precept, that intention is ever-present, even though at a very subliminal level in your consciousness. Even if you’re sitting here, and you’re not particularly consciously thinking, “I’m not going to kill,” still, because of your previous intention and the force of that existing in your mind, you have the intention not to kill. You’re not killing when you’re sitting here. You have the whole virtuous action there.

This is the real value in taking the precepts, because it keeps that intention always in the mind, even though at the subliminal level. It’s a continuous creation of positive actions. Whereas the person who doesn’t have the precept will not have that intention, that action, or the completion of the action. They’re just sitting there like the cat.

[Audience:] How is it that you create the positive karma because you don't really have the intention consciously in your mind all the time?

Well, I think there is the object in the sense that beforehand, when you took the precept, you thought, "All these other living beings, I'm not going to kill them." Then you have that intention subliminally in your mind. You're also sitting here in a room full of other sentient beings. You're doing the action of not killing them. You're still quite definite about doing the action of not killing them. You haven't altered your intention from the time you took the precept. If you're breaking your precept now, then you're altering your intention. That's cutting the flow of that intention. But if that intention is still there, that action is still there, that definite-ness about it is still there. It may not be operating in your mind at a conscious level, because otherwise you'll just be sitting there all day, all night, "I'm not going to kill. I'm not going to steal. I'm not going to ..." You'll never have time to think about how to eat your Cheerios.

You need to have some other conscious thoughts, instead of just constantly repeating the precept to yourself consciously. That's the power of taking the vows, that you put that intention in the mindstream so that all your actions are conjoined with that intention even though it's not a manifest one in your mindstream at all times.

[Audience: inaudible]

You're not actively not holding it. Actively not

holding it would be, “I’m not holding this.” It’s not consciously manifest in your mind, but that doesn’t mean that it’s having no effect on your mind. It’s definitely having an effect on your mind, because you made that intention.

[Audience: inaudible]

You’re not having the idea manifest in your mind when you have the precept, but it’s working at a subliminal level. If you’re just Joe Blow who hasn’t taken precepts, and it’s the middle of winter and there’re no mosquitoes, and you’re sitting there thinking, “I’m not going to kill mosquitoes,” then I would think that ... actually, this is quite an interesting thing. On some level, you don’t have the object right there in front of you, but on another level, just your thinking “I’m not going to kill mosquitoes” is putting a good imprint on your mind, isn’t it?

It is. What are you doing when you meditate on the four immeasurables on your meditation cushion? “May all sentient beings have happiness”, and you cultivate patience for your boss. Your boss isn’t there, but still, in your mind, you’re cultivating that patience. That’s affecting your mind, isn’t it? The next time you see your boss, you might think twice. It is putting some good imprint in the mind. There’s a real interesting story in the scriptures about some guy, who for some reason—this is a story, so don’t ask me why [laughter]—he was a butcher during the day-time and then at night-time, he took the vow not to kill. He actually had the precept not to kill at night, even though he didn’t have it during day-time when he was

killing.

Somehow this ripened in some very interesting karma, where in a future life, during the daytime, he experiences incredible suffering, like bugs eating him, incredible pain and torture. However, at night, he was in this really deva-like realm with all this pleasure. It's said that this was because he was killing in the day-time and in the night-time he had the precept not to kill.

Recognizing and rejoicing at our own and others' virtues

It's also really good in the evening when we go through and think about the day's activities, that we not only look at the things where we did act negatively, but also really congratulate ourselves for all the times we acted constructively. Rejoice at having taken the precepts and having them in our mind and accumulating all the positive potential from that.

This process of recognizing and rejoicing at our own virtues is really, really important. So often, we tend to get into this whole thing of low self-esteem and self-criticism, and it's precisely because we don't spend the time recognizing what we are doing well. It's important to recognize that. That doesn't mean we get all puffed up and proud over it, but we certainly can recognize and rejoice at our own virtue.

Also, we don't limit our rejoicing to just "I didn't kill the mosquito." There're all these other people around who are acting constructively. So it's really essential to rejoice at that too.

If we do these, it helps counteract this very negative image we have of ourselves, because we begin to actively recognize, “Well, no, there is something good that I’m doing.”

When we talk about the ten constructive actions, they have four results (actually three results, but one of the results is sub-divided into two):

1. Maturation result. This refers to what rebirth you have. The body and mind you take.
2. Result similar to the cause (sub-divided into two):
 - a. In terms of your experience. In other words, having been born in a particular realm, what particular events happen to you during your life.
 - b. In terms of your instinctive or habitual behavior. What things you repetitively do, very easily.
3. Environmental result. That’s the surroundings that you’re born into.

Maturation Result

What maturation result we get depends on the intensity of the action. If it’s a very intense action, then it creates rebirth in the formless realm, which is considered the highest realm in samsara, where there’s the greatest peace. With a middle intensity positive action, you get born in the form realm. With a small intensity positive action, you get born as a

human being.

Remember with the negative actions, for the really heavy actions, the result is rebirth in the hell realm, the middle one in the hungry ghost realm, and the small one in the animal realm. With positive actions, the result is also according to the intensity of the action.

The intensity of an action is determined by how many of the factors that make an action heavy or light (we went through those six factors previously) are present. One factor would be whether we have a very strong motivation.

Also take note that these results are in terms of worldly happiness, with the formless realm having the greatest amount of peace in samsara, then the form realm, then the human realm. So this is again why motivation in our Dharma actions is so important. If we don't motivate properly, then the karma could ripen in a rebirth in the formless realm or the form realm or the human realm, but we may not necessarily have the opportunity to practice Dharma in that rebirth.

[Audience:] What's the formless realm?

You get born in the formless realm when you have very high states of concentration, very strong samadhi. The mind just gets completely concentrated, let's say, on space. Or concentrated on nothingness. These are very intense states of concentration. You don't have a gross body at that time. You just have the energy of the mind.

[Audience:] What's so good about that?

You don't have to deal with all the hassles that we deal with day to day. You don't need to pay the rent. You don't worry about your golf game. It's quite peaceful. When you have single-pointed concentration, it generates great peace and bliss in the mind. You don't have any of the anxiety, worries, the constant flow of thoughts that we have in our mind now. The formless realm is when you have super-high levels of single-pointed concentration. The form realm is when you have single-pointed concentration, but it's not the super high levels. In the form realm, you have a grosser body, but it's more like a body of light or something similar. It's not quite as painful and problematic as our body.

[Audience:] You won't be reborn again?

Oh no, you're reborn again. You're still in the cycle of existence. That's why it's said that these good rebirths are in terms of worldly happiness. That's why just developing intense concentration is not sufficient to free ourselves from cyclic existence. Many religious traditions and many spiritual practices have ways to develop very strong concentration, very strong samadhi, but that doesn't mean that the people who develop them are liberated from cyclic existence. You might have very strong samadhi, so that the anger, the attachment, etc don't arise consciously or manifestly in your mind, but because the seeds are still there at an unmanifest level, then as soon as you lose that concentration state, they all come back again.

So you might get born in the form realm and the formless realm, and you can have a really long rebirth there. You can stay a really long time in these really nice states. But then after the karma to get reborn there finishes, the only way you go is down, because then your less positive karma or your negative karma starts to ripen.

They say that in samsara, we've been born as everything. Can you imagine this? That we actually have had single-pointed concentration before in the past? We've been born in these formless realms. We've been born in the hell realms. We've done everything within cyclic existence many, many times.

But we never practice the path! We never develop the wisdom that cuts the ignorance. We didn't do it right. That's again why the motivation is so important, because if we don't have the motivation, we might do a positive action, we might get a good rebirth, but then, that causal energy finishes and then another karma ripens again. But if you have a positive motivation, like I want to become a Buddha for the benefit of sentient beings, then you're able to, let's say, take another precious human rebirth, and have the conditions whereby you can practice Dharma, and thereby continue to purify your mind, and to continue to create positive actions.

[Audience: inaudible]

Right now, you might not be angry. Anger is not manifest in your mind. Likewise, when you are in single-pointed concentration, anger is not manifest in your mind. But, as soon as you start thinking of

something, anger comes real quick. So when those beings lose their samadhi, when the karma to be reborn in that realm ends, and they take a lower rebirth, then anger, jealousy, and other afflictions come back again.

[Audience:] What would cause death in these realms?

When the karmic energy finishes. When we create an action to get a result, because the action is impermanent, it doesn't last forever. Therefore the result doesn't last forever either. We experience something as long as the causal energy is there. It's like a flame burning. It will burn as long as the fuel is there. But if the fuel runs out, the flame goes out. Similarly, when the karmic energy to have a certain life finishes, that life ends. Then a different karma ripens, and you get born in a different realm.

I said before that the formless realm is considered the highest in terms of the peacefulness within cyclic existence. However, for attaining enlightenment, the human realm is considered the best one.

This is interesting, that the best thing in samsara isn't necessarily the best thing in terms of Dharma practice. When you have one of these really high states of concentration, you just zap into your concentration. You don't think about anything else. So you never develop wisdom. You just stay in your bliss. There could be an incredibly strong attachment to the bliss of concentration.

That's why from a Dharma perspective, a human rebirth is much more valuable than one of these

blissful rebirths in one of the realms of concentration. It's much more valuable than a rebirth as a desire realm god who has a super-duper sense pleasure. A human rebirth is considered better than those, because if you have either a lot of sense pleasure, or a lot of happiness from your concentration, you're so easily distracted from the Dharma. Whereas in a human realm, we have enough problems [laughter] to motivate us to practice.

[Audience: inaudible]

The method aspect—to create strong Dharma aspirations, for example—is much more difficult to cultivate in other realms. Some people who are aspiring for liberation might sometimes take rebirth as a form realm god, but they've done that specifically with a Dharma motivation and they continue their practice. But ordinarily, with the regular old desire realm gods, it's usually, “Hmm. It's nice. Who needs the Dharma here!”

[Audience:] Where does pure land rebirth fit in to this?

It doesn't really fit into the six realms of existence. Don't get too categorical here. There're many types of pure lands. Sometimes some of the realms in the formless realm are called pure lands. But when we talk about pure lands like Amitabha's pure land or Sukavati, these pure lands are created by the power of a Buddha's pure intention. For instance, before Amitabha Buddha became a Buddha, when he was

generating bodhicitta, he made forty-eight very, very strong, committed vows, to really help sentient beings. One of the vows was to create this pure land where all the conditions would be really conducive to Dharma practice. So that everything around one will make one think of the Dharma.

A pure land is a very, very beautiful place. You won't get all angry because things aren't efficient and they don't function properly. Everything works. The whole environment is very beautiful. All the people around you are into Dharma, so everybody you talk to is encouraging and supportive of your practice. Somehow, by the power of Amitabha and by the karma of the people born there, everything you hear becomes a Dharma teaching. Even when the wind goes through the trees and the birds chirp, they become teachings on impermanence or selflessness to you. They describe the pure land in terms of the quality of the environment, but you can see it also has to do with the state of mind of the person born there. That's one reason why we could see we could create a pure land here and now as well, because if you generate the ability, let's say, to hear the bird's chirping and the motor-cycle going (or whatever), as a teaching on impermanence, it becomes a teaching in the pure land here.

The advantage of being born in a pure land, for example, Amitabha's pure land, is that once you're born there, you'll never get reborn in the other six realms. Once you're there, it's kind of guaranteed that you're going to get enlightened. So it's like "Phew! At least I don't have to worry about any of these other six hassles." You just do your practice, and you will

eventually get enlightened.

Now it's very interesting, we ordinary human beings are always saying, "May I be born in a pure land." But there are these bodhisattvas who are born in the pure land saying, "I want to be born as a human being." Why would that bodhisattva want to be born as a human being? It's because when you have a human rebirth, due to the elements of the human body, due to the construct of the human body, it can be used to practice the Vajrayana or the tantric method. That is a very quick way to attain enlightenment. When you are a proper vessel, using those techniques can lead you to enlightenment very quickly. Whereas if you're in a pure land, attaining enlightenment can take some time.

So where people wish to be born depends on the aspirations people have. You could see that taking a human rebirth is tricky. If you're qualified and you practice Vajrayana, you can progress quickly. But if you break your tantric vows, or if you get distracted, you'll get into big problems. Whereas if you're born in the pure land, you might take longer, but it's more secure. So I think it's going to depend a lot on people's personality too, what they're attracted to.

[Audience: inaudible]

You're saying when a great lama dies, we pray for him to be reborn here. But shouldn't he get to stay in the pure land and enjoy because ... [Audience speaks.] What we're doing here, is we're looking at our teacher as somebody who has developed bodhicitta, who has developed the realization of emptiness, who

has the ability to control what happens to their consciousness. From their side, they can go to a pure land and relax. But what we're doing is, we're really crying out, "Help! I need help and I need you to come here, because my mind is too gross. If you're born in the pure land, and my mind is stuck here, I can't communicate with you. So please, out of compassion, please take rebirth here."

We're not asking our teacher to take rebirth here out of ignorance, anger and attachment. We're saying "Out of your compassion, because we need guidance, please come back to our world." Making that request prayer from our side creates a very strong imprint on the mind to meet pure teachers and teachings, because when we make that prayer with sincerity, we're really valuing having a teacher. We're really valuing the teachings. When we value those things so strongly, we're creating the karma to meet them.

[Audience:] Do they ever refuse?

The compassionate ones don't. [Laughter.]

I remember in one prayer to Chenrezig, it was saying that Chenrezig is bound to sentient beings by compassion, like a mother bound to her child by compassion. Chenrezig's compassion binds him to us. You can feel this, because as you start to develop compassion, you feel much more responsibility for others. It's not like, "Ciao guys! I'm sick of you. Good-bye." [Laughter.]

You can see that by the prayer His Holiness makes. I can't remember the words exactly, but it's something to the effect of "As long as space exists, as long as

sentient beings exist, I will come back and help and be involved.”

So again, from this, you can see why bodhicitta is so important. If other beings didn't have bodhicitta or the altruistic intention, they wouldn't come back to help us. They get born in the pure land, they attain nirvana. Good for them. Who cares about us? That's why they say that the altruistic intention is the source of happiness for all beings, because that's the link that keeps the holy beings bound to us, and by their being bound to us, then they have to help us. But we do not just leave it at “They're bound to me and they have to help me.” Rather, we cultivate the altruistic attitude and are bound to sentient beings in turn, because we recognize that that becomes the source of happiness of all other beings. We'll continue to help as long as they are around.

[Audience: inaudible]

Spiritual motivation is important, because if you have a motivation to become an arhat, or to become a Buddha, then you will take a rebirth in a situation where you're able to continue to practice. It's not like Joe Blow out on the street who developed samadhi because he thinks it's great to have samadhi and it feels good, and he then gets reborn in the formless realm. He didn't have a spiritual motivation.

[Audience: inaudible]

If you don't have a really firm determination to be free of samsara, if it's a weak determination to be free

of samsara, and you start doing lots and lots of concentration practice, they say the experience can be so blissful that it's easy to get lost. You need to have a teacher around to say, "Hey! Hold on. Remember your motivation and think of the suffering of cyclic existence." If you have a good teacher, your teacher will train you to use that concentration to develop wisdom, to develop bodhicitta and everything else. That's why having the determination to be free from samsara is so important, and that's why you need to have a teacher.

[Audience:] How do you start trying to pull out of that (attachment)?

That's a really good question. I think we all understand that. The reason that all these pleasures seem so fantastic is that they give you an immediate zap. Hot fudge sundaes—definitely big sugar rush. [Laughter.] Whereas if we say, "May I become enlightened," we don't get any kind of immediate zap.

What we have to do is start thinking of the limitations of hot fudge sundaes and all these kinds of things, and the advantages of enlightenment.

For example, if you show a kid who is in pre-school, a college text book and says, "Mama says read this," they're going to look at the book and go, "I don't even know which way is up! This is insurmountable. How can mama expect me to read this?"

But then, if the kid starts to learn the alphabets, then they begin to say, "Oh yes, I can read the alphabets, so I can at least tell that this is something

familiar and has the same alphabet. I can't read it, but there's something going on here."

As the kid starts progressing and learns to read more, they can pick out some words and some phrases, though they can't understand the meaning. As they train more and more, they can start to get some of the concepts. So it's like this gradual process of learning to read the book.

Now, if a little toddler just learned the alphabets, and says, "Oh I feel so good learning the alphabets. Why learn to read the college textbook? Learning the alphabets is good enough for me. Mama gave me a lollipop for that, and that's all I want. That's good enough. That's all the happiness I need."

Mama will be there saying, "Well, a lollipop is nice, but think of your future. You have to have a career and earn a livelihood. How are you going to support yourself?"

Then the kid says, "No, I just want a lollipop. Don't talk to me about careers and all these things."

That's because the kid has a limited view. The kid is only seeing the advantages of getting the lollipop and learning the alphabets, but they're not at all aware of the advantages of learning to read the college textbooks.

So it's a thing of cultivating the motivation slowly, slowly, slowly, and seeing the limitations of hot fudge sundaes and banana splits.

[Audience: inaudible]

Well, you do it at the same time. You begin to see the disadvantages of the hot fudge sundaes. That makes

you more eager to practice the Dharma. As you practice the Dharma, you start to realize that it works, and that you actually are happier—forget about enlightenment, you’re even happier now practicing the Dharma—then you get more enthusiasm. “Oh, it makes me happier now. Enlightenment must be even better.” So then hot fudge sundaes just aren’t quite as important as they used to be. For instance, when you’re really hungry and you want a sugar fix, hot fudge sundaes seem really glamorous. Yet if you sit there and you imagine eating hot fudge sundae after hot fudge sundae, even the thought of it makes you feel quite ill. So you begin to realize that hot fudge sundaes have their limitations. They can’t make you everlastingly happy. They just can’t do it.

Offering hot fudge sundae to the Buddha

[Audience: inaudible]

Offer it not with the feeling of, “A hot fudge sundae is bad and I’m bad if I’m attached to it. So I’m going to deny myself a hot fudge sundae in order to be holy.” Don’t ever have that motivation.

It’s more just sitting and thinking, “Well, I eat this hot fudge sundae. It’s great. But it’ll be gone. What do I have fifteen minutes from now when it’s gone? I’m still sitting here dissatisfied. It’s not going to solve my problems.” But if you can really generate this feeling of wanting happiness for other beings, so that you’re going to offer this hot fudge sundae to the Buddha in order to create the positive potential for the happiness of others, to lead them to

enlightenment, and you transform the hot fudge sundae into the blissful wisdom nectar which is infinitely more delicious, and offer that to the Buddha, and the Buddhas just really love it, then you can feel a real sense of happiness from offering it.

What to dedicate towards

[Audience: inaudible]

Well, again, it depends a lot on what you're praying for and what you're dedicating for. You'll notice that there are whole Buddhist traditions dedicated to being reborn in the pure land. So the motivation of people following those traditions is to be reborn in the pure land. When they dedicate and pray to be reborn in the pure land, that sets a really strong imprint in their mind to get that result. Whereas somebody else might say, "No, I want to have a precious human rebirth, to be able to meet a fully qualified tantric master and be a fully qualified tantric disciple and do the tantric practice." Then you pray and dedicate towards that. It doesn't mean you have to choose between these. I think it's good to cover all our bases. Pray and dedicate for everything. [Laughter.] It's very much going to depend on different people's aspiration.

One day in the Ganden monastery in Tibet, the care-taker monk went into the hall and saw that a cat was sitting on Je Rinpoche's throne. The care-taker told his lama who had psychic powers about it. The lama saw that in a previous life, this cat had been an old lady who had come to the throne to make prayers like most Tibetans. She had prayed at that time, "May

I sit on the Ganden throne.” But she didn’t say, “May I sit on the Ganden throne as a human being who practices the Dharma.” So you got to really check up how you dedicate. [Laughter.]

Well, in answer to your question, they do say if you have a really full, intense motivation for enlightenment, you get that (enlightenment). If it’s a middle spiritual motivation, then you might get the result of a solitary realizer, and a smaller motivation would bring the result of being a hearer.

Results Similar to the Cause in Terms of Our Experience

The results similar to the cause in terms of our experience for constructive actions are basically the opposite of the results similar to the cause for the destructive actions.

Abandoning killing—you have a long life.

Abandoning stealing—you have the resources that you need and you have access to those resources.

Abandoning sexual misconduct—you have a very good relationship with your spouse, good relationships with the people around you.

Abandon lying—other people believe what you say. You have a good reputation amongst other people.

It’s interesting. You can see that positive results from doing positive actions can be experienced in this very life. By abandoning unwise sexual behavior, you will have a better relationship with your spouse. Definitely. If you abandon lying, other people will

give more weight to your words. So it benefits this life as well. But here, we're talking about the karmic results for future lives.

Abandoning slander or divisive words—we have more friends and we are more in harmony with other people. Our relationships with other people are more stable, more satisfying. There isn't all the picking and nagging and haggling. With divisive words, we are splitting up people's relationships, so a result of abandoning that is that we have steady, firm relationships that don't get split up.

Abandoning harsh words—we live more harmoniously with others and others speak kindly to us. That again leads to better relationships with people and more friendships.

Abandoning idle talk—our words carry more weight. People will listen to us instead of just thinking, “This is a blabber-mouth.”

Abandoning coveting—we can fulfill our wishes. We can start a project, finish it, and accomplish our goals.

Abandoning maliciousness—we don't experience unnecessary fear, paranoia and suspicion. This one is real interesting, isn't it? Because again, we can see that if we have malicious thoughts for others, we psychologically create the cause for ourselves to be paranoid, suspicious, anxious. If we abandon that, our own mind will be peaceful. No unnecessary fear and anxiety.

Abandoning wrong views—we're born intelligent, with very good wisdom. Here we're talking about Dharma wisdom, not worldly wisdom. People can have a lot of worldly wisdom but be very ignorant in

terms of Dharma. Very close-minded. People who may not have so much worldly wisdom—they may flunk their math class—may understand the Dharma very well. That's the important kind of wisdom, the important kind of intelligence.

Results Similar to the Cause In Terms of Our Behavior

Abandoning killing—as young children, we are instinctively kind to others. We instinctively don't kill.

Abandoning stealing—our instinctive behavior is to be honest with others and to respect other people's property.

Abandoning unwise sexual conduct—we won't be tempted to engage in extra-marital affairs, or to get into dysfunctional sexual relationships with people.

Abandoning lying—it'll be very easy to tell the truth. We won't feel compelled to lie.

Abandoning slander—we'll have a very good disposition. Again, we'll create harmony in our environment instead of creating division.

Abandoning harsh words—we have an inclination to speak pleasantly to other people.

Abandoning idle talk—we have the inclination to speak to others in a meaningful way.

Abandoning coveting—there is the inclination, the tendency for the mind to be content and peaceful instead of always being restless and dissatisfied. When our mind is really dissatisfied, it's very good to think about this. Abandoning coveting is the way to make the mind peaceful.

Abandoning maliciousness—the mind becomes peaceful in the sense that we aren't tormented by a lot of anger and jealousy.

Abandoning wrong views—we will be able to easily understand the Dharma and easily have correct understanding.

This is real interesting to think about. I think it's good to spend some time thinking about your own life situation. When you read the newspapers and watch TV, spend some time thinking about it. When you experience something painful, ask: what are the karmic causes for that? When you experience something good, what are the karmic causes for that? Look at your own personality tendencies. Some people might be compulsive liars, and some people might be compulsive truth tellers. Look at the different tendencies in your mind.

Actually, sometimes, we might have both tendencies. It's not like you lie all the time or you tell the truth all the time. You might have habitual karma in both directions, but which one is stronger? Which one do you want to really nourish and encourage? It is very helpful to think about this. It also helps us to see the advantages of constructive actions. We really begin to appreciate it. Also, when we do this, we start becoming cognizant of the good conditions that we have in our life, instead of just taking them for granted. Recognizing the good conditions and opportunities we have and thinking of the good karma we created in order to enjoy that, gives us some energy to be able to keep on acting constructively.

I'll give you one little example of how that worked with me, where I kind of got a feeling for this. The

early years of my ordination was quite difficult financially, to put it mildly. At one point, I was living in France. I was living at the monastery. They gave the nuns the horse stables to live in. [Laughter.] The French winters are freezing cold. It's really cold. This was an old building. There was no insulation. The wind would blow through the bricks. It was so cold, and all there were, were little gas-heaters to put in our rooms. There was no such thing as central heating then. But I was really broke, and I couldn't afford a heater.

I was there the whole winter, and I couldn't afford a heater. It was miserable. I did a lot of prostrations that winter to keep warm. [Laughter.] I couldn't afford a heater and the nuns as a group didn't have enough money to give everybody individually a heater. You had to pay for it yourself, and I wasn't able to. Then other things happened that year too. There were teachings in Italy. It seemed that I wasn't going to be able to go for the teachings because I didn't have enough money to pay for a ticket, and these kinds of things.

So there were just a lot of financial problems and at one point, I sat myself down and I really had a good talk with myself. "Look. This is all due to your miserliness. Karmically, when you have problems with resources and you're miserable because you can't afford these things, it is a result of being miserly." Looking at my behavior, looking at how I was acting, I said, "You're still acting and creating more karma to be miserly, because you're still thinking, 'This is my doughnut. This is my this. This is my that.'"

I was sitting there thinking, "Here I am, belly-

aching, belly-aching that I'm so poor. It's a result of my own karmic action, and I'm creating more karma to have the same experience again." At that point I said to myself, "I need to change." It's like "I think I need to re-think this whole thing, because I don't want to continue this way." Even if I don't have a lot of stuff and I can't give a whole lot, I've got to at least start being a little bit more generous with things.

It was really good for me to come right up against it and really face it, instead of belly-aching "Oh, I don't have so much money. Why doesn't somebody give me some money to have a heater? Why don't they have more compassion for nuns?" "Well, this is your own karma, kiddo! What do you want?" I had to really sit and look at that and think about it, and see how until then, I hadn't been doing much to counteract that. Then that gave me a lot of energy to begin to review my relationship to possessions, and to begin to start to share a little bit more than I had been sharing previously. So this kind of contemplation and awareness of the results of karma—both the negative karmas and the positive karmas, reflecting on them in terms of your life—can give you some positive energy to develop your good qualities.

[Audience:] But isn't it a selfish kind of motivation, to just want my future to be better?

This is why we talk about the three levels of motivation: the first level of motivation being the wish for a good rebirth, followed by the wish for liberation, then the wish for enlightenment. It's because the motivation to have a good rebirth is the easiest one to

generate. “I want to have more in my next rebirth. I don’t like this.” It was completely selfish, but I was beginning to think at least about my future rebirths. So at least that got me going. It got me going somehow, in a positive direction. Then from there, once I got going, then I could reflect, “Oh, but look. That motivation is pretty selfish, isn’t it? You’re completely blocking out all these other people who are freezing cold.” So then the motivation began to expand and expand.

Okay. So let’s just sit and quietly think about this.

Review

We were talking last time about positive karma and the different results that come from positive actions—maturation result, result similar to the cause in terms of our experiences and our behavior, and the environmental result.

We have finished talking about the result similar to the cause in terms of our instinctive behavior. But it’s helpful to point out that if somebody has trained well in the path, done a lot of meditation and put energy into developing the positive attitudes and qualities, then in the next lifetime, these positive actions manifest karmically as those thoughts, feelings and inclinations with no great effort. When you hear about the incarnations of very high masters (who are not necessarily Buddhas or high-level bodhisattvas) having special mental qualities from a young age, this is a result of this kind of karma—the result that’s similar to the cause in terms of your instinctual behavior.

The same applies to us too. If we develop a patterned way of thinking well and the Dharma becomes more spontaneous in our mind, that carries over to the next life and then it doesn't become as difficult to generate the understanding of the Dharma. Sometimes we get stuck and it seems hard to understand the Dharma. Or even if we understand it, we can't figure it out in our heart. One of the reasons for these is because of the lack of this kind of karma, the lack of this habitual action.

A story to illustrate 'result similar to the cause in terms of instinctual behavior'

I want to tell you the story of the incarnation of one of my teachers. I saw the result similar to the cause in terms of instinctual behavior manifesting in this case. His name is Serkong Rinpoche. His previous rebirth is my root teacher. He was an incredible master.

I met the incarnation a few years ago in Dharamsala, when he was five years old. We went on some picnics with him. It was incredible to watch the way he acted. You know how most kids behave. They'll usually find one adult they feel the most comfortable with and latch on to that one and basically, stay near him or her. In Rinpoche's case, it would probably be to stay near Ngawang, who is his attendant. But when Rinpoche is with a group of people, he would pay attention to everybody. It was remarkable. He knew some of the people in the group well, and there were some he didn't know well. He would have the sensitivity to know that everybody in the group needs some attention. I really picked up on

it because this is something special.

Then we sat down to eat. Most five-year-old kids, when they're eating, would mess up the table, cry and shriek and jump around the table. But Rinpoche just sat there, led us in the offering prayer (he knew the offering prayer), and then he sat and ate like an adult. It was incredible to watch. These are small things, but they made an impression on my mind. I thought this is an example of the result of mental cultivation from previous lives.

And then one time he completely blew our minds. We had taken on the picnic a bottle of water, and we were sitting around. All of a sudden he took the water and he started holding it up like they hold the vase up during initiations, and he started pretending to chant and pour us each some water like they do in initiations. He'd never seen that. It's like, "Where did he get this?" Again, he is displaying the instinctual behavior of acting like a master even though he's five years old and he's playing as a child. That's the example with him but the same kind of thing applies to us. If we cultivate a lot this lifetime, then definitely the practice comes easier next lifetime.

Classifications of Karma

We were talking about karma meaning actions. Remember that Buddha did not create the law of karma, just as Newton did not create gravity. But rather, karma is just something that describes a natural functioning. And here it's the functioning of cause and effect. Karma links what we do now with what

we experience in the future.

Sometimes we have difficulty with the idea of karma. It sounds Eastern and weird and yet we live our lives as a cause and effect. You go to school to get an education so that you can make money later. That is because you believe that causes create certain effects.

What karma implies is causes create effects, but we are looking beyond just the span of being in this one body. In other words, it is based on the understanding that although our life seems very real, concrete and solid now, as though this were the only thing that is going on, in actual fact, “who we are” is something that came from before, exists now and goes on to the future. Sometimes they say this life is like a dream because it seems very real and solid like in a dream. Everything seems real and solid in a dream. But when you wake up in the morning, last night’s dream is very clearly last night’s dream. And yet, what you dreamt last night affects how you get up in the morning.

Similarly, our life now seems very real and solid. But we could die very easily and get reborn. Then what seems real and solid now very quickly becomes like last night’s dream. And yet what we do now will influence what happens to us in the future. In the same way that what we dream influences us when we wake up. There’s a continuity of mind. The whole idea is things influence one another. What we are experiencing now depends a lot on what we did prior to this, just as what you dream about at night often depends on what you did during the day. There’s a mental stream that is going on.

IS THERE FREE WILL OR ARE THINGS PREDETERMINED?

Although things do not happen by accident, they don't happen in a pre-planned, predetermined way either. This is something hard for us to understand because our Western paradigm often sees things as, "It's either this or that". And we think that "this" and "that" include all that there is. Then we ask the question, "Is there free will or is it predetermined?" The answer we get back is that it is neither. But, we go, "But it has got to be one of it!" Well, that is only because of our conceptual process. We've made black and white, we thought that's all there is. There are actually many other things that could exist too.

We can see by our lives that there is free will but, ironically, there isn't free will. We can do absolutely anything we want to do. I know they say there is freedom in a democracy. You can do whatever you want. But I mean, let's face it, I can't flap my arms and fly. I have limitations. It's not like we can do anything we want to do. We're limited by causes and conditions. We're limited by things in the past. I didn't grow up with wings, so I can't fly. I can't speak Russian right now. It's not like we can do absolutely anything we want. What things we can do depends on us having created the cause. If I had studied Russian and kept it up, then I would be able to speak Russian now. But if the cause isn't created, the result will not happen. Therefore I can't speak Russian. There's no absolute free will.

But on the other hand, we can't say that things are predetermined. You can't say that it's fated and

predetermined that I can't speak Russian, because I could have. I did study it for a year. I could have kept it up and then I could have been fluent. You can't say it's predetermined that I don't speak Russian, because definitely I could have taken that route in my life. There was the free choice to do that.

This paradigm of either this or that—we get stuck in that and it prevents us from understanding. It's interesting. The deeper I get into the Dharma, the more I see that often what makes us confused is how we're thinking to start with. We ask questions in a particular way, and then we don't understand the answer we get because it isn't said in a way that accords with our thinking. There were fourteen questions that different people asked the Buddha but the Buddha didn't answer them. Some people began to say the Buddha didn't know what he was talking about. They say he didn't know the answers to the fourteen questions. He just faked it saying, "I'm not going to answer those questions."

But that's not the case at all. It's because of the way the questions were asked. It's like, "Is this table made of marble or concrete?" How do you answer that question? All they can conceive of is marble and concrete. The table is made of wood, but if you say it is made of wood, they can't handle that because they can't conceive of that. The reason the Buddha did not directly answer many of these questions is because of the conceptual processes of the people who are asking the questions.

In discussing karma, we have to look at our preconceptions and examine them. I see this, again and again, even in my own practice. We have lots of

preconceptions that we don't recognize as preconceptions. We think that's just the way things are. And then we come to Dharma teachings and our mind gets knocked around a bit. We come out feeling completely confused. It's like our mind has a square hole and we're blaming the round peg for not fitting in.

Only a Buddha could understand karma completely

The subject of karma is quite a difficult one. They say that to understand karma completely, down to the last detail, you have to be a Buddha. They say a full, complete understanding of karma is more difficult than one of emptiness. If you understand karma completely, perfectly, that means knowing, for example, how everybody who's sitting here in this room created the cause to be here right now, at this moment. There are many different causes, the specific individual causes that each person created in previous life when they were born as this and that, in this realm and that realm, what they thought and everything, which went into creating the causes to be here right now at this moment. To be able to have that kind of clarity of mind and clairvoyant powers, to be able to see all the different individual causes perfectly, one needs to be fully enlightened. One's mind becomes like a mirror that can reflect everything that exists.

What we're studying now are the general principles. We're not studying the individual specific thing of what each person did, because that's quite difficult for us to know. But if we can get an idea of

the general workings of karma, then we can get some idea of where we're going. Based on what we've done, we know generally what we can expect in the future. We can make some very firm determination about how we want to be and how we don't want to be. It becomes very valuable in understanding our lives. You read in the new age newspaper about past life therapy and karma therapy and things like these. From a Buddhist viewpoint, it's not so important to know exactly what you were in your previous life because it's over. It's more important how we're living now for our future lives.

Do we need fortune-tellers?

They say that if you are interested in what you were in your previous life, look at your present body. And if you're interested in what your future life's going to be, look at your present mind. Looking at our present body, we see that we are human. That indicates something about our previous life. It indicates that we've kept a very good ethical conduct in our previous life. To have a human body, to have this kind of rebirth requires certain causal things to be created, specifically abandoning the ten destructive actions. We can infer that some time in our previous life, we practiced our ethics quite well. This created the cause for us to have this present body. Or we look at the wealth we have around us and the actual material ease with which we live, compared to so much of the world's population, and we can infer that we were generous in previous lives. We are experiencing the result of this generosity now. By looking at our

present body, we can see what kinds of things we must have done in the past.

If you're interested in your future life, look at what your mind is doing—you look at your present mind. If the mind is motivated all the time by anger, attachment and ignorance, then we can infer that is the causal energy motivating most of our actions, therefore we're going to get unfortunate results in the future. On the other hand, if most of our actions are motivated by non-attachment, compassion and wisdom, a balanced mind, a sympathetic, kind mind towards others, then we can infer that we are going to get a different kind of result; one which is happy in the future lives.

Many people get excited about going to fortune tellers. Not so much here, but in Singapore they do. They say that if you go to a fortune teller and the fortune teller tells you that you must have killed somebody in the past life and you'd better do some purification practice, you'd believe him. You get scared, "Oh dear, I must have killed somebody, I'd better do some purification practice. The fortune teller said something awful is going to befall me if I don't do this". Then we get busy doing purification practices. But if we come to Buddhist teachings and Buddha said if you kill sentient beings, you put negative impression on your mind and it brings suffering in the future, we don't believe that. That doesn't influence our lives at all [laughter] Isn't it interesting how we are?

The Buddha gave ethical guidelines as descriptions of how this creates the causes for that. We go, "He doesn't know what he's talking about! How could this

be?” But when we go to a clairvoyant fortune teller and they tell us something, we take it so seriously. Really. I have seen this happen many times. [Laughter.]

One man called me up one time. He was so distraught because he had gone to the fortune teller and the fortune teller had told him about awful things that were going to happen to him. But the fortune teller had a special amulet that cost S\$400 (about US\$250), and if this man bought one then that would help. This man was also having some problems with his marriage, so he brought the fortune teller home. The fortune teller looked at his wife’s palm and said, “Oh, something will happen to your father because I can see it in the lines of your palm. Something’s going to happen to your mother because I can see ...” The poor woman became hysterical. Of course, the fortune teller had another amulet that would help ... [laughter]

So this man called me up and you know what he wanted from me? He wanted me to tell him if what the fortune teller said was true—that all these horrible things were going to happen to him. And I kept saying, “I don’t know. I don’t read palms. I don’t read fortunes.” I was trying to tell him to try to have a good heart and act kindly towards other people and avoid acting negatively. He didn’t want to hear that. I probably could have gotten \$500 if I could tell him what he wanted to hear—the poor guy [laughter] He didn’t want to hear anything about the Buddha’s teachings. It’s really quite sad—quite sad because this encounter with the fortune teller made his mind more confused and made him poorer—and yet he still has

great faith in fortune tellers.

Anyway, so today we're going to talk a little bit more about karma and how it works—different categories of karma, different things about karma. There's quite a bit in here to think about.

CONTAMINATED KARMA, UNCONTAMINATED KARMA, AND KARMA WHICH IS NEITHER

When we talk about karma in general classifications, we can talk about contaminated karma, uncontaminated karma, and karma which is neither.

Contaminated karma

Contaminated karma is karma that is created under the influence of afflictions. Whenever there is the grasping at true existence in the mind, there's some kind of contaminated karma being created. When we have anger, attachment, greed, jealousy etc. manifested, a negative kind of contaminated karma is being created. We might have very virtuous minds. We might even have a mind of love and compassion or a mind of great confidence in the Triple Gem or a mind that takes great delight in practicing Dharma, but if our mind is tainted by this grasping at true existence, that karma is still considered contaminated karma even though it is positive. It's contaminated by the grasping at true existence.

This grasping, this ignorance that grasps at true existence is the fundamental cause of our problems. It's the ignorance that believes that things are

inherently and independently existing in the way they appear to us. This is a grasping; it's a belief. It's one of these preconceptions that we've never questioned. We accept that things exist in exactly the way they appear to our senses. We never question that. And yet if we begin to question that, we might discover that the way in which things appear to us to exist and the way in which we think they exist are not how they actually exist. They aren't independent, individual entities that exist in and of themselves. Rather, they're interdependent, inter-related things. But we don't always see that. We see them only as solid entities external to us.

That fundamental grasping at inherent or independent or true existence is what contaminates all the actions we do. We say 'contaminated', because ignorance is a wrong view. It's a wrong perception, so that everything that's done, even though it might be virtuous (for example, the attitude of loving kindness), it's not completely clear and perfect because something's tainting it. It's like having a dirty mirror. The mirror reflects things in it, but in a dirty, tainted way. You might reflect a beautiful chocolate cake in the mirror but the cake is tainted because the mirror is quite dirty. Ignorance is kind of like that.

This contaminated karma is what causes rebirth in cyclic existence. One is born within cyclic existence due to this contaminated karma which is created under the influence of the grasping at inherent existence. This is the kind of karma that ordinary beings create. And I think it exists also in some of the mindstreams of the beings who have understood emptiness—some of their previous karma might be

contaminated and hasn't been completely purified.

Uncontaminated karma

Uncontaminated karma isn't created with this strong solid grasping at true existence. There may still be the appearance of true existence. When you get to a certain level of the path where you could see emptiness directly in meditation, you don't perceive any false appearances. You are seeing reality, you are seeing the lack of independent existence. When you come out of your meditation, things still appear to you to be independently existing, but you don't believe it anymore. It's analogous to dreaming and knowing you're dreaming. You still have the appearances but you know they are only dream things and they're not real things.

When somebody has this kind of ability, and especially when they've been able to later on cut the grasping at true existence from their mindstream completely, they still may create some kind of karma (because karma means intentional action), but it's uncontaminated karma because this karma isn't contaminated by this strong grasping at inherent existence and also because this karma does not create the cause for rebirth in cyclic existence. This karma becomes the cause for liberation and enlightenment.

The high level bodhisattvas take rebirth in cyclic existence out of compassion. They don't take rebirth out of the force of their ignorance and their grasping at true existence. They're not taking rebirth out of their ignorance and contaminated karma. They have full compassion and wisdom. By their choice and by

the force of their compassion, they choose their rebirth. This is not a rebirth within cyclic existence, even though those bodhisattvas may appear in the midst of us. Do you understand this?

[Audience:] When you say things are not inherently existent, does that mean non-existence?

It means that they don't exist independent of causes and conditions. They don't exist independent of the parts that compose them, and they don't exist independent of minds that conceive and label them. We may look at a clock and it looks like this is a clock there. It is a clock. It has always been a clock, totally unrelated to anything else in the universe. It's one single, solid, identifiable object. And yet, when we start analyzing it, it's not one single object because it has many parts. And it isn't something that has always been a clock—the atoms and molecules have been many other things. And also this wouldn't be a clock unless we as a society had a certain conception and definition of a function that a certain object would perform and gave the name “clock” to any object that performs that function.

[Audience:] Are things predetermined or fated?

Things have causes but they are not fated or predetermined. They're influenced by the past but there's still a certain amount of flexibility within us. Like right now, you can choose to ask a question. You can choose to keep quiet. You can see that there are both those abilities within you. Also, if everything

were completely fated, if everything were predetermined, then we'd have to assume there was somebody with a grand lesson plan. This would be quite difficult to logically prove. Also, that's like giving up our responsibility, isn't it? "Everything's fated, so we can't do anything."

[Audience: inaudible]

Like I said, things are influenced by the past, but they aren't predetermined by the past. You see, we're slipping into that paradigm again—there's either absolute freedom or there's predetermination. We can't look at things through this frame and have it make sense. There's influence from the past, but at any given moment, there's also some mental space within which we can make decisions.

Now, if we don't have any kind of mindfulness and awareness, and we just let the choice, let each moment flow by, then it is as if we had no choice, because we're operating completely on automatic. We're just letting whatever energy (from previous actions) completely push us. We're not focused on what's happening now and how we want to steer our energy. When we're like that, the preconditioning is very strong at that moment. But the opportunity for choice still exists. It's just we're not taking it because somehow, we're just spaced out and letting the previous energy again and again do its merry-go-round.

You become really aware of this when somebody's sitting there criticizing you, and all of a sudden you become aware, "Actually, I have a choice. I could

either choose to get angry or I can choose not to get angry.” You realize that you actually have some control! It’s not that there is only this one option, that you have to follow the old patterns and act in the same old way. If we aren’t mindful, if we aren’t in tune with what’s going on in our own experience, then the energy from the past, like Niagara Falls, just pushes us along. But actually, that choice is still there.

[Audience:] How do I learn to not be pushed by this energy?

Well, I think as you start to understand your own mind through meditation, as you start to observe what’s happening in your mind, then it becomes a little bit clearer. Our mind, as His Holiness says, is our laboratory. We live with our mind and our emotions day and night. But we’re so out of touch with what’s going on. It’s amazing. It’s totally amazing. What did you think about in the car ride over here? Do you remember everything you thought about in the car? Were you sitting there completely blank when you were riding in the car? Something was going on, wasn’t it? But you can’t remember what it was and it’s like we’re out of touch with our experience.

[Audience:] Does that mean we can be pushed by our past karma into things before we know it?

Karma is very powerful ... VERY POWERFUL. It’s like if you have a car going ninety miles an hour, it’s difficult to stop right away. If somebody’s mind is really habituated in thinking in a certain way or

somebody's done an action in the previous life that is just really strong, it's very difficult to stop that. There's still always some possibility of modification but it's not easy to do that.

[Audience:] How does a person who is free of contaminated karma act?

Their intention is directed more by compassion and wisdom. They aren't pushed by the force of previous contaminated karma, karma created with the grasping at inherent existence. But they are still influenced by their previous actions. For example, they say that Chenrezig is bound to sentient beings by compassion—talk about that, *bound* by compassion—it's like the compassion is so strong that it just permeates the intention.

[Audience:] Do you know what the causes of schizophrenia are?

Well, you have to realize that I'm giving you answers to a lot of these questions based on my current level of ability, okay? Don't take any of my answers on any of these things as the final word. Ask the Buddha! He knows better. [Laughter.] And ask my teachers. They know more than me. I'm giving you my understanding.

Schizophrenia, that is definitely something karmic. You hear stories of the Chinese torturing some of the Tibetans, or the way the Nazis treated the prisoners during World War II. Now think of somebody whose mind is consumed with torturing other human beings

—there're definitely people who do this, they even receive medals for it. They spend much of their time and energy thinking of how to torture somebody cleverly. They get perverse pleasure out of creating stress, pain and distress on other people. It seems to me, that that kind of action would be a karmic cause for insanity in the future life.

So I think that something like schizophrenia is a combination of the ripening of previous karma, plus the mental factors that are arising at the present. There're definitely mental factors arising in the present that are coloring the way the person is perceiving something. I would say it's a combination of the two things.

It's very interesting. From the psychological viewpoint, this person doesn't have a good sense of self. From a Buddhist viewpoint, however, you would say that they have incredible self-grasping. Like a magnet, everything is drawn into an *I, me, mine* experience. It's like there's no space in the mind for anything besides this incredible strong sense of *I*, which then goes on to generate all this pain and misery. You can see quite directly how this indulgence causes pain.

When we say that something like schizophrenia has some karmic influence, that doesn't mean that schizophrenics are bad people. When you look at it, in all of our infinite lifetimes in samsara, we have all done horrible things—not once, but many times. It's just that we aren't experiencing those results right now. But we wouldn't say we're bad people. It's just according to what's ripening at the moment, so it's not as though somebody was bad, so they deserve to

suffer now. Everybody makes mistakes. These people made mistakes. We make mistakes when we're overwhelmed by this ignorance, we make lots of mistakes. It has nothing to do with being a bad person or being sinful or evil. It just means that our ignorance overwhelmed us and made us make mistakes. Karma will turn around and we will experience that energy ourselves later. There is no need to start putting value judgments on ourselves and others.

This is another one of our Western things—we encounter somebody and we immediately want to judge if they're a good or bad person. From the Buddhist point of view, that's a completely useless categorization. There's no such thing as a good person or a bad person; everybody has Buddha nature. Everybody has that basic clarity of mind. It's just that the mind gets clouded over, like the Seattle sky gets clouded over. Doesn't mean the sky is bad. The sky is still the sky.

Also, our whole Western idea of punishment and getting what you deserve. Again, from the Buddhist viewpoint, it's not 'you get what you deserve'. There's nobody sitting there saying "You did this, you deserve this. You get rewarded. You get punished." It's not that. It's just you plant poppies, and poppies grow; you plant roses and roses grow. That's it.

We have to rethink a lot of our very stubborn concepts [laughter] Also, our whole Western idea of blame. Have you ever thought about how much time in one day we spend blaming? I don't know about you, but a lot of my energy goes into blaming. It's like anything that happens that I don't like, I have to blame somebody for it. I either blame myself and then

you get into the whole thing of low self-esteem, or you blame others, in which case I'm the morally self-righteous, indignant perfect one blaming somebody else. And again from the Buddhist viewpoint ...

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

I mean there's nothing to blame. There's nobody to blame. It's just if causes get created, results come. What's the use of putting all this mental energy into this judgmental attitude of "I'm bad" or "They are bad"? It's just "I've created certain causes; they've created certain causes; everything comes together, you get a result. When you bake a cake, you put in the whole wheat flour and you put in organic oil and the egg substitute and some cinnamon and stuff like that, and when everything's baked, you get a cake. You don't blame the cake on the flour; you don't blame the cake on the egg substitute; you don't blame the cake on the oil. All these different things came together—lots of different causes, conditions, energies came together—and you got a cake.

[Audience: inaudible]

But that's thinking free choice. They're free beings, completely independent. They have no ignorance, they have no attachment, they have no anger. They have complete control of their mind. See how we're getting back into that extreme again? Ordinary beings are pushed and influenced by their ignorance. Very often, they're totally out of control. What's there to blame?

It's like somebody is completely crazy, and they come in and start shouting and screaming and insulting you. If you know this person is totally flipped out, you won't get angry at them. You won't blame them because you know they don't have any control over their mind. They're flipped out; they don't have that control.

Similarly, your boss might come in, start yelling and carrying on at you. Again, it's like your boss is getting pushed by their viewpoint, by their karma, by a whole bunch of different things coming together. They aren't truly present and mindful there at the moment to know what's going on. Their past energy is just over-taking them. They're completely overwhelmed by their ignorance, so why get angry at them? We're completely overwhelmed by our ignorance most of the time. What's there to blame? Why blame other people when they make mistakes?

[Audience:] I seem to notice physical sensations before I notice the mental ones. Is there a way for me to work with this?

You're saying you notice the physical symptoms before you notice the mental ones. The mental ones may actually be there first, but you're not noticing them until you get the physical thing. This causes you to say "Oh! I'd better look at what's going on inside me." Often, an uncomfortable physical sensation is a good trigger for us to say, "Hold on! I've got to check up what's going on inside". But if we get into the habit of checking up more often what's going on inside, we may find that we can notice the irritation or

whatever it is when it's quite small before the physical manifestation gets really big. It's like before the adrenaline gets pumping, you might notice that, "Oh gee! I'm getting irritated."

Karma which is neither

And then, the karma which is neither is when aryas (beings who have realized emptiness directly) are meditating on emptiness. At that point when they're meditating on emptiness, they're only perceiving emptiness.

[Audience:] Could you tell us more about the aryas?

Aryas or noble ones are those who have direct non-conceptual realization of emptiness. When you get to that level of the path, you haven't eliminated ignorance completely, but you've seen through how it's a completely wrong conception. And then, by the force of your realization, you're no longer propelled by the force of the contaminated karma. There's some space in your mind at this point.

[Audience:] What would an arya need to do to become a Buddha?

They need to create more positive potential and do more meditation on emptiness, so that they can completely remove the wrong conceptions from their mind.

When you reach the stage of an arya, when you have direct perception of emptiness in your

meditation, that's spectacular, that's great. No pollution in your mind at that time. But, when you come out of meditation, the appearances are there, they're like really strong again. Everything looks solid and independent again, but you don't believe it because you've had an experience and you know that it isn't solid and independent. You see, just that first moment of perceiving emptiness doesn't cut all the grasping at true existence forever. It's still there. You're not going to believe in it as much, but it's kind of still hanging in there. And not only is the grasping hanging in there, but the appearance of things as truly existent is also there.

As you progress on the path, by meditating and perceiving emptiness directly again and again and again, you get to the point where you completely cut the grasping at the true existence, that wrong conception.

Then you meditate more and more and more, and purify your mind again and again and again, and you reach the state of a Buddha, where you no longer have the appearance of the true existence.

I'm telling you the theory. I've no experience of this. This is what they say in the books.

[Audience:] This seems like a two-stage process?

There're two things: there's things appearing as inherently existent, and there's our grasping on to that appearance as true. When you realize emptiness, you're realizing that the appearance is false. At the moment when you're in meditation on emptiness, you're not grasping at the things. When you come out

of that meditation, you still have some residual of both the appearance and the grasping. As you meditate more and more and more, you eliminate all the grasping, but you still have the appearance. When you're able to eliminate the false appearance as well, then you become a Buddha and you perceive things as they are, as interdependent things. You perceive that directly, not conceptually.

[Audience:] At what point can one direct one's own rebirth?

Before you have the direct perception of emptiness, your understanding of emptiness is so strong that you no longer get reborn in the lower realms. After you perceive emptiness directly, you can still be reborn within cyclic existence, but you have some kind of influence about what's going on although not a complete and total influence. When you've reached a certain point on the path called the eighth bhumi, then you can choose your rebirth out of compassion.

[Audience:] In the next birth, would you lose your realization of direct perception of emptiness?

At that point on the path, when you've direct realization; that's not lost from one rebirth to the next.

[Audience: inaudible]

Because a soul is something permanent, concrete and unchanging. A realization is a continuity of ever changing moments of a similar thing.

It's like if you look at this, this is actually something that is changing. The scientist will tell you that the electrons and everything are changing. Something is changing all the time. It never remains static. But the idea of a soul is something that remains static and fixed and never changes.

[Audience: inaudible]

Well, the definition of “soul” I’m using is some concrete, findable entity that you can point at and say that is *me*, that always has been me, that always will be me. There’s something there—findable, solid, concrete, indestructible—that is *me*. And then at death, that thing that is *me* leaves one body (like in “Ghosts”), and goes ‘boi-ing’ into another body. That’s the idea of a soul. But when you start thinking about change and what change means, and you think deeply about it, you’ll realize nothing has any findable essence that you can point to.

[Audience: inaudible]

But everything’s changing all the time. Karma is not a concrete lump that clumps, clumps, into the next life. Memory isn’t a solid concrete clump. Everything’s changing, changing, changing, changing. Look at your mind—all day, changing, changing, changing, changing. Anything that functions, that causes effects, is constantly changing. It’s just we don’t perceive it. We think this thing never changes because we can’t perceive it with our eyes. But if we start to examine closer and you listen to scientists, this thing is

changing all the time. Similarly, we might have this idea of here I am, one fixed and independent person, this is *me*, I'm going through the world. I'm in control. I get reborn. This is a solid me that gets into this life. But then, you try and find that solid *you*, that something with an essence, and you can't find it.

[Audience: inaudible]

You have the Columbia River and you have the Mississippi River. They are two different rivers. A leaf that falls into the Mississippi doesn't fall in the Columbia. But if you look at either one of the rivers—they are constantly changing. When you analyze the Columbia River, you cannot find something specifically that is the Columbia River. But, when you don't analyze, you just kind of look in a general way, "Oh yeah, that's the Columbia".

The Columbia isn't the Mississippi. A leaf in the Columbia is different from a leaf in the Mississippi. The Mississippi is not one solid, unchanging, permanent thing and neither is the Columbia. The leaves that are floating in them aren't solid and unchanging either. They're changing all the time.

[Audience:] What is mind then?

It is a phenomenon; it does exist. Our mindstream exists but it does not exist as a solid thing with a permanent essence. It exists but it exists only in the sense that it's been labeled on top of a composition of things that are always changing. Our problem is that as soon as we give a label to something, we think that

that something has some essence inside it that makes it, it. This is the source of the problem.

[Audience:] What do you mean by “phenomenon”?

I’m using the word phenomenon differently from how Western psychology is using it. I’m using phenomenon as anything which exists. And anything which exists has no concrete essence. So maybe, for the moment, don’t give the Western philosophical definition to the word “phenomenon”. I’m saying that phenomenon is just anything that exists. And, anything that exists does not have a concrete essence.

[Audience:] What are the causes of clairvoyance?

Clairvoyance can come about from different causes. Some people, through the force of karma, have some limited kind of clairvoyance. Some people, through the force of spiritual realizations—let’s say they have single-pointed concentration—may get some kind of clairvoyance.

[Audience:] How does clairvoyance manifest?

Clairvoyance—one has super sensory ability, like the ability to see past and future lives; the ability to see things at a greater distance than one’s eyes can; the ability to hear things at further distance than one’s ears can.

Oracles, mediums and clairvoyance

[Audience: inaudible]

No, they have oracles. There's an oracle that gives a lot of advice to the Tibetan Government. What's the difference between clairvoyance, an oracle and a medium? A medium is the person who goes into trance. The oracle is the spirit or the god or whatever it is that suppresses that person's consciousness so that the oracle's consciousness can speak through the medium of that person's body. The person, the human being, is the medium. The spirit that occupies it is the oracle. You have this in many cultures. And there are some oracles that are reliable and some that are not reliable, just like some human beings are reliable and some human beings aren't. [Laughter.]

The Tibetan Government has this one oracle that they consult for a lot of their decisions. This particular spirit was one that was subdued by Guru Rinpoche when he came to Tibet in the eighth century. This spirit vowed to Guru Rinpoche that he'll protect the Tibetan Government and the practitioners of Dharma. He does that and he's fairly reliable in what he says. They've relied on him through many centuries.

Then, there are other spirits that occupy other kind of mediums. Some of them might be true and some of them might not be true.

[Audience:] Why would a spirit want to remain as a spirit for so many centuries?

Karma. Being born as a spirit is a rebirth that you get because of karma.

[Audience:] If this spirit has existed over this many centuries, does it mean that different persons have been reincarnated as this one spirit?

No, he hasn't died. He just has a long life [laughter] But, eventually, probably he will.

Clairvoyance, on the other hand, is a clarity of mind that gives you extra sensory perception. As I said, clairvoyance comes from different causes: some people have it because of previous lives' karma, in which case those people may not have any samadhi or concentration. They may not have any spiritual realizations. They may have some ability to see things. That doesn't mean that everything they say they see is necessarily correct because they can make mistakes. It's like we know how to read but we make mistakes.

Then, there are other people who get clairvoyant power through the force of single-pointed concentration. You can also get clairvoyant powers through the practice of tantra, as you begin to realize emptiness and start to purify the mind more and more.

If your clairvoyance comes through spiritual realizations and not because of karma, it's going to be more accurate. To make clairvoyance beneficial, it's very important that one has a good motivation. If you have some kind of clairvoyant powers but you have a bad motivation, then you will use the powers to hurt other people. It's like money. Money can be used with a good motivation or a bad motivation. It can hurt others and oneself, or it can help others and oneself. The same thing applies to clairvoyant powers.

People can get really fascinated about clairvoyant powers. You see many people like that—they don't

want to learn about Buddhist teachings on karma; they just want clairvoyant powers. It's the mind that is seeking something exceptional, a peak experience, a thrill, something so that other people will think that they're special. This is done basically out of egotism, self-interest and so on. People can develop powers like this, but those powers may actually harm them when they have the wrong motivation.

Whereas with a real spiritual practitioner, the analogy they use is when you buy rice from the store, the rice is the principal thing, but the bag it comes in is what you get along with it. For real practitioners, they're going to be aiming for spiritual realizations. They want to realize emptiness. They want to meditate on compassion. They want to gain concentration. They want to purify the mind. The extra added thing that comes out of those realizations is clairvoyance.

Now, if one has strong compassion for others, then one will want to develop clairvoyance. Because if you have strong compassion and you want to help others, you need to know more than what your five senses can tell you at the present. Out of compassion for others, you want to do the meditations that lead to the development of clairvoyance. You can then use those things to help others.

I get very emphatic when I talk about this because when I lived in Singapore, I had people coming who were unbelievable. They just wanted some kind of clairvoyance or magical powers. That's what impresses them. Somebody who might have incredible loving kindness and patience; that person is just ignored. But somebody who has a little bit of

flamboyant, clairvoyant power, they really respect. That's missing the point. If you look at His Holiness' teachings, what's the main thing he's talking over and over again? Loving kindness and compassion. He doesn't give a talk on clairvoyant power every time [laughter] He seldom mentions it, in fact. What does he always highlight? Loving kindness towards others, patient attitude. Open-minded acceptance towards others and towards ourselves too. Compassion—I think that's the real miracle. What's more valuable to you? What's going to make you happier? Being able to have a heart that can just accept others as they are, or being able to read auras or predict the future? What's going to make you happy? What's going to make other beings happy?

[Audience:] Is clairvoyance important if you are guiding others?

If you're in a role of guiding people, motivated by compassion, then you want to develop clairvoyant powers to help people better; it's not for your own ego pleasure. If you could know the things somebody has done in a previous life, you could tell much better how to guide them in this life because you could see what kind of potential they have. This would be helpful.

[Audience:] Since you said that the cause of being born a human being is positive actions, and that schizophrenia might be a result of having tortured others in the past, how can some human beings be schizophrenic?

Well, actually we have many, many previous lives and those karmas could have been created in other life times. They could also have been created in the same life. Maybe somebody tortured people in the earlier part of their life and in the latter part of their life, they started to do some spiritual practice.

[Audience:] I heard that there's some kind of Buddhist tradition that says rebirth is an upward thing, i.e. once you get to a certain level, you can't fall into the lower realms. Have you heard of that?

I've never heard that.

[Audience:] But what if one is born in a pure land?

Once you're born in the pure land, then you don't fall back. But in terms of being a human being or a worldly god, you can always regress.

[Audience: inaudible]

It's not as though things are pre-planned, that there's a right body for you to take rebirth in, "OK. So and so is going to be born in such and such a body now, where is your karma to get that body?" You pay up your karma to get that body, just like you pay up for your goods at the department store before they put the things into the package. No, it's not exactly like that! [Laughter.]

[Audience: inaudible]

I always come back to the analogy of a plant, and it sounds simple. You have a seed and this seed has certain potency. But how the seed actually grows depends on the soil, the water, the sunshine. The soil has certain things that influence it. The water has certain things that influence it. The sunshine has things that influence it. Everything is interconnected. When we get some kind of thing happening to us, it's generally a lot of different things coming together at that moment, that makes that moment the very special experience that it is.

[Audience:] Is it ever possible for one to perceive the complex cause and effect of things?

When you're a Buddha, then you have the ability to look at all the different strands. Actually, once you get some clairvoyant power, you can start looking at the strands but you won't be able to see all of them completely until you become a Buddha.

Let's sit quietly for a few moments.

The Environmental Result of Positive Actions

Positive karmas also affect the environment that we're born into. Our previous positive karmas not only affect what body and mind we take and what happens to us in that life in terms of our experiences and our instinctual behavior, but they also affect the place we're born into, the whole environment that surrounds us.

In the case of **abandoning killing**, we're born into

a place that's peaceful, with good food that's nourishing, and where the medicine works. You're born in an environment where it is easy to live a long time. There aren't so many epidemics. The medicine works. You can get healthcare and things like that.

From **abandoning stealing**, you get born into a very prosperous place. From not taking others' possessions, deliberately abandoning that through seeing its disadvantages, then our mind is attracted to rebirth in a place that has enough material wherewithal. Somehow here we are, living in Seattle, a very prosperous place, even though everybody here mourns and groans about the economy. Try going to a Third World country. Then you realize that actually this place is quite prosperous compared to the way a lot of people live.

From **abandoning unwise sexual behavior**, we're born in very clean and beautiful surroundings, and also a place that's very safe where there is no danger of sexual abuse or rape taking place.

If we **abandon lying**, we're born into a place with honest people. You don't have to go around giving bribes to this person and that person. Other people don't give you the runaround, lying right, left and center. It is a place where it's easy to get things done and people are honest and treat each other fairly.

If we **abandon divisive words**, we're born in a place where the land is even, with none of these incredible dangerous cliffs and bumpy things. You can see the correlation. If we abandon divisive speech, our speech becomes even. We treat people equally. We don't try and break up the relationships. Right speech manifests in the environment as an even place,

a place that's safe and comfortable.

From **abandoning harsh words**, we're born in a place where there's enough water. The land is very fertile and there are no dangerous animals. There is nothing harmful outside, because again, we have abandoned speech that harms others.

If we **abandon idle talk**, then we're definitely born in a place where there's enough water. As you can see, in idle talk, everything is wasted. If you abandon that, you're born in a place where things aren't wasted, where there's enough stuff. Your plants endure. In other words, the growing season is long. They actually bear fruit when they're supposed to. The parks, the forests and the natural places aren't over-crowded and aren't polluted. You can see the relationship here. When we idle talk, we pollute the environment. We over-crowd everything talking gibberish. By abandoning that, it shows up karmically in the environment being quite pleasant, not polluted and over-crowded.

When you travel to different places, think of the karma of the people who were born in that place, the karma of the people who live in that place repeatedly. It is interesting to think about this, especially when you go to places where the environment is very uncomfortable, and people don't seem to be able to get out of it. Or people trying to leave places which are very comfortable but are prevented from doing so by their good karma. It's interesting.

If we **abandon coveting**, we're born in a place where the property and our belongings endure. In other words, things last a long time. You get a car, and it lasts a long time. It is not like you buy something,

and the second time you use it, it falls apart and it breaks. This is a place where there are enough things for everybody, where there are abundant material resources. When coveting we're always wanting something for ourselves. This kind of wanting creates an imbalance, creates shortages. By abandoning that, then you are born in a place where there aren't shortages, where there's enough for everybody to live in the environment.

By **abandoning maliciousness**, we're born in a place where it's peaceful and harmonious, where people get along, where the food tastes good, where there's not very much illness. It's a place that's safe. No danger.

By **abandoning wrong views**, we're born in a place that's very rich in natural resources. This one is interesting because we can see when there are wrong views, it's like the mind is completely infertile. The mind is just hard like a rock. It can't listen to anything. It can't think about anything because it's so stuck in its own stubborn misconceptions. It won't let anything else in. You can see how that mental state will create a corresponding environment. Then you can also see that by having correct conceptions, abandoning the wrong conceptions, one's born in a place where there are natural resources. There is water. The land is rich. The mines work. The crops grow. It isn't polluted. A place where the people value ethics. The people you live among are ethical people, people you can trust, people you can rely on. There's a real sense of community and belonging, and people take care of each other.

Those are the kind of environments that come

about by doing the ten constructive actions, which are consciously making a determination to abandon the ten destructive ones. By understanding this, it gives us a little bit more energy to abandon the destructive actions and do the constructive ones. We also have a better understanding of the situation we're living in and the world we see around us. We begin to understand how our karma relates to our environment, how things are really inter-related. We aren't born in places by accident.

When you were a kid, did you ever wonder why you were born you and in the place you were born in? I did. Why wasn't I born in Mexico? Why was I not born somewhere else? Why was I born growing up in California? It's our karma. It's a result of the kinds of things we did before that makes the mind attracted towards rebirth in certain places.

[Audience:] Is it possible to have no rebirth at all, instead of being born into a horrible environment?

No. No rebirth at all would be really nice. [Laughter.] That would be nirvana. That would be a really nice thing. One will get a rebirth as long as one is under the influence of ignorance. If it happens to be a negative karma ripening, the mind will be attracted to that kind of place. You can see there's a big difference, for example, in the environment and the living situation of a dog born in India, and a dog born in a nice, cushy Seattle home. Huge difference in the lifestyle. This is due to karma. Similarly, when they talk about life forms of incredible suffering, where the whole environment is unendurable, it is due to our karma of

the environment.

CHAPTER 12

The Intensity of Karma

The next topic on the outline is again about the intensity of karma. We have talked previously about six different conditions that affected whether an action was heavy or light, and we're kind of coming around to this again, except this time, they talk about four conditions. Why they listed them in two different sections, I've never understood. But we're going to be talking again about the intensity of our karma.

1. Intention

The first factor that makes karma intense is our intention. Here we come back to motivation again, folks! One of our favorite subjects. What our motivation is and how intense it is will affect the karma and the imprint that we're putting on our mind. Some actions are neutral. By their nature, they're neither positive nor negative. Examples are sweeping your room or vacuuming your room. Cleaning your house. Driving down the road. Reading a newspaper. Taking a bath. There're lots of things that we do that have no special reason; they are done out of habit. These actions, by their nature, aren't positive or negative. What makes them positive or negative is the motivation that is pushing us to do them. This is why we try and take so much care and are always

checking what our motivation is, why we're doing something.

[Audience:] Are all actions neutral?

Well, no. By their nature, some actions are negative, like killing, stealing or unwise sexual conduct. But many actions in our life are neither by their nature positive or negative. You read the newspaper. You read a book. You walk down the street. You buy something at the grocery store. The nature of the action isn't one way or the other, but the motivation—why we do it—is going to determine whether it's positive or negative. You could go to the store and buy food with a lot of attachment. Or you could buy it with a neutral mind. Or you could buy it with a positive mind, to offer to others. Our motivation influences greatly whether an action becomes virtuous or non-virtuous.

Take, for example, cleaning or vacuuming the room. You could do it with an angry mind, like “I wish my roommate would do this. Why is this job always left to me?!” In this case, vacuuming the room becomes the direct cause of rebirth in the lower realms. The mind that's doing it is completely full of hate—“My roommate never does this. I always get dumped with all the blah blah blah.”

Or you can just vacuum the room with no special motivation. That's neutral karma. That's kind of like wasting the opportunity. It's better than to create negative karma, but still it's a waste of your time or life.

Or you could vacuum the room with a positive

motivation, and this is where the thought training process comes in. You think, “OK, I’m taking the dirt off sentient beings’ minds.” What’s the dirt on sentient beings’ minds? It’s the attachment, anger and ignorance, the contaminated karma. And what is it that cleans away that dirt? It’s the wisdom realizing emptiness. Your vacuum cleaner becomes the wisdom realizing emptiness. And you are cleaning the dirt off sentient beings’ minds. You can think like this while you’re doing the vacuuming. By thinking compassionately when you’re vacuuming, by thinking about the welfare of others, then even in the simple act of vacuuming the room, you have this feeling of connection and concern for everybody. Vacuuming the room becomes a positive action.

This is why I would like to encourage everybody to do the following: in the morning when we wake up, make the first thought, “Today I’m not going to harm others. Today I’m going to benefit them. And today I want to do all my actions with the motivation to become enlightened for the benefit of others.” You’re cultivating that motivation as the underlying motivation for all of your other actions that day. In this way, at least the causal motivation for the day is a pure one. During the day, we might get into certain situations and the negative mind takes over. But at least you had initially set some kind of pure causal motivation.

Also, by doing that, then when you do come to specific situations, you’re much more likely to be aware of what your actual motivation is at that time and try and transform it. You could be cooking your lunch out of attachment. Or you’re cooking it without

any specific reason. Or you're cooking lunch to offer to other people, or to offer it to the Buddha at your heart. That's why we offer our food before we eat. It transforms what would otherwise be neutral actions into positive actions by the force of our motivation.

Also the strength of our motivation is going to influence whether our karma is heavy or light. For example, when you make an offering to the Buddha, you can do so with an attitude, "Hmm, well yeah, for the benefit of all sentient beings," plonk the offering down. Or, you can try to cultivate an open heart when you're doing it. Try to generate that motivation and make it more intense in the mind, and then you make the offering. Even though the object you're offering is the same, the intensity or quality of the motivation is different, and therefore the karma that we create on our mindstream is going to be different.

Similarly, you may do a meditation thinking, "Well, I'm doing this meditation because I want to feel good. I'm tense. I'm stressed out. So I'm going to meditate just to feel good and to lower my blood pressure." Or you can meditate thinking, "I'm going to prepare for future lives." Or you can meditate motivated by "I want this meditation to be a cause of my liberation from cyclic existence." Or you can do the exact same meditation thinking, "I want this to be a cause of my becoming a fully enlightened Buddha for the benefit of others." Depending upon what your motivation is when you're doing the meditation, they're going to reap completely different results. You will get completely different results for the same meditation. Again, this is why cultivating our motivation is so important at the beginning of things.

And that's why it is good to take the time to offer our food before we eat, something we do so often. We try to transform it by thinking, "I'm not eating for my own beauty and health. I'm eating to keep my body alive so that I can practice the Dharma, so that I can do things of service for others." Then you offer your food. That's very different from just diving into your food. You're eating in both instances, but the mind that's eating is very, very different. That makes a big difference in what karma is created.

Also, before going to sleep, you may just fall into bed at night thinking, "Oh, thank goodness this day is over! I can't wait to drop into oblivion!" That's one motivation, and you'll see how it affects the quality of your sleep. It affects how you wake up the next morning. Whereas if you go to sleep thinking, "I rejoice at the constructive actions I did during this day. I need to rest my body and my mind so that tomorrow I can continue in this practice." And then you go to sleep with that attitude. Your eight or ten or twelve hours of sleep becomes constructive karma. Still, it's better to sleep six hours.

[Audience:] Why is it better to sleep six hours?

Because then you can use your time more in active practice.

[Audience: inaudible]

Yes. You're asleep, so you can't even enjoy it. I think the thing is, you sleep according to what your body needs, not with a mind that just indulges in sleep. Not

like a cat. Any opportunity they get ... [laughter]

The karma is less powerful if you do something because you have been ordered to. If you come to teachings simply because you feel obliged or because somebody ordered you to do so, then it becomes less strong than if you have a good motivation and go out of your own free will. Similarly, negative actions are less strong if you are forced to do them than if you're choosing voluntarily to do them.

Here we come down to the importance of bodhicitta, why we keep trying to cultivate bodhicitta or the altruistic intention as much as possible. This is because it is what makes an action strongly virtuous. Doing one prostration, offering one stick of incense or writing out a twenty-five-dollar-check to the Red Cross with the motivation of bodhicitta is much more intense karmically than doing the exact same action 100,000 times without the altruism. Offering the Red Cross one twenty-five-dollar-check with altruism is more powerful than offering them 100,000 checks of twenty-five dollars. You see, bodhicitta is very economical. [Laughter.] It is again emphasizing the importance, the value, the strength of this altruism; why it's so important. Think about it. You're doing one simple action, but when you're doing it, in your mind you're related to every sentient being in the entire universe. That's a very different mental state than when you're doing an action just completely caught in *me, I, my* and *mine*. Just by the power of the mind. Our mind is very, very powerful. This really illustrates it.

Now, let's say you are in a situation where you know an action is negative but you can't control

yourself. You don't really want to do this, but by the force of previous habit, you are getting into it again. Though you do the action, you have a sense of regret. And as soon as you have done it, you purify. You don't feel so good about it even though it is beyond your control. That's not going to be as heavy as somebody who just went ahead and did it without any regret and purification. This is important to remember. If you know you don't want to be doing something, but your body and mind are going in that direction anyway because they are beyond your control, then at least have a sense of regret and do some purification afterwards. It's not going to be as heavy.

On the other hand, if we know that something is negative, but we get arrogant and we say, "Oh, that doesn't matter. That's just a small thing. It doesn't really matter if I do this." We rationalize and justify our action, and we don't purify it. Then it becomes heavier.

This is important because sometimes, we find ourselves in situations where we're acting negatively, we're kind of out of control, we're following our negative habits. There's one part of our mind that wants to whitewash the action and rationalize, "This isn't really negative. I'm really doing this for the benefit of sentient beings." Or "This isn't really negative, Buddha kind of made that rule but he didn't know what he was talking about." That rationalizing, justifying mind makes the karma much, much heavier than if we were just honest and say, "Actually, this is a destructive action. But I'm just out of control and I wish I weren't doing this. I regret doing this and I'm going to purify." To admit that we're out of control

and to be honest about our ethics require a sense of humility.

2. Field of Action

Another thing that makes our karma intense is the field of our action. In other words, who we are doing the action towards. If you do a positive action or a negative action to your Dharma teacher, to the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, to your parents, to the poor and needy, these become much more powerful than if you do it to just anybody else. Doing it to our teacher or the Triple Gem is powerful because of their qualities. Doing actions towards our parents, or towards those who took care of us or helped us a lot in our lives, is powerful because of their kindness towards us. What we do towards the poor, the ill and the needy is powerful because of their condition; they are the field of compassion. If you create karma with a powerful object like the above, this kind of karma ripens very quickly. It ripens more quickly than that created towards any other person, because the karma is much heavier.

Here is where what they say in the teachings about our not knowing who is a bodhisattva and who isn't, comes in very important. If we give a dirty look to a bodhisattva, it's much more powerful than imprisoning and blinding all sentient beings. Shocking, isn't it? The reason why it is so powerful is because bodhisattvas are working for the benefit of all living beings. The bodhisattvas from their side, are not harmed. From their side, they couldn't care less. But

from our side, because we're disparaging somebody who is working for the benefit of others, we're disparaging somebody who has an altruistic intention, then our action becomes quite heavy.

Similarly, praising people who are bodhisattvas, or even showing them a little bit of respect, or doing some small favor for them becomes much more powerful than giving all blind sentient beings their eyesight back, because one bodhisattva is working for the enlightenment of all these beings. And because we don't know who is a bodhisattva and who isn't, we should be careful who we give dirty looks to, and who we get angry at.

[Audience:] Would a bodhisattva be engaged in non-virtuous actions?

The lower level bodhisattvas may slip up once in a while. But in general, from the side of their intention, they would never be doing anything that's negative. However, we may not understand what their real motivation is and criticize them. When the Buddha was a bodhisattva in one of his previous lives, he killed a man who was going to kill 499 others [out of compassion for all of them]. What would happen if we had thought, "Well, I don't care. He's still a murderer." And we became negative towards him simply because we didn't know his motivation. "He didn't kill that guy out of compassion. He killed him because that guy was rich and he was going to take all the money away,"—we impute our own false reasons on the action of a bodhisattva and criticize.

Bodhisattvas may do things that are very confusing

to us that we absolutely do not understand. I know this very directly. My teachers, I'm sure, are quite holy beings, but sometimes they do things that I just do not understand. And then after some time, I can very clearly see that it's my negative motivation that's getting projected outwards. I look at what they're doing, and I say if I were doing that, I would be doing it because of x, y and z motivation. Of course my motivation is impure, and I impute my impure motivation onto my teachers' actions. Actually I have no idea at all why they're doing that. No idea. With time, I've noticed that I could actually begin to see why they might be doing it for a very good reason. But if I get locked into my own negative conceptions, all I see is negativity.

Especially when your teacher tells you to do something you don't want to do, then you're quite sure that they're acting out of a negative motivation. [Laughter.] "They're being inconsiderate. They don't know what they're doing. They're just being manipulative." Basically, they're telling you to do something your ego doesn't want you to do. Your ego fights back and of course imputes all these negative motivations onto your teacher. But then, with some space, we begin to see that our teachers are actually doing these for our benefit and our welfare. We can't see it, so we blame them and get angry. You will begin to see we can project so much outwardly. It is important to be aware of this.

Also, if we kill a human being, it's going to be much heavier than if we kill an animal. Similarly, if we save the life of a human being, the karma is going to be more intense than saving the life of an animal. If

we commit harsh talk or idle talk towards somebody who is practicing the Dharma, which wastes their time or distracts them from their Dharma practice, it is much, much heavier than committing harsh speech or idle talk towards somebody who doesn't practice. Similarly, if you help people who are doing Dharma practice, or you help a group or a temple or center, that becomes more weighty than doing the same thing for somebody who isn't.

I remember when I was in Singapore putting out the prayer books, "Pearl of Wisdom", there was one woman in the group who was working for a publishing house. She helped to edit the books. She was a very skilled editor. She could edit "Mrs. Wong's Chinese Cookbook" and she could also edit "Pearl of Wisdom", but by the power of the object, the karma is going to be very different between just putting another cookbook on the market versus making Dharma prayer books available to others. Any kind of action that we do to help to spread the Dharma by helping the center's practitioners, by helping each other in the group, becomes much heavier than doing the same thing towards somebody who's not practicing.

[Audience: inaudible]

OK, so somebody took something belonging to you but you don't know who took it. The mind's inclination is to think that it is probably done by the person whom we think doesn't like us. What can we do about that? Basically, you can see that comes from a lot of grasping. We grasp at the thing that is missing.

We also grasp at our sense of ‘I’. “They did it to *me!* I’m offended.” Not only am I attached to that thing, but my pride is wounded. I’m offended.

I find what’s very helpful in that situation is to say to myself, “Oh, it’s very good this happened. It’s very good that this thing I am attached to got taken away, because it’s showing me how attached I was to it. Actually, if I think about it, I could probably learn to live without this, so this is a good chance for me to experiment, to see if I could learn to live without this. It’s very good that my pride is offended, because I usually go around with my nose in the air and I think I’m such hot stuff. It’s good that I get put in my place, that I’m shown that I’m not Queen of the world.” Instead of saying, “Oh, this is really bad”, I say, “Oh, it’s good this happened because this is my practice. This is showing me where my buttons are. It is giving me an opportunity to work with them.”

[Audience: inaudible]

If you’re doing that with a sugary sweet, “Well yes, they can offend me, but I’m above all of that. They can push my buttons. It’s good.” then you’re just being proud and arrogant. That’s not applying the Dharma technique. In your heart, you don’t truly feel it’s good this has happened. You’re ticked off about it and you don’t want this to happen again. If you say it is good this happened, then you’re actually lying to yourself.

When we apply these techniques and say it is good they are doing it to me, it’s not like you feel it right away. When we get negative, our energy is like a river

going in one direction. When we apply those techniques and say it is good they do that to me, it is kind of intellectual; we don't really feel that way. What we're trying to do is to divert this heavy stream of negative energy and at least try to get it to flow somewhere else. At the beginning, you're kind of saying intellectually, "Yes, it's good this is happening." But underneath you're saying, "Oh, but I can't stand it!" But you keep meditating. It's not like you apply this technique and five minutes later, your anger will be all gone. You need some work with this, OK? [Laughter.] With my own experiences, sometimes it's taken me a year to do it. And then when I can finally get to the point where in my heart I really feel ...

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

All these techniques, when we start out saying them to ourselves, we don't really feel them. But the more we do them ... it's like molding clay, it's a little bit hard, we need to put more effort into it. But eventually, we will be able to do it. We will be able to make our mind into the shape we want.

3. Basis

The next thing that makes a karma heavy or light is what you would call the basis. In other words, the person who's doing the action. It makes a big difference whether the person who does the action is somebody with vows or somebody without vows. If

it's somebody who has vows, whether it is the five lay precepts, the monks' and nuns' precepts, the bodhisattva precepts, or the tantric precepts, whatever they do becomes heavier. If you do a positive action, it becomes very weighty. If you do a negative action, it also becomes very weighty. This is so by the power of the basis, by oneself having taken vows.

Also, if you've taken the bodhisattva vows, then what you do is going to be much weightier than if you've just taken the five lay precepts. If you've taken tantric vows, whatever you do is going to be much weightier than if you've taken the bodhisattva vows and the five lay precepts. Having different levels of precepts also affect the potency of one's actions, both positive actions and negative actions.

Even if you're just doing a simple thing, for example, if you have the five lay precepts and you make a prostration or meditate, it's going to be much heavier than if you don't have any precepts and you do the exact same action.

Sometimes, people take what they call non-vows, that is, a non-virtuous vow. For example, they say, "I'm going to kill every mosquito I can find." It's a vow of sorts. When people make a strong determination or a vow to themselves on the negative side, then whatever they do is going to become more negative. Whether they are doing that action that they vowed to do or some other action, it is going to be heavier in a negative way. If somebody says, "I'm going to kill every mosquito I can get my hands on," every time they kill a mosquito, it's going to be much heavier than Joe Blow doing it. Also, every time they say harsh words or some other negative action, it's

going to be heavier too. This is because they have made themselves into a basis, a person who has a negative vow. That makes the karma quite heavy.

In the same way, if somebody, for example, has signed a contract to be a butcher, they're making a vow to kill animals. If a butcher kills one animal, that's much more negative than anybody else killing an animal, or somebody who's killing an animal because they're starving. The butcher has taken the vow to kill animals, therefore the karma becomes heavier.

4. Manner, What Is Involved in the Action

The next thing that makes something heavy is the manner in which it was done. How we did something. What was involved in the action. For example, generosity of the Dharma is much stronger than material generosity, because of the action itself. The gift of the Dharma excels all other gifts. You might think, "What's so special about the Dharma? I'd much rather receive a hundred million dollars than one Dharma book. Why is giving the Dharma more valuable than giving a hundred million dollars?"

I got a letter in the mail that says I'm the winner of a million dollars or something, with my name "Thubten Chodron" in big letters on the envelope: "Thubten Chodron is the undisputed winner of a million dollars". Two days later, they sent me another one. Of course I opened it up and one part of my mind is saying, "My mother always said throw away junk mail. Why are you looking at this?" [Laughter.]

Another part of my mind is saying, “Hmm ... but maybe you can get something for nothing. A hundred million dollars, hmm.” [Laughter.] It was interesting. I had to look at my mind. Why am I opening this envelope if I know that it’s a hoax. And then I sat there and I thought, “Well, even if I won a hundred million dollars, even if these people were telling me the truth, is that really what I want? Do I want a hundred million dollars?” And then I decided actually, I don’t. It would be much more of a hassle than just being the way I am now. So after that, I throw the letters directly in the recycling bin. I didn’t open it anymore. But it was very interesting to look at the mind that wants something.

Giving a hundred million dollars is not as powerful as giving the Dharma, because a hundred million dollars may or may not alleviate somebody’s problems. It may actually give them more problems, like I was thinking. But if you give somebody the Dharma, even if you don’t use high and fancy Buddhist words, you’re just talking simple language, encouraging people to keep ethics or to generate a loving-kindness attitude, this is powerful, because you’re encouraging people to create constructive karma. For the people who are receptive and whom you can teach, then you’re actually able to give them tools that they can use to free themselves from cyclic existence altogether. Giving Dharma is very powerful.

[Audience: inaudible]

You’re going to have to look at this. First of all, I’m not saying to give them “Pearl of Wisdom” and not

give them medicine. I'm not saying that. Better to give them both. This is going to need a lot of skills. If you can give them some medicine, get them well, and then give them the Dharma, that's the best. But then also, giving people the Dharma—even if it's just seeing a picture of the Buddha which puts an incredibly good imprint on the person's mind—is in some way more powerful than giving them food. Because it's creating very, very powerful karma for them to actually meet the Dharma in a future life. But I'm not saying to not give them food and medicine. You should give them those things. But don't think, "Oh, this person needs medicine. There's no sense exposing them to the Dharma."

Also, you have to be tactful. You don't have to push the Dharma on anybody. But giving people the opportunity to see pictures of the Buddha or your teachers, Dharma books, and things like that, is very, very powerful. They talk about the power from the side of the object. A Dharma object is very, very powerful.

Here's a story that will illustrate this. At the time of the Buddha, there's an old man who wanted to get ordained. Shariputra and Moggallâna [the Buddha's disciples] wouldn't ordain him because with their clairvoyant powers, they couldn't see that he had created the karma to be ordained. That's because they had limited clairvoyance. The Buddha came along and he saw this old man crying because he wanted to become a monk but nobody would ordain him. The Buddha who had complete, total clairvoyance, saw that actually once before, this man had been a fly that had landed on a piece of cow-dung. That cow-dung

had gone around a stupa, a Buddha's monument. By the power of the stupa, he created enough good karma circumambulating the stupa as a fly on a piece of cow-dung, to be able to become a monk.

Now, it sounds like completely ... but it shows that there's some power in the object. I remember even before I was a Buddhist, going to art galleries and museums and seeing figures of the Buddha. There's some special energy there. There is something. I didn't believe in any of this then but something came across; there was some influence on the mindstream. That's also why it is good to say lots of mantra to your animals or to insects that are dying. I was sitting here this afternoon reading a Dharma book, with the kitten curled up on my lap. There's the Dharma book and there's the kitten, and it really hit me how precious a human life is. The kitten is here with Dharma objects, Dharma books and Dharma class (everything!), and yet he can't benefit from it.

I thought "Wow!" It's just amazing what we can do as human beings that an animal can't do, even if the animal has very, very good karma to come in close association with the Dharma and to be born in a place where it has enough to eat and everything. I was thinking as much as possible, I've got to do my prayers and mantras out loud. If nothing else, this kitten can at least get a lot of imprint. This is important. Even though they can't study the Dharma, some imprint of the mantras, the Buddha's words, the path of the Dharma is very good, by the power of the holy object. I told the kitten to take a perfect human rebirth in the next life and practice the Dharma. He listened. I hope he'll do it.

Anyway, in response to your question, that has to do with the power of the holy object. Very powerful.

If you give a lot, it's going to be more positive karma than giving a little. If you give things of good quality, it's going to be more positive karma than giving things of bad quality. Some people go to the store, "OK, I'm going to get enough apples for the Buddha and for me. The apples that aren't so good, we'll leave on the altar, and we'll eat the good ones." This isn't the way it should be. We should offer the things of good quality and leave the things of lesser quality for ourselves. When we give to friends, when we give to other people, giving things of good quality is much better than giving things of inferior quality. Giving Dharma is much better than giving material things.

Acting in accordance with our teachers' instructions is much more powerful than giving our teachers material things. Acting in accordance with our teachers' instructions means practicing the Dharma. It doesn't mean an instruction like, "Bring me a glass of water." The instructions refer to the teachings. We should try and act in accordance with those, then that becomes much more powerful than just a simple action of generosity done without trying to cultivate a good motivation.

Review

What we've covered today was the environmental results of positive actions. Meditate on this. Think of the environments that you've been in and what are the karmic causes of those. Also, think of the different

actions that you've done and what kind of environment these actions would cause you to be born in. If you meditate like this, it will give you much more inspiration to put energy into doing positive actions and abandoning negative actions.

We also talked about the things that make an action intense.

1. The motivation. This is why the altruism is so important. This is why developing an intense Dharma motivation makes something more powerful than just a haphazard, lazy Dharma motivation.
2. The field, the person that we do the action towards. The karma of doing an action towards our teacher, the Triple Gem or our parents is heavier than if we do it towards anybody else.
3. The basis, whether we have taken vows or not taken vows. If we have vows, then whatever we do becomes heavier. Also, according to the level of the vows, what you do becomes heavier. Having the lay precepts is not as heavy as having the monks' and nuns' precepts. That's not as heavy as the bodhisattva's precepts. That's not as heavy as the tantric precepts. That's why the more levels of precepts you take, the more it gives you the opportunity to create good karma very quickly. If you keep the precepts, everything you do becomes very, very weighty.
4. The manner in which it was done or what the action actually was. Giving Dharma is heavier than giving material things. Giving a little of

better quality is better than giving a lot of poor quality.

Another thing that influences whether something is intense or not is whether we apply an antidote to it. If we apply an antidote and we generate a sense of regret, then the negative action becomes less intense. If we rejoice at it, it becomes more intense. Similarly, with our positive actions, if we regret our positive actions, then we lessen the good karma we've created. If we rejoice at our positive actions, we increase the good karma that we've created. This doesn't mean getting proud of our positive actions. "Oh look at me! I gave a tomato to the temple." It's not a sense of pride. It is being able to rejoice at what we do well, and at our own good karma. If we can do that, it increases the good karma. Similarly, if we can rejoice at the good karma that other people create, it increases the weight of that.

Questions and answers

[Audience:] What exactly is a vow?

A vow is a very, very strong determination that you make. We take constructive vows while visualizing the Buddhas in front or in the presence of a spiritual community or in front of our teacher. Even if a person doesn't take a vow formally in a ceremony (if one does it formally in a ceremony, one gets the energy of the whole lineage), it becomes a vow of sorts, for example, a person makes a very, very strong New Year's resolution. It increases the heaviness of what

they do. In the same way, somebody who takes an ‘anti-vow’, for example, one takes a negative vow to kill mosquitoes or to beat up anybody who gets in one’s way, then that makes one’s actions heavier.

Also, the intensity with which you take the vow is going to influence how strong it is on your mind too.

[Audience: inaudible]

Yes. In the case of the lineage, there’s something coming from the other side too. For example, the first time you take the eight precepts, you get the transmission from a teacher. After that, you take it in front of your shrine with the statue of the Buddha, and you imagine all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas in front of you. The Buddhas and bodhisattvas are there. You’re getting something from them. What’s really important is to know that you’re not taking the vows from a statue or from a piece of bronze or clay. You think, “I’m taking the vows from a Buddha.” You’re imagining that the Buddha is there, and the statue is helping you to connect with that. They say that the Buddha’s mind is everywhere and anywhere. By visualizing, we’re trying to tune into that.

[Audience: inaudible]

There is a difference between just seeing the image as a statue versus thinking, “From this person, I’m getting the energy of the lineage going back to the time of the Buddha.” But if you’ve reached that level on the path where you look at the statue and you see the Nirmanakaya Buddha, then there’s probably not

going to be a huge difference.

[Audience:] What's being transmitted?

Here, I'm giving you my opinion. As far as I understand it, there is a definite power to the transmission of the lineage that is coming from the Buddha, in the sense that when you think of the Buddha having a certain practice or a vow, and then somebody else taking that from the Buddha and that person keeping it well, and then passing that energy down to their disciple, and down to their disciple and down to their disciple, there's definitely some energy that's coming. It's not made of atoms and molecules, or electrons, or protons, but there's something there, by the power of a transmission of virtue from one person to the other.

Whether your mind is tuned into receiving that or not, is a whole different ballgame. It's like taking an initiation. You can sit in an initiation and not take it at all because your mind is like a piece of concrete. There's an incredible transmission coming from the lama, but your mind is just distracted and is like concrete. You'd much rather be at home eating chocolate. In this case, you did not receive the transmission. But at other occasions when you take an initiation, you're really concentrated and meditating, then an energy is definitely coming into you. From the side of the person giving you the initiation, that energy is going out to everybody in the room. But different people have different capabilities to take that in, depending upon their level of mind and depending upon what's happening in their mind at that

particular moment. Is that making sense?

I remember the time I took my bhikshuni vows—that's the full ordination for women. In the Tibetan tradition, they only have the novice ordination. The lineage for the full ordination didn't go to Tibet, so the transmission isn't available in the Tibetan tradition. I went to Taiwan to take it. It was incredibly powerful. Incredibly powerful. There was definitely an incredible power from the lineage of people practicing over twenty-five hundred years. What it was, I think it's one of those things that you can't put under a microscope. But I'm sure that everybody who was there at the time of the ordination experienced it quite differently.

[Audience: inaudible]

That is why it depends a lot on whether you realize that they're empty or not. If you realize that both of them are empty of inherent existence, then you could probably get the same energy from the statue and from the person. What I'm getting at, is that there is something coming through the power of the object, but there's also something coming from our mental state that makes us either open to it or closed off. Whatever we receive is a combination of the two things.

They say that for somebody with higher realizations, this is a pure land. For that kind of person, everything they deal with here is generating the wisdom of bliss and voidness in their mental continuum. For me, everything I deal with generates anger and attachment. That's due to my mind. This is

inter-dependence here between the giver, the receiver, and the whole process. When you get to high realizations on the path, you can take teachings from the Buddha's statue. The statue talks to you, explains the Dharma to you. Try it. [Laughter.]

CHAPTER 13

Other Ways of Differentiating Actions

Importance of Karma in the Three Levels of Motivation on the Path

[Front portion not recorded.]

When we talk about the three levels of motivation on the path, an understanding of karma is involved in all three.

1. Aiming for a good rebirth

Aiming for a good rebirth is our most immediate concern. And the way we go about doing that is by abandoning destructive actions and creating positive ones. This is following karma, the functioning of cause and effect. Understanding karma helps us achieve that goal of having a good rebirth, because if we don't understand how cause and effect works, we won't understand how to create the causes for a good rebirth and abandon the causes for a rotten one.

2. Liberation from cyclic existence

In order to be liberated from cyclic existence, again we need to understand karma. What is it that keeps us trapped in cyclic existence? Our afflictions and our

contaminated actions or karma that we create under the influence of those afflictions. Since contaminated karma is one of the chief things that binds us to this cycle of constantly recurring problems, the better we understand karma, the better we're going to be able to control it and the easier it will be to attain liberation, instead of being under its influence.

3. The altruistic intention aimed at enlightenment

This is the highest level of motivation. Here karma is important for a couple of reasons. Firstly, when we do the bodhisattva practices (the six far-reaching attitudes), what we're doing is we're creating the karma to be able to become a Buddha. We're creating the causes to get the resultant state of Buddhahood.

We're also purifying very strongly the karma that keeps us in cyclic existence.

Also, understanding karma helps us to generate the compassionate wish to become a Buddha, which is what the altruistic intention is. The more we understand that other beings are trapped by their afflictions and karma, the more compassion instinctively arises in us for them. As we see the extent of their predicament, instead of getting angry at them because they're confused and have problems, we are able to develop an altruistic intention wanting to free them from their afflictions and karma.

We can see that although karma comes under the first level of motivation of the path, understanding it is going to influence our entire practice. It's an important topic.

Throwing and Completing Karma

Throwing karma are those actions that ripen in terms of the rebirth we take. They're the ones that throw us into a particular rebirth. They're the ones that cause us to be born as a human being or as a god, or as a donkey, or whatever.

Completing karma are those actions that complete the different conditions that you have once you've entered that rebirth. For example, we take Palden here [from the audience]. He had the throwing karma to be born as a human being. His completing karma is he was born as a boy. He was born with Carrie as his mama, and he was able to live in America and come to Dharma teaching, so all that is his completing karma. The completing karma also influences the different things that happen to us, whether we're human beings or an animal or a god or whatever we're born as. So the different events that we experience, the place that we're born in are the results of completing karma.

Throwing karma is the karma that propels us into another rebirth. This generally involves actions that have all four parts in place:

1. basis or object
2. intention
3. actual action
4. completion of the action

Alternatively, there're three parts:

1. preparation, which includes the basis or object

- and the intention
- 2. actual action
- 3. completion of the action

If an action has all those parts in it, it's a complete action, and that can act as a throwing karma that causes a particular rebirth.

It's interesting. An action can at one time be a throwing karma and at other times, a completing karma.

Remember when we talked about the four results of karma—maturation result, result similar to the cause (in terms of experience and in terms of behavior) and maturation result? An action acts as a maturation result if it ripens in the realm you're born in—the body and mind you get. It is thus a throwing karma. When an action ripens in terms of the results similar to the cause, or the environmental result, then it's acting as a completing karma. In this case it's completing the circumstances of another rebirth, that is, not the same rebirth that it was the throwing karma for.

With throwing karma, sometimes it can be one throwing karma producing many, many rebirths. Not everything is a one-to-one correspondence. Remember there's lots of play and dance in this whole thing about karma.

For example, somebody killed a person. It's a complete action. It becomes a throwing karma. It can actually act as the cause for many, many rebirths, particularly if one does what we call one of the five heinous actions, such as killing one's father or killing one's mother.

On the other hand, you can have many, many actions, all of which, put together, act as a throwing karma, and they produce one rebirth. For example, our having precious human lives is dependent upon having had very good ethical conduct in previous lives. We did many, many actions of keeping good ethical conduct. Maybe we took the five precepts in previous lives. That's five different actions done repeatedly, all of which came together and acted as a throwing karma to cause one particular rebirth—the precious human life we have now.

So what we're getting at is, sometimes one action can cause multiple births, and other times, multiple actions can cause one birth. This is concerning throwing karma.

Like I said, one karma can act sometimes as a throwing karma, and other times as a completing karma, *depending upon which result happens to be ripening at that particular time.*

There are actions done that don't have all the four parts complete (only two or three of the parts complete). These actions are weaker and so they don't bring such a forceful result like a rebirth. They may ripen as the completing karma which complete the circumstances of your rebirth, determining your gender, whether your body is healthy or not, what you experiences are in life, where you're born, whether you're rich or poor, whether you're able to have an education or not. Those are all results of completing karma.

Various possibilities of throwing and completing karma

1. You can have somebody who is experiencing the results of a *good throwing karma and a good completing karma* at the same time. If you look at our situation right now, you'll see that we're experiencing good throwing karma, because we're born in an upper realm. We also have very good completing karma because we have enough to eat. We've been able to encounter the Dharma etc.
2. There're other beings that have *good throwing karma, but very unfortunate completing karma*. So they might be born as human beings, but they're born, let's say, retarded or handicapped in some way, or in a country where it's so difficult to eke out a living, where there's a lot of starvation and great difficulties.
3. Then there're others who have it the other way about. They have *unfortunate throwing karma and fortunate completing karma*. For example, Achala is born as a cat as a result of unfortunate throwing karma, but for a cat, he has a really good circumstance. That's fortunate completing karma.
4. And then there're other beings that have *unfortunate throwing and unfortunate completing karma*. Let's say a dog in India. Most of the beings in the lower realms have this kind of situation, where it's a problematic rebirth and the whole environment they're born into is also problematic.

Summary

This is interesting to think about, how all these different actions bring different results, how all the different actions combine in such a variety of ways to bring so many different results. We begin to get a feeling for the power of karma, that cause and effect is something quite real. We also get a feeling for the incredible possibilities within it, with all the different possible results and how they can inter-mingle and influence one another.

[Audience:] What would be the karma of a still-born baby, or an aborted baby?

In that kind of circumstance, that being would have the throwing karma to be born as a human being, but there is very strong completing karma that completely inhibits their actually getting to live a full life. If you have that completing karma, it can be pretty serious.

Sometimes what they say is that babies who don't make it out of the womb, or children who don't live very long, have the karma to be born as a human being, but they didn't have the karma to live a long time as a human being. So sometimes that's the case, that the karma to live in a certain body is very limited.

Other times, a person may have the karma to have a long life but they had some other very, very heavy karma that ripens. Even though they have the karma to live long, this other karma is so strong that they end up dying early. This is called an untimely death.

Definite and Indefinite Karma

We're taking the subject of karma here and looking at it from different ways, but none of these ways are separate things. They're just different ways of cutting the pie. And by cutting the pie in different ways, we understand the pie better.

Another way of cutting the pie is to talk about definite karma and indefinite karma.

When Amchog Rinpoche was here, I asked him what really is the difference between definite and indefinite karma. This was the time when he was trying to make his travel arrangements to go to San Francisco, and he kept changing his mind, and so he said to me, "Definite karma is like when you have your flight and you have the ticket and it's confirmed. Indefinite karma is kind of like what we're doing now, lots of change of plans." I think that's a really nice way of putting it.

Definite karma is karma which has a certain amount of potency so it's pretty strongly going towards a specific goal. Of course any karma can be purified. Nothing's fixated and cast in concrete. Rinpoche said that definite karma is like when you have the ticket and it's confirmed, but you can still change your mind.

Indefinite karma has more leeway in exactly how it ripens, when it ripens, what result it brings, whether it's a strong result or a weak result.

Definite karma, in general, has, again, all four factors complete in it. Like I was saying, with definite karma, you're pretty strongly going in a certain way, but it can be influenced.

Remember when we were talking about

purification, I was telling you that when you start to purify, you might experience negative things happening? Remember the story about that nun who had a big boil on her cheek? Sometimes when people go to their first meditation courses in Nepal, they get sick. Everybody gets the cold and the flu. I think there is some kind of purification going on.

Often what's happening is that as soon as you start to engage in the practice, by the force of your Dharma practice, some of the karma that was definite—let's say definite to be born in the hell realm for x number of eons—ripens and you get the flu instead. Or you get a boil. Or you get depressed. Or you feel sick.

In such cases, it's a definite karma, but *by the power of your practice, you're altering it, and it's ripening now in a comparatively small suffering*, compared to what it could have ripened as, if you hadn't done any purification and it had remained as that definite karma going strongly towards its specific goal.

If somebody has the definite karma to be born as a dog and also the definite karma to be born as a human being (because we've done all sorts of actions during our life), and if one is stronger than the other, then that one will probably ripen at the time of death. If they're both of equal strength, then the one that's more habitual will probably ripen at the time of death. So we can have more than one definite karma, but it doesn't mean they will all ripen at one time.

Like I was saying, you can have definite karma either for a lower rebirth or definite karma for an upper rebirth, but then if you do something to counteract that or to put some obstacle or interference

with it, then that *definite karma can be obstructed*. So if you have definite karma to be born in the lower realms but you start doing purification, like the Nyung Nay practice, then that can interfere with the ripening of the definite negative karma and you may just feel a little sick (instead of something more serious).

Or you may have a definite positive karma, some positive action you did that is pretty definite to result in rebirth as a human being or in the god realm, but then you get really, really angry over something, and by the force of your anger, the force of your wrong views, you impede the ripening of that positive karma. So again, definite karma isn't cast in concrete. There're other factors that influence it.

Ripening of Karma

Definite karma, in general, ripens in one of three time periods. It can ripen in this life. Or it can ripen in the very next life. Or it can ripen in any of the lives after the next life.

For karma to ripen in this lifetime, it's usually very strong karma. A lot of what we're experiencing in this lifetime is due to our previous rebirths. Of course some of what we experience is due to things we did in this rebirth, but these are usually the very, very strong actions. For example, if you did a negative action out of extreme attachment to your body or your possessions or your life, or you did a positive action with extreme generosity in terms of your body, your possessions or your life, that kind of action can ripen in this lifetime. It has a strong intention.

Or an action that has a very strong object, for

example, you swear at a bodhisattva and criticize a bodhisattva. That's fairly heavy karma, and that can ripen in this very lifetime. Similarly, if you make offerings to a bodhisattva, it can also ripen in this very lifetime. Any kind of actions that we do that are very strong in terms of powerful objects like Buddhas, bodhisattvas, our spiritual teachers, the Triple Gem—the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha—those things can ripen in this lifetime.

This is one of the reasons why the tantric practice is said to be very effective for attaining enlightenment in this lifetime, because through it, you can create a lot of this kind of karma, that is, karma that ripens in this very lifetime that brings enlightenment in this lifetime.

Another type of actions that can ripen this lifetime rather than other lifetimes is actions done with a very strong malicious intention towards sentient beings, or a very strong compassionate attitude towards them.

Summary

Generally, if an action is done with a very strong intention, if it's done towards a powerful object, if it's done repeatedly over a long period of time, or if the preparation for it took a long time, this action can ripen in this lifetime. We could probably make some examples from our life of very strong actions, positive and negative, that could easily ripen in this lifetime. That may give us a little bit more enthusiasm for purifying, and also some enthusiasm for rejoicing. Thinking about that is quite helpful.

But then we can also see that there are a lot of

actions that we've done that haven't been strong in terms of how long they've been done or the length of the preparation, or our intention, or who we did them towards. These actions are probably going to ripen either in the very next lifetime, or the lifetimes after the next.

I want to emphasize that nothing's pre-programmed. Somebody once asked His Holiness whether he could read karma and tell the future. His Holiness said, "Well, you never really know what's going to happen until it happens." You can get some strong indications of the way something is flowing, but you're never sure what's going to happen till it's actually happening.

Questions and answers

[Audience:] Are all instances of cause and effect karmic, or are there some cause and effect that have to do with the material elements and other cause and effect that have to do with karma?

Yes, quite definitely. In other words, the leaves falling off the tree, you can't say that's karma. That is due to the biological functions and the cause and effect of the physical elements going along in the tree.

Karma is referring to the functioning of cause and effect in our mental continuum. It doesn't mean that absolutely everything in the universe is caused by karma. Karma is involved with actions that bring the results of happiness and suffering. The leaf falling off the tree, or the plum growing out of the plum blossom—these are the cause and effect that's existing in

terms of physical elements.

[Audience:] Could you comment about clairvoyance in relation to karma?

In terms of clairvoyance, some people have clairvoyance due to karma. If somebody is a spiritual practitioner, their clairvoyance isn't due to karma, it's due to their own spiritual attainments. It's due to the development of their mind.

[Audience:] Every single tape recorder that I buy breaks down.

Yes, I have that with clocks. I understand your situation completely. There was a time in my life when I went through so many different clocks. They would break down when I use them. I gave it away and it worked for the other person!

Your experience of suffering is due to your karma. The tape recorder breaking or working is due to the atoms and molecules and things like that in the tape recorder. So we shouldn't see all these different kinds of cause and effect as things with big brick walls between them. They very much inter-mingle.

[Audience:] Does group karma create universes?

They say that the universe is created by karma. His Holiness uses this example. Before you could move into a house, you have to build it. You painted it. You fixed it up. And you created a certain environment. Then you moved into it. He uses that as an analogy to

say that the beings who are born in our particular universe have some kind of shared or collective karma that influenced exactly how our universe was, or is. And that that started to develop before we were born into this universe.

We then asked His Holiness whether that means that everything that happens in the universe is controlled by karma. He said, no, there's a lot of physical functioning, inter-relationships of the elements, the atoms and the molecules that are functioning along physical laws—laws of physics and biology etc—that bring the results.

It's like you have all the different cause and effect systems working together and inter-mingling. And when we really pushed His Holiness, "When is it just the physical functioning of the elements and when is it our karma?" He said, "Hmm. I don't know. That's a really fine line." So I figure if His Holiness can beg ignorance, I can also.

I remember him saying one time when we were in Dharamsala. There were those pretty flowers growing outside his room. And he was saying the growth of those flowers is due to just the physical elements. But the fact that the bees and the birds and human beings enjoy them and reap benefit, that part is controlled by our karma, or influenced by our karma. So there's no hard and fast distinctions on all these things.

[Audience:] When freak accidents happen, for example, a person struck by lightning, is that karma or just the physical functioning of the elements?

It's both things together. The scientists can explain the

whole lightning bolt coming down. But the fact that that person was there underneath it and got hit by it, and experienced suffering, that's due to that person's karma. So there're a couple of things going on at the same time.

[Audience:] I could see that the person is there due to their karma, but to see that the person is there in order to get hit by the lightning, I don't.

No. They're not there to get hit by lightning, because there's nobody sitting up in the sky that says, "Hey you, go over there. There's lightning coming."

Let's say you have a lot of causal energy going towards enlightenment, but you also have some very strong negative karma that you haven't purified. When that negative karma meets all the co-operative conditions, like a seed getting water and fertilizer and sunlight and everything, then that negative karma can ripen at that particular time.

It inter-reacts with the physical world, but your karma doesn't cause the rock to fall, as I understand it. But the rock falling and your being underneath it—you have different systems of cause and effect working together to bring that about.

[Audience:] You don't just happen to be there?

No. You don't just happen to be there.

[Audience: inaudible]

I don't think you consciously know that the rock is

coming. But it's like in the past you've created some kind of energy, let's say energy of harming somebody else. That energy has stayed in your mind. Today is the day that it's starting to get watered, and it's starting to germinate, and that energy is somehow propelling you, so that that day (and not some other days), it happened. Maybe there's an earthquake, or an avalanche, and this big rock comes rolling down. It's not like anybody preplanned it and scheduled it, and it's not like you consciously knew it. It's just that there was that energy there that made you do that that day. From the physical side, there was the earthquake and the avalanche that happened. And the two things came together.

[Audience: inaudible]

What do you mean by 'knowledge'? I gave the example last week. Do you have knowledge of what you thought about in the car ride over here?

[Audience:] No.

But it happened.

[Audience:] Right.

And it was your experience. So there're lots of things that are your experience that you don't consciously understand and have control over.

[Audience: inaudible]

You didn't sit on top of a cloud with a little interview form, "I'm going to choose my parents now from the applications being received." You didn't sit there and say, "Hmm, let's see. Shall I be born to these parents? What about these parents? What lessons do I need to learn in life? Gee, I think I'll be born as an abused child and learn that lesson." When you talk about choice, it's not like that. It's not this conscious "I'm going to do this, this, this, this." But there's definitely some energy pushing us.

[Audience: inaudible]

Yes. Very much like a bad habit.

[Audience:] So there's no such thing as an accident of any kind?

No, not really. But what do we mean by 'accident'? Do accidents have causes? When you have a car accident, does it have causes? Even though in our conventional language, we give it the name 'accident', we can see that it still has causes. Things don't happen without cause. If things happen without causes, then you could have a peach tree growing in the front yard in the middle of the asphalt without a peach seed, because things don't depend on causes and conditions.

If you say that things don't depend on causes and conditions, then it's like saying anything can happen for absolutely no reason at all. You won't need to work to get money. You don't need to do anything to

get money, because things don't depend on causes. But as we can see, things do depend on causes.

[Audience:] Do all things depend on causes so that there're no random events whatsoever?

We're framing things in the wrong way. We're getting into our 'either or' mentality. By 'random events', do 'random events' mean without any cause? Or do 'random events' mean that there's a cause but we don't understand it? So 'random' doesn't necessarily mean without any cause. It may just mean we don't understand what the cause is.

[Audience: inaudible]

But remember what I said, it doesn't mean things are unrelated and completely separate, because things obviously influence each other. Everything is inter-dependent. This is the very essence of Buddhism.

We are very inter-dependent here as a group. We don't exist as a group independently. By all the different people each working in their own way, each doing their own thing, we bring something about. If one person wasn't here tonight, it would be different tonight. And if another person who wasn't here came, it would again be different. So we're creating something here together that's dependent on all of us. Yet within that, we can still say there's Carrie and Lily and Leah.

It's the same thing with the environment. We're influencing the environment. The environment is influencing us. Everything is involved in a cause and

effect. Karma's referring to one particular kind of cause and effect. But again it's not a totally isolated, frozen category that's unrelated to other kinds of cause and effect, just as you aren't a frozen, isolated person that is unrelated to other people.

This subject is extremely difficult to understand. I'm only giving you my present level of understanding, and when I go to my teachers, I question and ask and debate and wrestle with this as well. I remember them telling me at the beginning that karma is a very, very difficult topic.

In many ways, to understand it completely is more difficult than understanding emptiness, because really understanding karma means you understand every little bitty cause and effect and how it relates with every other itty bitty cause and effect in the entire universe. It is quite complicated.

Remember the butterfly in Singapore flapping its wings and then it can affect worldwide weather patterns? That one small thing changes, it influences something else, which in turn influences something else, and pretty soon, you have an incredible result. Well, that's exactly how this world is functioning. Everything is interrelating, influencing everything else.

[Audience:] I have noticed that the same causes and conditions seem to ripen repeatedly over time, but I experience them differently.

That's because you're having similar but not exactly the same causes and conditions on the external level, but your internal causes and conditions are very

different. Anything we experience is a combination of something from the outside and a lot from the inside. You see, we see things as isolated, unitary, inherently existent events. You've seen in discussing this, what makes it so difficult for us is we're coming smack up against our conception of nice, solid, clearly definable categories called independent events. And what we're coming up against is what you've pointed out. There're things from the outside. There're things from the inside. So we experience things differently. Two people have the same external thing but they experience it differently.

You're sitting in this teaching. When this teaching is over, somebody (I hope) will say, "Wow, a fantastic teaching!" And somebody else is going to leave the teaching and say, "She doesn't know what in the world she's talking about! I'm completely confused." Heard the same words, but completely different experiences. Why? Because different causes and effects come together to create different experiences.

[Audience:] Not all cause and effect is karma?

Yes. When peach grows from the peach blossom, that's due to all the biochemical things going on in the peach blossom. When you pick the peach off the tree and taste it and it tastes good, your feeling of pleasure from that is related to your karma. But again, they inter-relate.

A lot of things are going on at the same time, and depending on which framework you pull out of your toolkit, you can describe it in different ways—from the biology angle, chemistry angle, etc. But if you

only pull one tool out, you're going to have a somewhat incomplete description of what's going on.

[Audience:] What's the point of knowing these inter-relationships?

It strengthens our understanding of dependent arising and inter-relatedness. It strengthens the understanding of emptiness, the wisdom realizing emptiness, which is the third principal aspect of the path. They say that because things are dependent, therefore they're empty. And because they're empty, therefore they're dependent. In other words, dependent arising and emptiness aren't two little distinct boxes, though they're two things. You look at one thing from this side and you say, "Ah! Dependent arising." You look at it from this side and you say, "Ah! Emptiness." But it's the exact same thing.

When you start to examine and understand all these incredible, intricate causes and conditions, all these different parts and all these different elements, and that so many things fit in together almost miraculously, magically, at one particular moment to make one particular thing, then you really see how things don't have any independent, inherent, solid existence. Because they're just *this momentary collection of all the parts due to all the causes and conditions coming together at that particular moment the way they did*. And then it all changes and becomes something else.

So there's nothing solid, and you can begin to see how those two things just go right together.

[Audience: inaudible]

Well, you can say that conceptually, we can talk about karma and conceptually, we can talk about biology and physics cause and effect. But in actual fact, they're influencing each other all the time in our life. If you have a spaghetti plate, and they're all mixed up together, when we start talking about one or the other, we're pulling one noodle out and looking at it. Or like maybe we're looking at the spaghetti from this side as opposed to that side, or some other way. Imagine being inside the spaghetti noodle looking at the plate. It's going to look very different, isn't it? And how you describe what the plate of spaghetti looks like if you're inside one of the noodles looking out, is going to sound totally different than if you're outside looking in, and yet it's similar ... there are many things going on there.

This is one of the things that I find myself fighting so much. In Buddhism, everything is broken down into these nice, neat little categories: three of this, four of that, five of that. For example, they may say there's one major thing, and it has three branches. The first branch has three sub-categories. The second branch has seventeen sub-categories. The first sub-category of the second branch covers the first two sub-categories of the first branch. And the second sub-category of the second branch covers half of the third branch's six sub-categories. As one lama said, symmetry is stupid!

I don't know if it's our mind or our educational system, but when we study things, we like to think that once we have a list of categories, they are nice,

distinct, independent, isolatable things that we can examine and know absolutely everything about, without studying everything else. But the world isn't like that. *Everything is affecting everything else all the time.* And when you really think about it, it's totally mind-boggling. You begin to realize your categories are conceptual conveniences to help you understand things. They're not rigid things. In other words, categories are descriptions. I used to think that first, you have the categories, then you fit the world into it. But it's not like that. There are all these experiences and existences, and categories are only ways of describing them. We made up the categories. They don't exist by themselves.

[Audience:] How do we reconcile all these complexities with what the text said, in simple terms, about ripening karma?

I think they're doing that simply to get across the point that there is a cause that brings a result. If we think one will be born in the lower realm if one kills somebody, and that's all there is to it, it is like a biology professor saying if we plant a peach seed, a peach tree will grow from it—it's too simplistic. It's too simplistic because whether the peach seed grows into a peach tree depends also on the weather patterns, the pollution, the ground level, and so many other factors.

So if in the text, it says that if you do this, that happens, it doesn't mean that there's only one cause and one effect with no *other intervening conditions*. Rather, it just means that if you let this happen,

there's a lot of potential to bring that result. But exactly what happens depends on so many other factors.

[Audience:] Are you saying that a ripening karma has to involve a consciousness that experiences pleasure and pain?

In general, yes. The ripening of karma is intricately involved with sentient beings' experience of pleasure and pain.

[Audience:] If a ripening karma has to involve a consciousness that experiences pleasure and pain, then how are the body and karma related?

Throwing karma produces all five aggregates. When we talk about a rebirth, we're not just talking about the form aggregate. We're also talking about the mental aggregates, the mental components. We're talking about the body and mind. Which level of body and mind we take is influenced by our throwing karma. Although your body and mind themselves are not pleasurable or painful, the fact that through your body and mind you experience pleasure and pain shows that they're related to karma.

[Audience:] What do you mean by the five aggregates?

The five aggregates are the five psycho-physical aggregates, and the composite is what we call the person. The first aggregate is the **form** aggregate.

That's referring to our body. The other four are mental aggregates, which are different types of consciousness. One of them is the mental factor of **feeling**. The other one is **discrimination**. The fourth aggregate is called **compositional factors**, which includes many different mental factors. The fifth aggregate is the **primary consciousness** aggregate, which consists of the five sense consciousnesses and the mental consciousness.

When we have a throwing karma ripening, and our throwing karma is ripening to be a human being, we don't just get the body of a human being. We also get the consciousness of a human being. Our consciousness becomes the consciousness of a human being. The body we get is made up of atoms and molecules, so it's not positive or negative; it's not pleasure or pain. But through the body, we experience a lot of pleasure and pain. That is how karma is related to it.

[Audience:] Is karma involved with only the pain and pleasure of sentient beings?

In general—this does not mean absolutely all the time—the results of karma have to do with things that are involved with the pleasure and pain of sentient beings. It doesn't mean that the results of karma *are* the pleasure and pain. It means things that are involved with pleasure and pain, for example, our body.

But again you come to the situation where it's really hard to isolate what's karma and what's physical conditioning—what's the law of physics, what's the law of biology—because they influence

each other a lot. When we talk about karma, we're looking from the aspect of what factors are involved with the pain and pleasure of beings.

[Audience: inaudible]

It doesn't mean that the rock isn't going to hit you. It means that maybe the rock hits you, but because you have changed your attitude, you feel completely okay about it. It's just like what Patty Joe was saying, that the same thing happens to her at different times in her life and she reacts very differently. It's the same here. If you change your attitude, then you're changing how you're experiencing what's happening.

This is the reason why we do the thought-training practice. We may have karma pushing us and we find ourselves in certain external situations that would generally lead us to experience either pleasure or pain. In situations where we normally experience pain, if we transform our way of thinking and not get angry or disturbed, we will avoid creating more negative karma, and we will also act in a way that purifies that karma.

That's why we say everything that happens to us is an opportunity to practice the Dharma.

[Audience:] The psychologists talk about the "unconscious experience of pain".

This is an interesting thing. What do we really mean by "unconscious"? The idea we have is you went through some kind of traumatic event in the past and you've been experiencing pain from it ever since, and

that's influencing your life. We have the idea that we're experiencing this pain all the time, twenty-four hours a day, though we're unaware of it. But if you start to look at your experience, are you really experiencing the pain from some incident that happened five years ago, twenty-four hours a day?

What we think is an unconscious experience could actually be a conscious phenomenon that we're not aware of. For example, you're usually not aware of what you're thinking when you're driving. You are actually thinking and feeling a lot of things as you are driving. They are conscious phenomena. But because you're so distracted by external things, you're not aware of what your own conscious phenomena are. So you say they are unconscious phenomena.

Or you may be angry and not know you're angry. But your anger is a conscious experience.

Going back to the pain from the traumatic event, is it there every single moment of the day? It may not be. The pain comes up only when you think about the incident.

Or maybe the pain is there but you're not aware of it. Some thought processes are going on that are causing you to remember something or causing you to look at the world in a certain way that's giving you pain. You're not aware that you're thinking that, though you're definitely thinking that; it's your conscious experience. But does it happen twenty-four hours a day?

It's real interesting when you start to look at your own experience. When we say "I have a hang-up," or "I have a problem," it is as if there is this incredible boulder that's on my back, and it's there twenty-four

hours a day. But whatever problem you have, is it there twenty-four hours a day?

When you're enjoying eating frozen yogurt, are you at the same time necessarily caught up in "Five years ago, somebody did this and that thing to me?"

What I'm getting at is, if we look at our experience, there are so many different mental factors, attitudes, feelings, emotions at play—they come and go, come and go. The idea of any particular experience of pain or pleasure or any particular attitude as being concrete, fixed and always there ... if we begin to look at our experience, we'll see that that's completely not the way it is. Look what happens when you watch your breath. How many different things go through your mind when you're trying to watch your breath?

Can you say that there's this one solid "*my* problem", "*my* trauma" that's there all the time?

It's not there all the time. At times, it may surface and influence how you see things, but it doesn't mean that it happens twenty-four hours a day.

Let's sit quietly.

Last week we talked about karma and dependent arising, how things depend on many different factors, some of which are under our personal control and others which are not. What happened in terms of Rinpoche's visit was a perfect example of this, wasn't it? Many factors were involved in his visit. People here all worked together to prepare for it. Many different factors, many people, many things were going on. Then an obstacle came in the way and everything turned out differently—Rinpoche's visit

was cancelled. The last conducive factor wasn't there. Just like what we were saying last time, we can begin to see how things are dependent on so many factors that it's not just a linear relationship of this brings that. The experience we had with the hope of Rinpoche coming and then the hope being unfulfilled was an excellent example of dependent arising. Our collective karma was involved and within that, each of us experienced the result of our own individual karma. Each of us also created our own individual karma. Collective karma was also being created by the group. You can see what we've been talking about the last few times on karma pertains to what happened last week. Did you see this? It's very interesting when you start to think of it that way, isn't it?

Last time we left off in the middle of talking about definite and indefinite karma. Remember that I gave you the example of what Amchog Rinpoche said, that definite karma was analogous with a confirmed flight [laughter], and indefinite karma was analogous with an unconfirmed flight. I said to Rinpoche that even confirmed flights can be changed and he agreed. [Laughter.]

Let's review for a moment. When you have four branches of an action complete, then it propels you strongly towards a particular result [maturation result]. It becomes not so flexible because the intention was very strong. The action was very strong. We did an "A" perfect negative action or an "A" perfect positive action.

Definite karma can ripen in this lifetime. Examples of such karma are when you have a very strong

intention to do an action, either positive or negative, or when you do an action towards a strong object like your spiritual teacher or the Triple Gem, or when an action is done repeatedly or done after a long preparation. But most of our definite karma ripens either in the next life or in the second life thereafter.

Indefinite karma is created when all four branches aren't complete. Maybe you don't have the intention, or you don't have the actual action, or you don't have the completion of the action. It isn't an "A" perfect positive or negative action. Therefore it's not going to bring a result in terms of the realm that you'll be born into [maturation result]. It is also not going to ripen in this life. Indefinite karma tends to bring results like the environmental result and the result similar to the cause in terms of experience. The result isn't going to be as strong as that of definite karma.

An example of indefinite karma is if you do something but you have a very weak intention to do it. If you do the same action with a super-strong intention, it's very likely to be a definite karma. But if you do it with a wishy-washy motivation, then it becomes an indefinite karma. This is important to know. When we're making offerings or when we're doing some positive action, take the time to make sure our intention is strong. This will influence how the action ripens. Similarly, when we get carried away and engage in a negative action, try and weaken the intention.

Another example of indefinite karma: you have the motivation to go out and steal something, but then you don't do it. It's not a complete act. You have the thought to do it, but you do not act it out. This

becomes an indefinite karma. Whereas if you have the thought to do it and then go do it, then it's much more likely to be definite karma. We can think of many examples from our own lives where we intended to do an action but ended up not doing it.

Another example of indefinite karma: we purify a negative action we did. Let's say you lied to somebody. You knew what you were doing. You felt great doing it. You were very glad you did it. But then afterwards, you thought, "Wow, what have I done? I'm a Dharma practitioner. Out of self-respect and self-dignity, I don't want to act this way." This motivates you to do some purification afterwards. You had some regret and you made a determination not to act like that again in the future. By doing this purification, that karma goes from being definite to being indefinite. You're impeding its ripening.

Five actions which bring indefinite result

In one of his texts, Asanga talked about five actions we do where the result is indefinite.

1. When you're forced by somebody to do something.

Let's say you're abducted into the army without a choice. You're told to go and be a soldier and kill people, but it's not your choice. It's not your wish. This is very different from someone choosing to enlist and going out with their flag to kill. There's a difference. If you're forced by somebody to do an action, the result is not going to be a definite one. It's going to be much more indefinite.

Similarly, if we are forced by others to do a positive action, then even though it's a positive action, it is not going to be strong. For example, somebody forces you to make offerings. They guilt-trip you for so long that you finally make out a check to the Red Cross or some other charitable organization. You feel obliged to or forced to. Or your family is watching and so you do it. The result of an action like this isn't going to be a firm, definite one.

2. When somebody requests you insistently to do it.

In the first case, you're forced to do an action. You don't have a choice. Here, they nagged you so much that you eventually give in. Again, the result is not going to be as definite as if it's your own volition, your own intention, your own idea. You're doing it mostly because you're under pressure from somebody else.

It must be quite interesting when we think about the number of decisions we make that are what other people want us to do or what we think we should do. For example, some people put their pets to sleep not so much because they want to do it, but because they think other people want them to.

Or in the case of euthanasia, maybe the patient pleads with the person, "Pull the plug. Pull the plug. I don't want to live." The person then pulls the plug. This is different from the scenario where the person (who is well) says, "Ah, I can see this person is suffering," and he pulls the plug based on his own decision. There are many nuances in this. This is just an example. We can think of many similar situations

in our life. Think of the things we do because people ask us insistently. We should be careful here. If we do positive actions only because somebody asks us insistently, then we're missing out on the opportunity to create a lot of good karma in our mindstreams. We're not being fully present in generating our own good intention to do the action.

3. When we do something with a lack of awareness.

In other words, we don't know that what we do is negative. For example, you don't know that the company you are working for sells materials to another company that makes bombs. Or you don't know that your company is engaged in chemical warfare, selling chemicals. You're not aware that there's any negativity involved in what you are doing. In such cases, you do not have an intention, so the result is going to be more indefinite.

4. When we have an uncontrollable compulsion to do something.

This is not referring to our normal uncontrollable compulsions, or it'll be so easy to rationalize, "Oh, going to the refrigerator to get ice-cream is an uncontrollable compulsion, so it is not a definite karma." [Laughter.] I wish I could rationalize that one. This is referring more to the case of having a mental problem, a mental compulsion, People who are insane; people who don't have all their mental faculties together. They have the intention but they don't have a real intention because their mind is

completely out of it. An action done due to this kind of compulsion leads to an indefinite result.

On the other hand, if you think about something again and again, and you plan exactly how to do it, this kind of compulsion will result in a definite karma. It wouldn't be indefinite.

It is interesting to know that if an ordained person becomes insane and breaks a vow, they don't actually break the vow, since they are mentally unsound when they do the action.

5. When we have an incorrect understanding.

If you think you're doing something good, but it turns out to be harmful in the end, it will not bring a definite result. The result is going to be indefinite. You had a certain intention but you were not aware of all the factors. Things happened quite differently from what you had planned. That's going to be an indefinite ripening. This happens with both positive and negative actions. For example, you may think you're helping somebody, but in effect you're harming them. You give some money to a charity thinking that they're doing something good, but they wind up embezzling the money. Or you give an alcoholic some money to buy a sandwich or get his resume done, but he winds up drinking booze. This refers to cases where you think what you're doing is right, but only realize in retrospect that it was actually a harmful action. This will be indefinite karma.

[Audience:] What if you intended to help somebody, did it and it helped that person, but in the process

you hurt somebody else?

It would depend very much on whether you had the intention to harm the other person. In other words, if you only had the intention to help this person, and you weren't thinking about the ramifications for some person halfway around the world, then it's not going to be so definite because you're not really putting all the pieces together. But if you have the intention to help one person but harm another through the action, then I wonder how much positive karma there is in that. You're helping somebody, but with a negative motivation to harm somebody else.

I remember talking once with one of my teachers about the people who were involved in doing nuclear research before the Second World War. These scientists did the research out of a deep interest in Physics and the like. Do they get any negative karma when people were killed by the bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima? This is a very interesting question. Our teacher was saying it depends on their motivation. If these scientists were not aware that their research was going to be used for bombs, then they don't receive the karma of killing those people. From their side they didn't intend to kill anybody. But his translator (who is a Western woman) and I felt that the scientists should have been thinking about what they were doing and how the results of their research could be used. Can we say that because they weren't aware of what's going to happen, they had no responsibility?

We got into quite an interesting discussion with my teacher about this. It's something to think about,

exactly how much intention somebody had. If the scientists have the intention to kill people, or if they have the suspicion that their research can be abused, I think the karma is going to be quite different than if they have their heads in the clouds and don't even think one way or the other what's going to happen to their research. You can see from this, that there can be so many nuances, depending upon the person and their attitude, their motivation. It is interesting to think about this.

Performed and Accumulated Karma

Now we're going to look at definite and indefinite karma in a slightly different way. Here we have the breakdown of karma in terms of karma performed and karma accumulated. The terms here are actually quite misleading. When I explain them, I might just change the terms. But the literal translation is 'performed' and 'accumulated'. 'Performed' means actions that you've done, that you've committed. 'Accumulated' means actions that have been done with intention. You had the motivation to do the action in the first place. We can make four different pairs out of these two:

1. Actions that were done (performed) and intended (accumulated)
2. Actions that were done but not intended
3. Actions that were not done but intended
4. Actions that were neither intended nor done

It's interesting to relate the different actions we do in the day to these categories.

1. Actions that were intended (accumulated) and done (performed)

These are definite karma. You had the intention to do the action and then you did the action. We did not do it by accident. We did not do it because we were spaced out. There was a very clear intention to do the action. All the other branches of the action are complete because you actually carried out your intention through doing the action. Also you don't have any regret afterwards. For example, there is a mosquito on your arm and you want to kill it. You kill it and you say, "Fantastic!" Or you cheat on your taxes. You had the motivation to cheat and you cheated. You said, "I'm glad I did it! And I'm going to do it again."

There's a big movement now where people refuse to pay the amount of tax that would go towards military expenditures. Is that stealing or not stealing? I'll leave you with that. It is interesting to think about it.

Actions are considered as done and accumulated when you had the motivation, did the action, and there was no regret afterwards. An example would be you get up in the morning and you generate your positive motivation, "Today, I'm not going to harm others. I'm going to help them as much as possible. I'm going to do everything for the long term goal of becoming a Buddha for the benefit of others." You motivated like that in the morning, and then during

the day, you act accordingly. The actions done during the day in accordance with this motivation are therefore intended and done. Another example is if you have the idea to go out and steal, and you go out and do it.

Or somebody says, “Hey, your company has this and that. Can’t you bring some of it home for me? They won’t miss it.” And you think, “Oh yes, my company does have a lot of money. I can take some of the things and bring them home for my friend. My friend will like me better.” And you do it. Even though you are told by somebody else to do it, still, you have the intention to do it. We have to be careful about the actions that other people tell us to do. In this case, it isn’t like they’re forcing us. It isn’t like they’re nagging us and wearing down our will. Pay attention to such cases.

These are some examples of actions that are intended and done. We have the motivation and then we go out and do it. They are going to be definite karmas. They’re going to be strong karmas.

2. Actions that were not intended but done

These are actions which we didn’t have the motivation to do, but the actions got done anyway. For example, you were forced into military service. You had no intention to kill. You were forced to do it. If you’re forced into military service, you’re told to kill, and you think “Oh yes, I’ll do it!” then it falls into the first category of an action that is both intended and done. But if you’re forced to do it and you don’t want to do it from your heart, then it’s not

intended but done. The result of this one would probably not be a maturation result because you didn't have a complete action. You didn't have the intention there. It's going to be an indefinite karma.

Another example of this is when you act unknowingly. You don't have the intention to do something but it just turns out that way. Sometimes people come up to thank us and we realize we had no intention to help them, it just kind of happened unknowingly. [Laughter.] Or people might complain about us harming them, but we did it unknowingly. There was no intention to do that.

Or actions that people do for the heck of it, something off the top of their head, kind of not considering what they're doing. Being reckless. There was no real intention.

[Audience:] I cheated the IRS but I honestly don't regret it because I feel that they've ripped me off so much. So what do you do, do you trick yourself into purifying something you don't believe is wrong?

Well, to purify, what's the first step in purification?

[Audience:] To regret it.

Yes. So are you purifying?

[Audience:] Well I guess no. I start rationalizing my action and I get to the point where I'm convinced they don't have the right to do it. So then I won't purify.

You have to think about why you think they don't have the right to do it. In other words, everybody else in the country should pay taxes but not you? You have to think, what is the law of the land? What is fair? What have people agreed upon as a group? If a government institutes a policy that is clearly a criminal policy, then I think you can have very strong ethical reasons for not going along with it. But when it's not a case of the government instituting a criminal policy and it's more like, "I don't want to do this because somehow, I'm special. I deserve more than everybody else does," then you have to check up. It is strange. I'm always the one who shouldn't have to pay IRS so much. I'm always the one who should get more of this. I'm always the one who shouldn't have to do that. I never think about other people in those situations. I never look around the room and say, "Oh, you shouldn't have to give so much to IRS." "You give to IRS. That's good. I want you to pay for the roads, for the welfare, and so on, but I have better things to do with my money." [Laughter.]

[Audience: inaudible]

My opinion of that is that it's quite a different thing. If you feel that this money is getting used to kill other people, then what some Buddhists have been doing is they subtract the portion of their taxes that would go to the military budget from the check that they sent in and explained to the authorities why they're doing this.

Somebody is putting a bill before Congress proposing that you could be a conscientious objector

tax payer in order not to have to pay your taxes towards the military if you don't want to. You still have to pay the same amount of taxes, but they would channel the money towards non-military areas like social welfare or education. I think it'd be good if as a group, we write a letter to let those people know that this is good. In this way, you're acting with a very clear ethical conscience. You don't want your money and resources going for the harm of others.

[Audience:] Wouldn't it be possible that the money could be channeled somewhere else?

We do the best we can from our side. We can't sit on top of everybody. We try and direct our resources in the way we think fit, but we can't always control everything.

When we do something but it doesn't go according to our plan, it is an action not intended but done. We had an intention to do an action to get a certain result, and we did that action. But it didn't go as planned. Something other than what we had intended happened. This is therefore an action that was not intended but done. For example, you intended to kill a mosquito but instead you killed a tick.

Actions not intended but done also include actions that we do half-heartedly. You're doing something but at the same time you feel, "I shouldn't be doing this," or "I don't really want to do it." As soon as you have done it, you have regret, and you think, "I'm not going to do this again." Here, although you had the intention, it is as if you didn't have the intention because you were regretting it almost as soon as you

started doing it. This kind of action is considered as non-intended but done.

It works the same way for our positive actions. For example, we're making some kind of contribution but the whole time we're thinking, "I don't really want to do this." If somebody asks you for help and you think, "I don't really want to do this but I *have* to." You're doing it but at the same time you're regretting it, wishing you weren't doing it. This is an action that's done but not intended. It is not going to be a strong karma.

Or, for example, you're forced by somebody to kill, you do it, but you regret it. Or you think of a woman who's forced into prostitution by economic conditions, although she doesn't want to behave in that way. It's not going to have a definite result. This works for both positive and negative actions, if we regret the action afterwards. This is why it is important when we've done something positive, to make sure we don't regret it. And to make sure we dedicate it. It's easy for some regret to come in. For example, you felt an impetus to give somebody something. "Oh, I really want to give somebody something." You feel very good about it and you do it. But afterwards, you think, "Why did I give them that for? And now, I don't have it."

We've all done that, haven't we? We kind of destroy the good karma. We have to be careful not to regret our positive actions. Another example: maybe you felt a little tired before you came to teachings. You thought, "Yeah, OK, I'll go to teachings." And you came, you felt good and you enjoyed it while it was happening. After the session, again you felt

totally wiped out and said, “Oh, why did I go? I should have just gone home and go to bed.” Regretting a positive action is very easy to do.

[Audience: inaudible]

I think all the different kinds of regret are going to have some kind of effect. If you regret an action, you are diminishing that karma. Later on, if you again rejoice about it, you create good karma through the rejoicing. But I think you still lose something by initially regretting it. [Laughter.]

Some people think, “I can do a negative action and then I’ll just purify it afterwards.” “I’ll regret an action and I will ‘un-regret’ it later.” That’s like saying, “Well, I can break my leg and put it in a cast and it’ll be okay afterwards.” It’s never quite the same. It is better not to break your leg in the first place.

[Audience: inaudible]

Yes, and there is also no determination to avoid it in the future. You’re not going to have full purification. The most important thing to do in purification is to generate regret. Sometimes when we do purification, we don’t do it with true regret, we do it with the kind of mind that says, “I should feel bad for doing that.”

[Audience: inaudible]

If you have a criminal who sees nothing wrong with killing, how is that person ever going to go back to

live in society peacefully? They have no regret. There's no determination to change in the future. It is the same with us. We may not be criminals. But if we have deeply ingrained bad habits that we don't feel any regret for, it's going to be hard to change our ways. The mind will get more and more obscured.

I think what's most difficult for us, especially at the beginning, is to admit our mistakes. I think there's something in us that feels, "Well, if I admit that I was wrong, it means I'm a horrible person." There's just too much fear involved in admitting our mistakes. Somehow we're afraid of ourselves. We're afraid of our own judgmental mind. "If I admit that it was a mistake, then I must be a horrible person." We pile up the rationalizations, justification and all this kind of stuff. But meanwhile underneath, we feel confused, edgy and unresolved.

It is good if we can get ourselves to the point where we say, "OK, I made a mistake. But that doesn't mean I'm an awful person. That doesn't mean I'm evil, sinful and condemned to hell for eternity." We don't have to let our judgmental mind be like a huge ocean-wave crashing over us. We can be more honest about our mistakes, which will bring us a tremendous sense of relief. When we try not to look at our mistakes, we have to spend much more energy doing that than if we honestly look at our mistakes and clean them up.

[Audience:] Sometimes, what stops me from doing a virtuous action is that people might take advantage of me.

It is interesting that we have this feeling that if we act virtuously, we're going to be taken advantage of. This permeates our culture, doesn't it? If you're a nice guy, look out, because other people are going to trample on you. One part of our culture is saying, "Be nice, it's Christmas time", and the other part is saying, "Don't be nice because you're going to get taken advantage of." We get caught in a lot of these culturally learned attitudes. What we need to do is think, "What do I believe? What do I feel is virtuous to do? It is not what other people tell me to do so that I will not be taken advantage of. What really do I believe in? What are my standards?"

[Audience: inaudible]

If you're doing civil disobedience for ethical reasons, I think it can be quite powerful. Suppose you had a society like Nazi Germany, and let's say you were one of the people who realized that millions of people there were getting killed. You decided not to go along with the army, not to pay the taxes and not to follow the laws because your doing so was leading to millions of people being killed. You did acts of civil disobedience. In this case, I would think you were acting ethically. Whereas if you knew that people were destroying other people's lives and you went along with it, putting your head in the ground ...

[Audience: inaudible]

It's not just a matter of public opinion. Some people would say, "Yes, we're acting very ethically. We're

killing everybody who's not white." That might be their ethical standards. But I don't think that it deserves the name 'ethics'. It's not just a question of 'my own personal belief'. But rather, you look at the ten destructive actions and the ten constructive actions. If within that, you can find the basis for whatever you're believing in, then you know you're on the right track.

[Audience:] Somebody is forced to join the military, and he's not inclined to kill people. But if he doesn't kill people, he will be killed.

I think there's definitely some negative karma involved in his killing others, but it's not going to be as heavy as that of a person who says, "Rah, rah, I'm going to enlist. I'm going to kill as many people as I can!" The motivation is totally different. Completely different. That's why even within a large group of people, every single person within the group is going to create a different karma according to their motivation.

3. Actions that were intended but not done

These are actions that you intend to do but you don't do them. These would not be definite karma.

Let's say you intend to do an action but you ask somebody else to do it for you. You didn't do it personally. But because you ask somebody to do it, you do get the karma from that. Remember we mentioned before that if I go and tell somebody else to kill, steal or lie on my behalf, not only do they get

the negative karma of doing it, but I do as well. This could be a definite karma. We intend to do it, but we tell somebody else to do it for us, and then we rejoice after it's done.

[Audience: inaudible]

You go to India on pilgrimage and I ask you, "Please take this money and offer it to the beggars at Bodhgaya." I had the intention but you did the action. It would be a definite action in this case. It's a good thing to do. When we ask other people to do positive things on our behalf, it is good for them and it is good for us. That's very often what our teachers do. I have observed that my teacher is always telling one person to go build a stupa, someone else to build a Dharma center, another to print books, and so on. He can't do it all on his own, but I'm sure he gets a lot of good karma because he's coordinating everybody else's efforts in this way. We have to be careful what we tell other people to do.

[Audience: inaudible]

I don't think anybody has done very much with this because many of these issues are only arising more strongly as Buddhism comes to the West. Things that are issues for us were not issues in ancient India or Tibet. But they're coming up now and we have to think very hard how to apply the teachings. There is a lot of discussion within the Buddhist circles about the ethics of various issues.

If we think about karma in the light of our own

culture and the issues that are strong in our society, karma and our Dharma practice are going to become very alive for us. We will also get much more insight on how our own mind operates as well. It is good to discuss issues amongst yourselves. There aren't clear-cut answers to many of these issues.

We're used to, "Let's have a law that tells us what to do." "Euthanasia is good." "Euthanasia is bad." How about saying that it depends on the motivation? It depends on the circumstance. It depends on whether the person who is doing it—whether they have clairvoyance or not, whether they are a bodhisattva or not. We always want a nice, simple answer: "Do this." "Don't do that."

And yet, whenever we get a "Thou shall do," or a "Thou shall not do," we hate it! We can't stand black and white extremes, but another part of us is wishing everything was black and white. [Laughter.] What we're coming to, is the more we understand things in a deep way, the more we see how many different factors come together to make something the way it is. We have to think about all these different factors, many of which are internal factors. Two people might be doing exactly the same action, but one is creating negative karma and the other is creating positive karma. But we want some kind of computer that will measure it all and tell us what's going on.

Another kind of action that is intended but not performed is when we rejoice at other people's actions, whether positive or negative. Through our rejoicing, we're having an intention, although we may not do the action itself. But this karma can be quite powerful. Remember when we went through the

Seven Limb Prayer, we were saying how rejoicing was a lazy person's way to create good karma. You don't have to do anything except lie in bed and rejoice. Effortless—physically effortless. Mentally, however, it is quite difficult. If we rejoice in other people's constructive actions, then we share in it. We create a lot of good karma.

Similarly, if we read a piece of news in the newspaper and we say, "Ah, I'm so glad they caught that," we accumulate the karma from that too, even though we didn't do it ourselves. It's intended but not done.

Now, it's very interesting when we talk about dreams. What happens if you dream that you killed somebody? Is it intended? Is it done? What do you think?

[Audience:] It could be a symbolic dream, where it is not really the action of killing.

Let's say it isn't a symbolic dream.

[Audience:] It depends on the outcome of the dream.

You mean if the person in your dream dies or doesn't die in the dream?

[Audience:] Yes, or if you wake up before it happens.

If you dreamt that you killed somebody, they died in your dream, and you didn't wake up before they die, is it a negative action?

[Audience:] I don't think so. It'll be negative if you wake up and you say, "Yeah! Good!" [rejoicing at the death].

What they say in the text is, if you killed somebody in your dream, there is no object, therefore you didn't really kill anyone. If you wake up afterwards and you say, "Oh, that was only a dream, but I don't want to ever do that," then actually you're putting a positive imprint in your mind because you're making a positive determination not to kill anybody. But if you wake up from your dream and you say, "Oh, that was only a dream. Too bad!", then actually you do create negative karma. It's interesting. There might be some intention before we fall asleep, but the real thing that determines whether it's an intended action or not is our attitude upon waking.

[Audience: inaudible]

At the same time that you're thinking, "I want to kill somebody," part of your mind is saying, "This is just a day-dream. I have no intention of acting this out." This is quite different from thinking about killing somebody and feeling, "Oh, this is a pretty good idea." In the former case, there will be some negative karma involved. You are having malicious thoughts, but the maliciousness (one of the ten destructive actions) isn't a full one because you're not actually thinking of doing it. You're not actually planning how to do it. But you're not sitting there wishing the person well either. There is definitely going to be some negative imprint on the mind.

We can see with all of these that so much depends on our internal processes, whether we're regretting it when we think about it, whether we're thinking we're going to act on it, or whether we're thinking we're not going to act on it.

I suppose it could be the same when we're making offerings. We do the mandala offering where we offer the Buddha everything in our visualization. If you're doing it and you're thinking, "Oh well, I'm sure glad this is a visualization, because I don't want to really offer my body, wealth, enjoyments and friends." You're probably getting some positive karma, because at least you're training your mind in the attitude of giving. But you're not going to get the full positive karma since in your heart, you're not truly giving.

This is why we do the prayers over and over again. I think most of the time we're really glad that all the generosity is a visualization [laughter] By making offerings again and again, by visualizing the whole sky full of offerings again and again, we might eventually get ourselves to the point where we want the generosity to be real.

[Audience: inaudible]

I think in lucid dreams, it certainly involves the creation of karma. If you're lucidly dreaming and you actively know what your intention is, or you're actively intending it, then even though you may not have the object (because it still is a dream), your intention process is much stronger.

By the way, the last three of the ten destructive actions—coveting, maliciousness and wrong views—

can never be actions that are intended but not performed. These three are all done mentally at the level of motivation. As soon as they're completed, you have intended and performed the act.

[Audience:] I have malicious thoughts about my boss, but there's no real wish for any of these to happen to her.

This will not be a complete action of maliciousness. A complete action of maliciousness is not just the negative thought alone, but includes following the thought, planning and coming to the conclusion, "I'm definitely going to carry this out." We have lots of negative thoughts floating through our mind all day long. They definitely have some karmic effect, but they aren't complete actions of maliciousness. They also have some kind of effect on our mind right now. As we go through the whole day thinking negative thoughts, it becomes much easier to make them full-blown ones. Also you may get into a bad mood, and tend to be more short-tempered, and so on.

4. Actions that were neither intended nor done

An example of this is when you were driving your car and you almost accidentally hit somebody, but you didn't hit him. Here, there's no intention and there's also no action. We didn't kill a person.

Another example is when you plan to engage in an unwise sexual behavior. You planned it but you didn't do it. You regretted it and you purified it. Here you've taken the intention away.

Another example would be if you intend to offer some money to a Dharma center or to publish Dharma books, but you forget about it or change your mind. You don't have the intention and the positive action isn't done.

Collective and Individual Karma

Another classification of karma is collective karma and individual karma. As a group of sentient beings on this planet, we have some collective karma. That is, karma that we have created as a group, sharing this environment together. Within that huge collective karma, we have smaller chunks of collective karma. We have collective karma with the people in America we're living with here right now. We have collective karma with our family. We have collective karma with each other because we're doing things together here. There are different levels of collective karma.

We also have individual karma. We all individually act and receive our own individual results. We can be accumulating both types of karma at the same time. Right now we're accumulating collective karma. We're engaged in a virtuous action together as a group and we're intending it. At the same time, we're all creating our own individual karma. One person might be thinking, "Oh, I'm so glad I'm here. This is really good. I'm glad I'm doing virtue." Another person might be saying, "Oh, this is so boring. I wish I could go back to Häagen-Dazs." Within the collective karma, we're each going to create our own individual, personal karma too.

Like I was saying, in the case of Rinpoche's visit, we definitely had some karma as a group. It was a powerful karma because Rinpoche's attendant, Roger, was telling me Rinpoche had received many invitations from his centers here, but he didn't accept any of those invitations. He accepted ours. We had somehow created the karma for Rinpoche to come. But some kind of obstacle happened later and Rinpoche's visit was canceled.

[Audience:] When you talked about collective karma, I was thinking we probably don't have very good collective karma because Rinpoche didn't show up.

Well, it could have been. Our karma probably could have been improved. We got so far, but we couldn't make it through the rest of the way. I had written to Rinpoche requesting that he confer the Chenrezig empowerment. I had specifically mentioned that we had done Nyung Nay and that we had been doing the Chenrezig practice. Roger said that when people are practicing sincerely and honestly and want to purify through doing Nyung Nay, then, of course, Rinpoche wants to aid as much as he can. We definitely had some collective karma there. But not quite enough. Either that or some kind of obstacle came in between.

[Audience: inaudible]

This is a very good point. So much depends on how we view an experience. If you're thinking, "Wow, I learned a lot about myself. I saw this moment of flurry and excitement and I saw the disappointment. I saw

my mind get wrapped around something, but I also saw myself, like other people, pitching in and helping. Even though this experience didn't turn out as I had expected, I nevertheless learned a lot about myself. It was very valuable for my practice because I learned from the event." That's a very good attitude to have. You learned a lot from it.

[Audience:] We got the articles written by Rinpoche that we would probably not have gotten if not for this opportunity.

Yes. You didn't get the empowerment, but you got a few of Rinpoche's articles. People who had never met Rinpoche remembered reading things by him and photocopied them for the whole group. To me this was incredible. It was remarkable. Many people benefited from this. This is how we benefited from the visit—the non-visit! [Laughter.]

Also, as a group, we were working together a lot. Out of the goodness of their hearts, people came to help out with all sorts of various little things. As a group, we learned a lot too.

Let's sit quietly.

CHAPTER 14

Specific Aspects of Actions and Their Results

After thinking about the general aspects of cause and effect, we are now going into the second major division—thinking about the specific aspects of actions and their results.

Here, I will cover:

- What are the eight favorable qualities for Dharma study and practice?
- How to utilize these qualities properly?
- What are the virtuous actions (the causes) leading to a human rebirth with these qualities?

As I explain each of the eight qualities, I will also talk about the benefits and the causes. Some points in this section can be a little bit controversial. I should preface this by saying that these eight qualities are not necessary conditions for becoming enlightened. We already went through the precious human life, giving the conditions that are most conducive for Dharma practice.

These eight qualities are like frostings on the cake. They are not necessary for Dharma practice or enlightenment. But because these eight qualities give us certain “societal power”, they help our actions to benefit others more. They aid in the practice of the Dharma, making progress more rapid. They are not

necessary, but they are nice to have if you can have them.

Long Life

I think most of us can see that if we have a precious human life, it would be nice to have a long one. It is very advantageous, giving us a greater amount of time to study and practice. It beats growing up to thirty—dying, being born, having to go through childhood and teenage years again—and then not having much time until you are thirty again.

The Tibetans actually say that if you live a virtuous life, it is good to have a long one. If you are not living a virtuous life, it is better to have a short one—less time to create negative karma. [Laughter.]

The long life helps us to have more time to practice. It gives us an extended period of time to get to know others and to establish relationships and be of benefit to them.

How to get a long life?

- Abandon killing
- Save other people's lives
- Give others food
- Give medicine to the sick
- Nurse people
- Release prisoners

In my humble opinion (my teachers might disagree), there are cultural elements in some of these causes. The scriptures often talk about how wonderful it is to

release prisoners. I have a feeling that is because in ancient times, many people were imprisoned unjustly. The king had so much authoritarian power that somebody could just go into a village and arrest people they did not like and torture them.

So, in those days, releasing prisoners probably meant releasing innocent people. In our days, I think it could mean something else. But when we talk about this whole idea of prisoners in Buddhism, I think the basic thing is that imprisoning people with a wish to get revenge and to punish them is a negative action. In other words, it is the wish to harm somebody else that is negative. That does not mean that you never imprison people.

Obviously, if people are going to hurt other people—creating negative karma and sending themselves to the lower realms—you can, out of compassion, protect them from circumstances whereby they are going berserk. Then, you are doing both them and their potential victims a favor. But you have to do it with a good motivation.

It is very important that if you have these eight conditions, you have to have a good motivation to accompany them. Any of these eight qualities, in and of themselves, are not virtuous. Any of them can be misused.

Take the example of a long life. If you are living a virtuous life, a long life is great. If you are living a very destructive and harmful life, a long life is not good. It is not a quality that benefits you.

Sound, Attractive and Healthy Body

Having an attractive body makes people attracted to you. Being attracted to you, they would have faith in you and like you. So, you can influence them and be of benefit to them.

You might say, “But isn’t wanting to have a nice body the eight worldly dharmas?” Well, if you want that out of attachment, yes, it is. If you want a beautiful body simply because you are attached to good looks, definitely it is one of the eight worldly concerns.

However, what we are talking about here is a positive attitude and a wish to benefit others with an attractive body that is used properly. If you are outrageously ugly, people who have their own confusions and their own “junk” are not going to want to be around you.

It does not mean being attractive makes you a good person and being ugly makes you a bad person. It just means that in terms of other sentient beings’ prejudices and preconceptions, having an attractive body makes people attracted to you and have more faith in you. There is no logic to it. We’re living in a world with sentient beings who have prejudices and preconceptions. It helps if you are reasonably good looking because people like to be around you so you can help them better.

What are the causes for having an attractive body?

The principal cause is patience. What does your body look like in this lifetime when you are impatient and angry? It does not look very attractive. When you are angry, it shows in the body right away. It creates the karma to have a body that is not so attractive in the future. But if you are patient, you have a very

nice expression in this lifetime. It creates the cause to have an attractive body in future lifetimes.

- Offering light and food to the Triple Gem
- Publishing Dharma books
- Building or repairing statues and stupas (monuments with relics inside)
- Offering clothes to statues (different clothes are often put on the statues)
- Giving other people clothes and ornaments

I should add here that the Tibetans, particularly in terms of building statues and making paintings, emphasize the importance of doing it properly. If you paint a very unattractive-looking Buddha statue (poor artistry since the Buddha can never be unattractive), it could create the cause in future lives not to be so attractive. They emphasize that when you are doing this kind of artwork, you have to do it properly. When one makes something or someone else beautiful, one creates the karma for oneself to be attractive.

Good, Reputable Family

If you are born in a reputable family, you have a lot of social status. And I think this is especially true in Asian cultures. Americans have this big deal about equality, so my guess is, this is probably not as important in America. However, you can certainly see that if one of the Kennedy kids became a Buddhist, it would have a big effect on people.

What people in high-class families do affects other

people, because it is easier for them to get publicity. News about them is more widely known. If you have a lot of social status, people know about what you are doing.

They respect what you are doing, not necessarily because you are good or bad, but because you have high status. That is why a condition like this is so dependent on having a good motivation. If you have a lot of social status and you abuse it, it could be very harmful.

If you are practicing Dharma and you come from a family that has status, then you can use that in a beneficial way with a good motivation. You can influence people. They will listen to you and heed your advice. They will think you are competent.

How to create the cause for this?

- By being humble, abandoning arrogance and conceit.

Do not be proud of your education, your social class, your ethical conduct, your wisdom, your clothing, your income.

- Respecting others who are worthy of respect.

This includes making prostrations to the Triple Gem and generally being helpful and humble to others.

- Helping people who cannot help themselves.
- Having a mind that is open to seeing value in other people, instead of walking around thinking, “Here I am. Why don’t you treat me properly?”

This is *me*.”

That kind of attitude creates karma for rebirth where people tend to look down on you. Whereas, if one has a humble attitude and respects others, it creates the cause to be reborn in a family where people look up to you.

This does not mean that people born into lower class families are bad, or that lower class families are bad. We have to be clear here, that we are not looking down on anybody.

Look at His Holiness. He was born into a peasant family. Now, his family is part of the Tibetan aristocracy. Everybody listens to them. But if their son had not been His Holiness, (actually there were two other sons in the family who were Rinpoches), or if their children were not recognized as reincarnated lamas, that family would have no power. They were just a very simple peasant family.

Certainly, people from simple families can become very great Dharma practitioners. And I wonder: If somebody is born into a simple family, who then becomes a great Dharma practitioner, would that person in some ways benefit people more? Everybody else can look at that person and say, “Wow! Look how much they overcame in their Dharma practice. If they can do that, I can do that too.”

For instance, there was an illiterate farmer in Thailand who became an arhat. Now, he is very revered in Thailand. The people are very excited that this uneducated and illiterate person became an arhat. It makes people more enthusiastic, thinking that if this simple farmer could do it, they could do it too. So, I

think in some cases, a bodhisattva would take rebirth in a simple family to act as a good example to others. I think that is probably what His Holiness did.

Wealth, Good Reputation and Many Friends

If you have a worldly motivation for this, it just becomes a worldly concern. So, it is important to have a good motivation and to want these not for one's own benefit but simply because it enables you to contact more people.

If you are wealthy and you have more money to give, you will of course have more friends. If you give things to people, they will like you. I have seen many Dharma students in the East, who feel wishy-washy and are travelers in the circuit. They just happen to meet one of the teachers in a personal interview and the teacher gives them a chocolate bar or a book or something else. All of a sudden, they think, "Wow! They gave me something! This is really important." And that makes them more open to listening because they feel somebody cares for them.

When we are trying to influence others and lead them on the path, one of the ways to show our intention to help them is by giving them things. Because in ordinary societal language, giving people things means you care about them, and then people will be more receptive to listening to the Dharma.

You can see this even with your friends—that sometimes your friends are more open to you explaining a little bit about Buddhism than they would be to me or even to His Holiness. Because they know

you, they trust you. So, by having a life where you have many friends, many more people are apt to listen to you.

In the West, it is almost exactly the opposite from the East. In Singapore, I saw kids who are interested in the Dharma, bringing their parents in. But, in the West, our parents are sometimes more willing to listen to a friend or stranger than to us.

My parents had a hard time accepting that I was ordained. When I was living in Hong Kong, they came to visit. The people who had the Dharma center, where I was teaching, had a very big business in Kowloon. They invited my parents out to lunch at a very nice hotel, and took them to downtown Kowloon and up to the office with all the computers. All of a sudden, my parents looked at Buddhism completely differently. They thought, “Oh, there are all these really intelligent people. It is only our daughter who is a little bit flaky.” [Laughter.]

So, sometimes, people who are not related can say things we cannot say. This example also shows that by having some kind of wealth, it can influence people in a good way when used properly.

What are the causes for wealth, good reputation and having many friends?

- Being generous to the poor
- Helping others when you really do not have to
- Making offerings to the Triple Gem
- Repainting statues and offering them clothes
- Meditating on love
- Generally, being a charitable and generous person

- Eliminating misunderstandings

All these causes create the reasons for other people to like us now and in our future lives.

Honest and Credible Speech

If we are honest, then others believe us. And this is important when teaching the Dharma. If other people do not believe us, we can teach all the precious things but people are not going to practice it.

It is important to take care of our speech so that people find us trustworthy and will put into practice what we suggest. If our speech is sloppy, deceptive or deceitful, then even this life, people would not listen to us and it would be difficult to benefit them.

What are the causes for honest and credible speech?

- Abandoning the four destructive qualities of speech
- Keeping to our word

If we say we are going to do something, we should do it. If something happens and we cannot do what we say we are going to do, we should say we could not do it.

Often, we get into situations where we tell somebody we are going to do something, then we realize that we cannot do it. We are too embarrassed or ashamed or in a hurry to tell the people that we cannot do it. We leave them sitting there, still

counting on us. They trust us, and we don't come through for them. Then they lose trust and confidence in us.

So, in this life, and also to create the karma for future lives to be trusted, it is important to do what we say we are going to do. Or, if we cannot, to let the person know so that they can make other plans.

This is really important. I am continually surprised how often this happens. I see it in myself too. Sometimes, I say I am going to do something and I realize mid-way I cannot do it. Then this feeling comes: "Oh, I don't want to tell them I can't do it. They might get mad at me." So I put it off. Then, it just builds a lot of tension. I certainly do not like it, and I do not think any of us like it, when people behave like that with us.

So, I think it is important for relationships in this lifetime and karma in future lives that we must be attentive to this.

We should also take care about what we say and how we say things to people. If we have pleasant speech, then of course people are going to listen to us. This is why I feel that communication skills are something really necessary for Dharma practitioners. We can have a motivation to help, but if we are not mindful of how we use speech, then we can unintentionally make a mess.

For credibility of speech, there is also a certain practice of blessing of speech that you can do in the morning—reciting the Sanskrit vowels and consonants, and the mantra of interdependence.

There is value in having powerful speech. When His Holiness says something, we all listen. If some guy

on the street who is known for being deceptive says exactly the same thing, we do not listen to him. This is our prejudice, isn't it?

We close ourselves off from learning from everybody, when in fact we actually could. But people do have this prejudice, so if we can work with it, and have honest speech, then when we do say worthwhile things, people will listen to us.

Strong Influence on Others

Having some kind of authority or being in a powerful position lets us influence a lot of people and get a lot done.

King Ashoka, one of the Kings of India in third century B. C., was a Buddhist king. He ruled the country by Buddhist law. He had edicts—the government rules and regulations—written on huge pillars, and they were all according to Buddhist principles. Some of these are now in museums.

With his powerful position, King Ashoka did so many good things for the welfare of many, many people. And people still study about him nowadays. You can see that if we have a precious human life where we are able to have a powerful position and influence over many people, then we can do many Dharma actions.

His Holiness is another example. He can do so much to influence others because he has a powerful position. For example, when the Tibetans became refugees, he was able to help organize them in exile and start the Tibetan Children's Village, the

monasteries and schools. He could do all these because he had that kind of position.

If we have that kind of position, it can be really helpful for benefiting others. Also, when people are grateful, they will listen to us. It is not just about putting the Dharma into a general law in the country or in your company. It is also a way of winning other people's respect so that you can influence them in a positive way.

Having a powerful position also means that when other people need help, they know that we can do something about it. So, it puts us in a position to be able to help more people. But again, we can see that in and of itself, there is nothing particularly virtuous about a powerful position. If you have a bad motivation, the power can destroy you.

What are the causes to have influence and power?

- Offering and respecting those who are worthy of it.

Interesting, isn't it? To have power, you get the power by respecting others and by following good advice.

It is important to make offerings to and respect especially our spiritual teachers, the Triple Gem, the good advice our parents give us, the good advice other teachers and people give us.

- Making sure that in this life, we do not abuse whatever power or authority or responsibility we have.

If we abuse them in this lifetime, it is difficult to have

this quality in future lifetimes.

We might not be King Ashoka but we all have some power, ability and authority whereby we can get certain things done that other people cannot. So, if we use this properly in this lifetime, it can create the cause to again have that kind of strong influence on others.

Birth as a Male

Very often, when Tibetans teach this part of the Lamrim nowadays, there are only seven favorable conditions when they teach it to Westerners. When they teach it to Tibetans, there are probably still eight. When they teach Westerners, somehow this favorable quality gets left out, I think, because they cannot handle the flak that we give them.

There are different explanations. Some people take it literally. Some people say what is referred to here are personality traits—usually associated with being male. I will tell you what the traditional teaching is, and throw in some of my own opinions.

They say that by having a male body, it is easier to live alone in a cave without problems. In old times (and still practiced in Tibet), people did retreats in caves. If you are a woman doing retreat in a cave there are no doors that you can lock at night, and so you are more vulnerable to somebody coming in and raping you. So they say, by having a male body, it is easier to live on your own because you do not have to be afraid of other people disturbing you.

They also say that you would not face the social

discrimination that women do. People think that you know what you are talking about because you are a male. And this is true even in our Western culture, isn't it? In spite of all the progress we have made in the last twenty years, basically, it is harder for people to have faith in women's capabilities.

I think they once did a study. In a plane, the pilot sometimes talks to you, and it is always a man. And they did a survey on what happens if it happens to be a female pilot. Some people were really skittish about it. "A woman flying this plane? Can she do it?" Again, you can see that there is clearly social prejudice. This is nothing to do with the reality. But our society is prejudiced. So I think this quality is considered more in terms of avoiding the prejudice of society.

They also say it is more advantageous being born male in terms of your personality traits in that you will have strong will power. You will work hard. You are not afraid to stand up for what is right, or to explain Dharma to a crowd.

My personal opinion is that it depends completely on the individual. You will meet some men who can explain Dharma in a crowd, who have strong will power, work hard and stand up for what is right. And you will meet many men who do not have those qualities. You will meet women who do have these qualities and you will meet women who do not. So, my own personal opinion is that in terms of personality qualities, this part of it does not hold.

Maybe in Asian society, it does hold. If you look at the position of women in India 2,500 years ago, it was very different from the position of women in our society today. Women were never let out of the home.

The Buddha was a total social revolutionary in letting women join the order, because aside from the Buddhists and the Jains, none of the other traditions in India at that time even allowed women to be serious practitioners.

To some extent, even now, women in India are first the property of the father, and then the husband, and then the son. There are still many arranged marriages. The parents arrange the marriage for the girls, and the girl lives in her husband's family and is subservient to the whole family. Even when she is older and rules the household, her son still takes charge of the family business.

In Indian society, women have a very, very different position from our society. So in that kind of traditional society, it is going to be much more difficult for women to practice and for people to listen to women simply because of the societal prejudice.

In our society, things are changing. They are also changing in Asia. But, often, when we hear about this favorable quality, we think it means that it is saying women have less innate ability. Maybe some of the Asians think that. Maybe some Americans think that. I am sure many Americans think that. I am sure many men think that. I am sure many women think that, too.

Self-confidence is the key

In my view, the important point is not about societal preconceptions, but our own self-image. If we have confidence, we can go ahead in the practice, whether we are male or female. If we do not have confidence, for whatever reason, based on gender or based on

anything else then it is difficult to progress along the path.

Self-confidence is a really crucial element in the path. Self-confidence does not mean pride, thinking: “I’m a big shot. I can do it!” It is a sense of feeling good about ourselves in our hearts. We like ourselves and we feel: “I have the Buddha potential, I can do something useful with my life. Even if other people criticize me, even if other people think I’m stupid, or think I’m illiterate, or think whatever they think, I know I can go ahead.”

If you have this attitude, no matter who you are, whether you are poor or rich, male or female, that kind of confidence gives you the ability to go ahead in your practice and also to be very beneficial to others.

In fact, I think that nowadays, due to the changing social conditions, sometimes women can benefit in Dharma situations more than men. This is not necessarily a good reason for selecting a teacher, but many people say, “Oh, I come to your teachings because you are a woman.” My being a woman has nothing to do with my ability to teach. But some people feel more comfortable with that. In the past, people may seek a man because he is an authority figure but, nowadays, many people seek a female teacher. But again, it depends on the person.

[Audience:] What are the causes for having a male rebirth?

Admiring the male form and masculine qualities, remembering the disadvantages of the female body, rejoicing in the Triple Gem, reciting Manjushri mantra

and a particular prayer to Manjushri, abandoning castrating animals, praying to be courageous and not being childish or calling your adversaries names.

I'm going to tell you a story that really got to me. Somebody got mad at somebody else and as a way of criticizing and putting them down, said, "You're just like a woman." And as a result, he was born as a woman five hundred times. And that's considered really unfortunate. So, don't call people names.

They also say don't call people names like 'monkeys' or 'dogs'. But we all do that when we are angry. This creates the karma to be born like the animals.

There's another story of somebody who was losing a debate with some monks and he started calling all of them different animal names. "You're like a monkey." "You're like an alligator."

One day, some monks were walking with the Buddha, and out of the water came this incredible, horrible—looking creature with eighteen heads, each of them different. The monks asked the Buddha what karma did somebody create to have this horrible kind of body. The Buddha said it was this person's incarnation.

Mental and Physical Stamina

If you have a strong body and mind, then you can endure physical hardships in practice. You can make lots of prostrations and you can do Nyung Nay, take the eight Mahayana precepts and you can do retreats and circumambulations. If you are always getting sick,

practice becomes more difficult.

A powerful body makes practice easier. If we have a powerful mind, then we would not have regrets or hesitate to work for the benefit of others. We will have the “go-forward” energy. And we can have the pleasure of working for the benefit of others.

What are the causes?

- Doing what others cannot do.

If you are in a position and have some ability to do something that people around you cannot do, help them out

- Abandoning hurting others and helping them when you can
- Making prostrations
- Carrying others’ loads and their burdens
- Not hitting others

Questions and answers

[Audience: inaudible]

I didn’t see any, but in the Vinaya, for example, the bhikshunis or the nuns are subordinate to the monks. When asked about this, His Holiness said that is because of Indian society and culture. And that makes sense to me.

Buddha already shook everybody up. He shook the men up by letting their wives out of their houses and letting some of them become nuns. If he had made them completely equal, I think the men would have

freaked out! So I think that in many regards, when you look at the Vinaya rules, the Buddha was going along the societal traditions, and I think this was one of them.

[Audience:] Is there hostility in India towards Tibetan Buddhism because the Tibetans have an open approach to women's position?

I don't think so, because the Indians are not so interested in Tibetan Buddhism. You don't find so many of them studying Tibetan Buddhism. There are a lot of them who converted under Dr Ambedkar to Buddhism in general (but not Tibetan Buddhism in particular). He was the first person from the outcaste class who became a parliamentary minister in India. He converted to Buddhism and half a million people converted with him. And now there're eight million outcastes who have converted to Buddhism because Buddhism doesn't believe in the caste system. ...

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

The Tibetans say there's no discrimination between men and women in their culture. A few Tibetans I've met are honest and admit that there's discrimination. But it's very interesting—in terms of chores around the home, the men and women are quite equal. The men take care of the kids very often, and the women haul water and chop wood. In business, if you go to Dharamsala, many of the businesses are women-owned and operated. They're the big business people in the community.

In politics and religion, there's a big discrimination. The Tibetan society is now keeping a certain number of positions open in the assembly of people's deputies for women. So, they are improving. It's certainly not half of the people's deputies, but there're a few positions reserved for women.

His Holiness' sisters have both done a lot for the community, basically because they're His Holiness' sisters, so they've been given the chance to do it. If they weren't His Holiness' sisters, I think it would be more difficult. His Holiness' sister-in-law is the one in charge of Tibetan Women's Association, which has done so much incredible good work. But again my personal opinion is that she has the opportunity to do that because she's in the family.

Tibetan society is very, very class conscious. Even though Buddhism outlaws castes, there are some castes in Tibetan society. My experience is that there has been discrimination against women. That's talking about the society and the institutions created by people.

In Buddhist philosophy, when you look into the scriptures, especially the tantric scriptures, it's very clear that men and women equally attain enlightenment. So, in terms of the potential to become a Buddha, there's no difference in terms of tantra.

In the Theravada school, they'll say something different. They'll say that in the last rebirth, before becoming a Buddha, you have to have a male body, because one of the 32 physical signs of a Buddha is the sexual organ.

However, those 32 signs of a great person also existed in ancient India prior to Buddhism. Excuse me

if I'm a heretic, but it seems to me that the 32 signs accepted in general Indian society, later got incorporated into Buddhism. The Tibetans still accept the 32 signs, but they say, "Actually no, you can become enlightened in the last rebirth in a female body." So there're different positions on this in different traditions.

I think in the Tibetan system, philosophically speaking, men and women are equal. But in terms of the institution, in terms of general Tibetan society, there's discrimination. That's my opinion. Other people might see it very differently.

[Audience: inaudible]

Yes. They always talk about mother sentient beings, specifically bringing up the female image here. Yet, there seems to be the feeling that if you're a mother, you're very attached to your kids, and that makes an obstacle for attaining enlightenment because there's a lot of attachment. So, it seems contradictory.

When they talk about mother sentient beings, one of the reasons they do that in Asian society is because usually (probably in Western society too), people generally feel closer to their mothers than to their fathers because their mothers are more involved in raising the kids. And they have more contact with the mother.

When you are a baby, usually it's your mother who feeds you, changes you, talks to you, teaches you to talk and walk, gives you cookies and milk after school, and things like that. So I think in most cultures, people have a more affectionate feeling

towards their mothers than towards their fathers. This is only a general thing. It's not true in every case. So, to evoke in people this feeling of fondness and love that they have for the principal caregiver—they say mother sentient beings.

It's interesting that when they talk about bodhicitta, they talk about motherhood—caring for all beings just as a mother cares for her only child. And, on the other hand, thinking that mothers are so attached that it's difficult for them to practice. I think they're really talking about the sacrificing attitude of mothers. They give up so many things for their kids without feeling that they're giving up anything.

I remember talking to my grandmother who raised my father during the depression, and she told me that sometimes there just wasn't very much food, and she just gave it to her kids. I could tell by the way she said it—it was no sacrifice to her. She would have been more miserable eating it herself and watching her kids go hungry.

And I remember talking to another woman who's a Dharma student, and she was saying that after she became a mother, she just watched the change in herself, that so many things that she would never do for anybody else she would just automatically do for her kid. No questions asked. No feeling of sacrifice. No feeling of pain in giving.

[Audience: inaudible]

I think that's a very good point. The tricky thing is: "How to generalize that same feeling you have for your child towards other people?" Often, that feeling

of connection and compassion gets completely focused on one sentient being to the exclusion of others. In that way, it becomes partial. Attachment gets involved.

What you said about getting in touch with that feeling of love for somebody (that you've never had for anybody before) because of being a mother, and then giving that love out to other beings, is very beneficial.

I think what they were talking about in terms of attachment being an obstacle on the path is when you take that and you just keep it focused on *my* kid. Most parents say, "My kid's the best! If my kid is going to get sick, then the school has to change. But if my kid is not in that school, I don't really care so much what that school does. What happens to other people's kids isn't so important, but my kid, it's a real big thing." That's where the attachment, the partiality, gets involved. But if you can have that same experience and then train the mind to look at every other living being with that same love, that can be very, very powerful.

[Audience: inaudible]

I think that it's extremely important, as Buddhism comes to the West, starting things fresh and new, that we bring things over on a very equal basis. Especially in translations, we should have gender-neutral language.

The Tibetans are not aware of this, and even many Westerners, surprisingly, are just not aware of this gender-bias language. When we see it, it's very good

to politely point it out to people so that it can be corrected.

I don't see any sense in bringing over gender-bias language because it does affect people. And also in terms of opportunities offered to women, in terms of establishing Buddhist institutions in the West, I think it's really important that we're quite equal.

[Audience: inaudible]

When you are a Buddha, your mind is completely beyond being male or female. Actually, even now, I think, when you sit and watch your breath, when you sit and watch your mind, can you find anything in your mind that's male or female?

The labels 'male' and 'female' are given totally on the basis of the body. When you call certain qualities male or female, they sometimes get ambiguous, because people of both sexes do have all those qualities. And when you're a Buddha, your physical form is completely a manifestation of your mind, so definitely, there's nothing male or female. If you appear in a male form or a female form as a Buddha, it's just an appearance for the benefit of others. It's not assuming an identity.

[Audience:] We are trying so hard to overcome attachment to wealth, power, fame, social prestige and all these things, and now we're talking about creating the karma to get them. So doesn't this seem contradictory?

I think this is where the motivation is so crucial,

because if you're aiming for these eight, it should not be with our usual attitude of "I want these things because they make me better. I want to be a big person so that I'll have more respect,"—doing things in a really egocentric way.

But, due to societal preconceptions, if you can be born in a reputable family, and you have good motivation and strong practice, you would be able to help people more than if you're born into a very scandalous family where your family is always in the tabloids. You might be very honest and upright, but because of the family, other people are going to have a harder time listening to you.

So this is completely dealing on the level of societal prejudices. The point is that if you want to attain these, it should never, ever be with a selfish motivation, because attachment to them is harmful for our practice.

[Audience:] Even by talking about this being a favorable thing, aren't we reinforcing that view? Talking about having wealth, aren't we reinforcing the view that wealthy people are better people? And that wealthy people should be elected to public office because somehow they're better?

I think the point in teaching this, is that we should definitely overcome these societal prejudices. They're definitely things that society has prejudices about. As individuals, we have to work to overcome that prejudice, and we have to try and help others overcome that prejudice. Sometimes, the best way to help people overcome, is to be in that position

yourself.

[Audience: inaudible]

All these eight qualities are completely empty. They're valuable just totally based on societal conception. In the last few hundred years, society is really challenging these values. Challenging all the reputable families. Look at the French Revolution.

There is a big movement in society for equality for disabled people and to let go of prejudice with regard to having a sound, handsome and healthy body. Again, being wealthy doesn't make you good. There's a lot of societal change going on because, in and of themselves, these qualities don't have value.

[Audience: inaudible]

What is gender-bias? If a man was to carry the pack in America, he gets accused of gender-bias. But in Asia, if the man carried the pack, he would be accused of gender-neutrality, because the women should carry the pack. It's the women's responsibility to carry the heavy stuff. That's not in all of Asia, just in some cultures.

If there's any kind of difficult physical or mental thing that needs to be done, have a buoyant attitude and go in and do it when you're capable of it, instead of being lazy and thinking: "I can't do it. It's too difficult. You do it". That kind of attitude creates the cause not to have a powerful body and mind because we don't have that attitude now.

CHAPTER 15

General Advice on Engaging in Positive Actions and Avoiding Destructive Ones

We are near the end of the section on ‘Karma’. If you look in your Lamrim outline you will see that we are at the section about how to practice actions and the results of actions in general. In this talk I will give you some general advice about how to put into practice all the teachings on karma we have had up till now.

Contemplating Cause and Effect

First, try and continuously contemplate cause and effect in terms of our own life. In other words, look at our present experiences, the different things we experience on a day-to-day or yearly basis and see those things in the light of the kinds of actions that we did in previous lives. We do this because it is those actions that brought about our present experiences. Similarly, look at our present actions and think about the kinds of results that they are going to bring in the future.

This relates a lot to the section that we just finished where we talked about the ten destructive actions and their different results. So now, you begin to see that you can look at the results and go backwards and see what the causal actions were, and you can also look at your actions and go forwards and see those results.

Always think about it in terms of our own life experience.

For those of you who are really keen to learn more about this subject, there is a book entitled “The Wheel of Sharp Weapons” (verses explained by Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey) that is really good. It talks a lot about different aspects of cause and effect and is very, very interesting. It is called “The Wheel of Sharp Weapons” because of the use of the analogy of a forger who makes his own arrows and bow and then winds up getting shot by the very things he himself crafted. So in the same way, we act and create certain energy and we put that energy out. That very same energy comes back and we experience it as different events that happen in our lives. That is how the book got its name.

Generating a Wish to Practice Cause and Effect

Also, generate a wish to practice cause and effect by contemplating the different results of positive and negative actions. If we merely listen to the teachings on karma and the ten destructive actions, we might just start feeling, “Oh, yeah, yeah, this is just a bunch of blah, blah, blah.” But if we start looking at it in terms of our life and in terms of what specific results come from our actions and start imagining ourselves experiencing those results and tracing those results to what we have done in our life, then it becomes very, very much alive. It then becomes something that we want to follow.

So, rather than thinking, “Oh yeah, here I am

engaging in the ten negative actions. I *should not* do this. I am *not supposed* to do it. I *ought not* to do it. I am going to go to hell because I am sinful,” we will instead have an attitude of, “Oh well, look what I am doing. This is not an isolated event in the universe. It will bring about certain results. Are these results things that I look forward to experiencing or not?” If we do not look forward to experiencing the results, then at that point we have the choice to not create the cause. On the other hand, if we can see the results as something attractive and something we would like, then we can go ahead with our decision and do whatever it is we are doing.

Extending our thinking beyond this lifetime

In the same way, in our regular life we should always check things out before we do them. If you are going to do a business deal you do not just go and buy any kind of corporate stock for instance. You look at what the results are going to be. You do not do things haphazardly but always ask, “What are the benefits?” This is the same way of thinking except that now we are extending it beyond this particular lifetime. This gets us out of the rut of thinking that all we are is this body. We are beginning to see our consciousness as a continuity coming from previous lives and going to future lives, and that birth and death are actually just major transition points, but they are not a beginning and an end.

Being mindful not to resort to justification and rationalization

So karma involves having a new view of how we fit into the universe and the results of our actions. If we begin to do this, to really take seriously our actions and their results, then we will also stop justifying and rationalizing about the things that we do. Or put it another way, as long as we continue to justify and rationalize the things we do, we are going to find it very difficult to understand and live according to cause and effect.

Psychologists often use terms like “justify” and “rationalize”. These terms essentially mean making excuses. And not just simply make excuses, but making excuses to explain what we are doing in a way that makes us happy. Here in speaking about karma, we use the terms justification and rationalization in the same way—to explain what we are doing that makes our ego happy. We use them to give us the logic to do whatever it is we have already decided we are going to do.

For instance, the mind out of attachment or anger wants to do something, and we explain the action away to ourselves in terms of karma. We think, “Well, I have a good motivation for doing this.” But in reality there is jealousy all over the place but we are not looking at it. Or we think, “This is just a little negative action.” Or maybe we think, “Well, it is a big negative action, but the people I am harming do not even know they are getting harmed. I am just ripping off the U.S. government which will not know the difference.” So we rationalize. We justify. It all comes around to this thinking of, “Here am I, the center of the universe, the most important one.” And we make up reasons to fit what our attachment and aversion have already

decided we are going to do. This is a big obstacle to understanding cause and effect.

Overcoming rationalization and justification

One way to overcome this obstacle of rationalization and justification is to spend some time just thinking about our actions and the results that they bring. Really make examples in our own life. Similarly, we can look at our present results and experiences and see what the causal actions were. This helps us get over this hump of rationalization. But do not get mad at yourself for rationalizing because that just adds more confusion.

Developing Confidence in the Buddha as the True Source of the Teachings

Another thing that is useful in making this section on cause and effect come alive is to develop confidence in the Buddha as the true source of the teachings on this subject. In other words, this subject is something that is quite difficult to understand with our limited abilities. Just as we go to an expert whenever we have some limitations in understanding something, here also, when we have limitations in our understanding of cause and effect, we rely on the expert, the Buddha. That is why when some of these sticky questions come up, I always remind you (and myself, too) of what my teachers said. They told me that in actuality, understanding all the tiny, microscopic details and specific instances of cause and effect is

much more difficult than understanding emptiness. Only the Buddha fully understands all the minute ramifications of any particular action. So we do need to rely on the Buddha's word a lot on this subject.

Relying on the Buddha's speech

Relying on the Buddha's word is something that most Westerners find difficult. There is something in us that feels a little bit edgy about believing something because the Buddha said it. This is often because we are reminded of our previous religious associations. However, we readily believe something whenever scientists say it. Remember when some scientists said they created a new source of energy called Cold Fusion? It was in the newspapers and everybody said it was fantastic. Everybody believed it. We never questioned it. We never thought that scientists make mistakes. We never thought some scientists lied on their lab reports. We trust scientists. Really, talk about blind faith! We have lots of blind faith in science.

But developing some kind of conviction in the Buddha's word is not a matter of just developing blind faith. It is a matter of checking out the Buddha's qualities, seeing if the Buddha lies or does not lie, seeing if the Buddha explains things with a good motivation or a bad motivation, seeing if the Buddha has wisdom that can see things correctly or does not have that wisdom. If we have some kind of confidence in the Buddha's qualities, then it becomes easier to believe in the things that he has explained because we recognize that he is an expert in a certain field of which we are quite ignorant. This kind of

confidence in the Buddha takes some time to develop. I think it is good to open our minds to allow that kind of confidence rather than just shutting it out.

Where we should place our confidence

This leads us to also question why we have confidence in different things such as our faith in science and faith in all sorts of things. There are so many things in this world that we take other people's word on. We never check their word to see if what they are saying is true. Look at our whole education when we were kids. Did we ever doubt what we were taught when we were kids? No, we believed it. We still believe most of it right now. Sometimes as an adult we might actually start questioning what our parents and teachers taught us. But often we do not. We just believe.

So, if we have this kind of blind belief in limited beings who are not omniscient, why do we have difficulty trusting the Buddha's speech when Buddha has high realizations? I am not saying just to believe it but the thing is, if the Buddha is an expert in this, we can take the different things he said about cause and effect a little bit more seriously than if Joe Blow says them. This helps us gain some conviction in it.

Is this making some people squirm?

Are the sutras actually said by the Buddha?

[Audience: inaudible]

You are questioning that we get a lot of instructions

from various sutras and that the sutras did not appear publicly all at the same time. The fact that some of them appeared later, is it not possible that there were things that were attributed to the Buddha that were not actually said by the Buddha?

These teachings on cause and effect you will find in the early sutras. Regarding the texts that appeared later, it is explained that the Buddha spoke these texts but the majority of the people on earth did not have the karma or the open-mindedness to understand them then.

Some people did practice the teachings in these texts, but they practiced them in small groups and the teachings were passed on orally just from teacher to disciple and never in big groups. They were kept very quiet until later on when they became more public. It is also said that some of these texts were taken to another land and kept there in a safe place until people's minds were ripe to understand the teachings of those texts. The idea of going to another land was the ancient equivalent of putting something in a safe deposit box.

About the Mahayana texts

Those texts that appeared later are mostly the Mahayana texts. The Mahayana texts speak specifically about the emptiness of inherent existence of all things. That is also spoken about in the earlier texts. It is elaborated on more completely in the later texts.

And also, the bodhisattva path is spelled out in the Mahayana texts. I think if you listen to the teachings

that appear in the later texts and think about them, if they make some sense to you then it seems like the Buddha must have said them. When you consider the teachings on the bodhisattva practice and the aspiration to become enlightened for the benefit of all beings, for me, I cannot see anything better than that aspiration, notwithstanding that everybody has a different mind. I cannot see anything that is deficient in it. So, the texts that teach that kind of thing do not make me have doubts because it seems to me that is the most noble thing in life in which you could engage.

I once asked Amchog Rinpoche this question about how we know that in the texts there are no mistakes. There are different renditions of certain texts where a particular passage may be present or absent. I asked about the people copying it down, is it not possible that they made mistakes when they were writing them, that they made mistakes when they were memorizing and passing them down? Amchog Rinpoche said, “Yes, I am sure there are mistakes. I am sure there are translation mistakes. But we may not have the wisdom to be able to figure out just what is a mistake and what is not right now.” [Laughter.]

The Buddha’s knowledge

[Audience: inaudible]

You said that the Buddha said he did not hold anything back. But the Buddha did not explain everything he knew. I do not care if you are talking about the earlier texts or the later texts, what is

written down is merely a fraction of what the Buddha knows. The Buddha only spelled out in the teachings what was essential for us to know in order to be able to practice. The teachings do not even attempt to fathom the entirety of Buddha's knowledge.

Logic, experience and faith

[Audience: inaudible]

His Holiness says that in the end, you have to rely on logic and on things that make sense to you and not just on faith. If things can be proven logically, or can be proven by your own experience, you have to rely on that. For the things that we cannot prove logically and we do not have the capability yet of experiencing, then we have to rely on the word of somebody who knows more than we do.

So for instance, we may rely on scientists who tell us things we do not know and if we train in Science we could verify what the scientists say. Similarly, we may rely on the Buddha for things we do not know and if we practice the path, we will be able to verify through our own experience whether what the Buddha said is true or false. So in the end it does come down to our experience, although it may be something we cannot experience right now.

We often use the criteria of, "If it says what feels good to my ego and is what I already believe, then it is true. If it says something that makes me feel uncomfortable and something I do not agree with, then it is obviously wrong." At some point we have to check things out and see how they feel to us. But I

think it is good to always remember that our understanding is limited and leave some space in there to alter our thinking.

I think the basic thing is to try and understand things as best as we can. Feel free to doubt what you doubt. Feel free to not understand what you do not understand. There are lots of things I do not understand and lots of things I doubt. I ‘quarrel’ with my teachers all the time. We have nice debates together. And so, in the end it comes down to each of us figuring it out for ourselves. But that does not mean throwing something out simply because we do not understand it right now and cannot perceive it right now.

When In doubt

[Audience: inaudible]

That is very true, when we put our mind to it we can find fault with anything. I think what really helps is to always come back to the point of what it is that makes sense to us. Why did we get involved in this in the first place? Why are we continuing on? There is obviously something that the Buddha said that touched our heart. And if you come back to that and that major impact that the Buddha had on your life, then you feel much more connected to the Buddha and it becomes easier to hear the teachings.

Understanding Emptiness Helps Us Understand Cause and Effect Better

Understanding emptiness can help you to understand cause and effect better. This is a very important point to remember because some people hear a little bit about emptiness and they think emptiness means nothingness. They may think, “Oh, well, if everything is nothing and everything is an illusion, then actions have no effects.” Sometimes you hear people say, “There is no good. There is no bad. There is no right. There is no wrong.” Sometimes you even hear this in Buddhist teachings. But we have to correctly understand this. If we misunderstand it, our incorrect understanding becomes poison to us. Emptiness does not mean that things nihilistically are non-existent.

Emptiness does not negate cause and effect in any way. In fact, if you have a real understanding of emptiness as the lack of inherent existence, then you understand cause and effect much better. If your understanding of emptiness makes you think that there is no cause and effect, your understanding of emptiness is not right. This is very, very important to understand.

It is important because if you understand emptiness correctly and understand that things do not have an inherent nature, then things must arise due to causes and conditions. And if they do arise due to causes and conditions, then there you have the functioning of karma.

If things are empty of inherent existence, they do not have their own solid self-nature and they must arise out of causes and conditions. If they arise out of causes and conditions, then actions have results and our experiences have causes.

If instead things were indeed solid and existed in

and of themselves with an intrinsic essence, if they were inherently existent, there could be no functioning of cause and effect. Everything would automatically have its own inherent nature that it got without depending on anything else. And if things did exist without depending on anything else, then there is no way cause and effect could work.

If things were inherently existent, you would have to conclude that there is no cause and effect. People who do not understand emptiness correctly often think the opposite. They think that if things do not have inherent existence, there also must be no cause and effect. This is incorrect understanding.

The Buddha's comments on emptiness and cause and effect

When the Buddha said that there is no good and there is no bad, people with incorrect understanding take that as literal. They might think, "Oh, there is no good, there is no bad so I can kill somebody. I can do whatever pops into my mind." Basically that thinking is how we have always lived our lives ..."(there is) no good, no bad, it does not matter what I do."

The Buddha did not literally mean that there is no good and no bad. What he meant was that there is no inherent good and no inherent bad, no inherent right and no inherent wrong. In other words, things do not become good or bad, right or wrong, constructive or destructive because of their own self-nature. They only become good or bad because of their relationship to other things.

Remember at the beginning of this Lamrim section

when I started talking about karma and I spoke about the way we distinguish constructive from destructive actions in Buddhism? Remember I said that the only reason killing is called a destructive action is simply because its result is painful? In other words, anything that has a painful result we label that cause a “destructive action”. Anything that has a happy result in the long term, we label the cause a “constructive action”. Things are only constructive or destructive, right or wrong, good or bad in terms of how they fit into the whole relationship with other phenomena. This is incredibly important to understand.

Instant understanding of emptiness?

Often nowadays people very quickly think they have had experiences of emptiness when they first begin to practice. It seems that it is really glamorous to think that you understand emptiness. When I was a beginner in Buddhism, I remember some of my own experiences in meditation and how I thought, “Oh wow, now I am getting it!” In those days Lama Yeshe used to have some of the older students give talks to everybody. And so when I was a young student I thought, “When I become an old student, I am going to give a talk about emptiness because I really understand that well.” [Laughter.] It is very easy to think you understand emptiness when you do not. That is why we always have to stay really grounded in cause and effect and never see emptiness as contradictory to cause and effect.

Illusion versus being like an illusion

Many people do not listen properly. They say phenomena are illusory, or phenomena are an illusion. Buddha did not say everything *is* an illusion. Buddha said everything is *like* an illusion. There is a big difference between being an illusion and being *like* an illusion. Just like there is a big difference between real chocolate and being like chocolate. That is a big difference. [Laughter.]

So some people misunderstand and say, “Buddha said everything is an illusion, that means nothing exists, that means I can do anything I want because nothing exists.” This is completely incorrect understanding.

Things are *like* an illusion in the sense that phenomena appear to exist in a certain way. But they do not actually exist in that way. For instance, you are in Disneyland and you look and see a ghost sitting next to you. That ghost is a hologram. It appears to be a real ghost, but it is not. But there is still the appearance of a ghost next to you. You cannot say that there is nothing there.

In the same way, phenomena appear to exist solidly and inherently, but they do not. However, that does not mean that they are non-existent. So if you go to the extreme of denying all existence and think everything is non-existent and an illusion, then you also deny cause and effect and that is really, really dangerous.

If you deny cause and effect, you completely take out the underpinnings for any kind of ethical code. If you deny ethics then the society falls apart. Witness what happens all around us. Why is our society having so many problems? If you closely look at it

you see that it is a matter of ethics. All the problems that we read about in the newspapers basically happen because people do not abandon the ten negative actions.

Being Mindful in Daily Life

Here is another piece of advice. After you know the difference between constructive and destructive actions and after you learn about what makes something a neutral action or what makes it a constructive one, try and be mindful and alert in your daily life and put that awareness into practice. Become aware of what we are saying, thinking and doing.

For instance you can ask yourself, “What is my motivation for doing what I am doing? Is it a good motivation? Do I need to change my motivation? If I change my motivation, can I still do the action?” Or “If I change my motivation, will I lose interest in doing the action?”

Transforming our motivation

Maybe we are doing something like washing the dishes, sweeping the floor, washing the car or taking out the garbage. Ask yourself, “What is my motivation here?” If it is a neutral motivation, can you transform that into a positive motivation? Start asking yourself things like, “What can I think about while I am doing this action? How can I do it so that my motivation can be transformed into a positive one?”

Remain mindful during the day of what is happening and try to apply cause and effect to our life in a way that allows us to really use cause and effect in every circumstance.

Developing the Conviction to Not Act Negatively

Also, try to develop and increase your conviction to not act negatively. If we have more conviction in this, then even if other people try and encourage us to act harmfully, we will not do so. When we have a real deep conviction about actions and their results we become more immune to pressure from our peers.

Also, a deep conviction about actions and their results affects our attachment to reputation. If we are really attached to our reputation, then peer pressure can easily affect us and cause us to act negative. But if we have a very strong conviction about actions and their results and wish to not act negatively, then even if people pressure us and even if our reputation seems threatened, we will not go along. We will not care because we are living according to our own ethical principles and that becomes the important thing.

I think it is a great freedom when we have the ability to evaluate inside of ourselves what is harmful, what is beneficial and act with a clear conscience and not worry about what other people think of us. Do you realize how much time we spend each day worrying about what other people think of us? Unbelievable!

Withdrawing from the world?

[Audience:] Buddhism says to not withdraw from the world. But it seems that if you really understand cause and effect, you will stop doing a lot of the things that you used to do. Isn't that withdrawing from the world?

I think that part of withdrawing is quite good. We should not get the idea that just because something exists in the world it is therefore good. We tried to find happiness in this world independent of the Dharma since beginningless time but we have yet to find it.

To withdraw from the world means to stop caring about others. If we withdraw from the world, we're leaving behind others and just going off on our own trip. But being involved in the world does not mean we do everything everybody else does. Look at this world—do you want to be involved in the same way that everybody else is involved? Pick up Newsweek magazine. Do you want to act like the people you are reading about in Newsweek? Newsweek is an excellent teaching for me about how I do not want to act. [Laughter.] I do not find a whole lot of heroes in there.

You want to live in the world but not be of the world. We do not want to be clinging, attached and doing everything that everybody else does. We can still live in the world and participate, but do so with a different motivation and different attitude, not doing things just because others do them. So what if you stop drinking? You think the world is going to fall apart if you stop drinking? You think all your friends aren't going to like you because you don't drink and

take drugs anymore? If that's the only reason they like you to start with, then you must have a really lousy personality. [Laughter.]

Look at the world today. Most people in the course of one day kill something. They may not kill a human being but most people kill an animal or kill at least one insect in the course of the day. Do you want to do that? Is that what you need to do to be able to communicate with other sentient beings? In other words, do you think that for you to be beneficial to sentient beings you have to do everything they do and so every day you have to kill something? This is not correct thinking.

The Buddha lived in the world and Buddha was of tremendous benefit to others. Twenty-five hundred years later people are still practicing the Buddha's teachings. Buddha did not kill anybody. Buddha did not steal anything. He did not drink. He did not do everything that everybody else did. Look at Jesus. Did he do everything everybody else did? It is basically because he did not that he made such a strong impact.

Measuring Our Level of Understanding of Cause and Effect

One way to evaluate and measure our level of understanding of cause and effect is to see what interests you more—this life or future lives? If you have a weak understanding of cause and effect, then this life interests you more. If you have a good understanding of cause and effect, then future lives are quite an important thing.

It involves a paradigm shift. Our usual paradigm is, “I do this because it makes me feel good now. What is important is what makes me feel good now. What else is there to life? Is this not why I am here?” As long as we live our life with that as our chief paradigm, our “A” number-one-framework with which we evaluate everything we come into contact with, then it is going to be extremely difficult to practice cause and effect because there is no space in that thinking for delayed gratification.

Delaying gratification

Psychologists talk about learning to delay gratification. Instead of doing something that makes you feel good now but in the end is self-destructive, we learn to do something simply because it will bring about a good result in the long term. Karma is the exact same thing as what the psychologists are saying, except it just goes beyond this particular body.

Through understanding cause and affect you might decide to delay some immediate gratification. You understand that doing whatever it is you are doing now may make you feel good this lifetime, but bring a lot of pain in the next lifetime. So if you delay the gratification and learn to do without this particular action now, then in future lifetimes much more happiness will come. This is the same psychological principle except that we are now looking beyond this particular body.

Questions and answers

[Audience:] If we delay gratification, won't we suffer now? Is that not psychologically unhealthy?

That depends on the attitude with which you delay your gratification. If you are doing it in the sense of self-denial, "I am going to suffer now so that I can be happy later," then that is not so psychologically healthy. But if you recognize that what you are going to do now through the delay of immediate gratification is going to bring happiness later, then it does not seem like a big suffering trip. You are quite happy to do it because you know what the result is going to be.

When you become pregnant and have a baby, going through childbirth can be miserable. But when you think of the baby that you get afterwards then you become willing to go through it. Childbirth does not seem like a horrible thing to you and something to avoid, if your mind is focused on the result of childbirth—the beautiful baby that you are going to have afterwards. So it becomes a matter of putting things into perspective and not getting into a self-denial trip. Rather, it is learning to have a balanced attitude.

I think one big problem is we have gotten so sensitive to every tiny thing that bugs us and so sensitive to any tiny thing that could bring us the least bit of pleasure that we get totally confused. You go to the shopping center and you become confused. You do not know what to buy because you do not know what is going to make you happier, a blue sweater or a green sweater. Since we want the most happiness that could possibly be, we feel we have got to make the

right choice! And we make ourselves miserable that way. Whereas, if we stop caring about what is going to make us happier, either a green sweater or a blue sweater, then even if we wear a purple sweater we will be happy.

Gratification and emptiness

[Audience: inaudible]

When we talk about future gratification it does not mean we have to suffer now. If you realize that no situation exists as inherently good, inherently bad, inherently painful, inherently pleasurable, etc., you can give up some small pleasure and the experience can be transformed right now into a happy one. So when we talk about delayed gratification, it does not mean you have to suffer now in order to be holy later.

Keeping ethics does not mean suffering

[Audience:] I do not think it is in people's nature to enjoy doing harmful things and so I think giving up these negative actions would not be such a sacrifice.

Yes, we are trying to give up the harmful things. It is as you said, things like killing harm us too and make us feel miserable. So it is not as if giving up killing makes us think, "I really want to do it, but I cannot now because I have become a Buddhist."

In the same way, some people think taking nuns' vows is putting yourself into this incredible prison of being frustrated all the time—"I want to do all these

things and now I cannot!” [Laughter.] Instead it is more like realizing that if you just give up the attitude that wants to get involved in that stuff, then you can be quite happy now.

So keeping ethics does not mean suffering now. It means giving up actions that cause you suffering later, that make you hate yourself now. And in that way, you begin to like yourself a lot more, right now.

[Audience:] Did it make you unhappy to give up some of the things you had to give up when you became a nun?

That is what I too grew up thinking, “Oh, all these people must be really unhappy. They cannot do all these things.” But start by looking at your own experience. Look at some of the things that you used to do that you thought made you happy and you later realized were self-destructive behavior. Once you realized they were self-destructive, you gave them up and you became happy.

So you can see from your own experience what it is like. Basically you are giving up self-destructive behavior, not because you should or ought to, but because you have finally begun to acknowledge that it is self-destructive. You realize that it is not making you happy, it is making you miserable.

It is just like when the alcoholic finally comes to realize that drinking is not solving their problems; it is creating them. Or when anybody who has any kind of addiction realizes that what they are addicted to is part of the problem; it is not a solution.

Attachment to appearance

[Audience:] Didn't you have to change your views about your long hair and why it was important to you?

The way I changed my views about why long hair was important to me, was that I imagined having beautiful long hair, more beautiful than my hair was already. Do you think I did not have beautiful long hair? I'll show you pictures! [Laughter.] So, I imagined having this really, really beautiful hair and then I thought, "O.K., I go through my whole life with beautiful hair and then I die with beautiful hair. I lie in my casket with this beautiful hair and all these people will come and say, 'Wow, she has such beautiful hair!'" [Laughter.] And I realized, "What good does that do me? If it does not do me any good after I am dead, what is the use of it when I am alive?"

[Audience:] If you had not made that transition so convincing for yourself, you would still be suffering, would you not?

I would be very worried if I had not made that transition. I would be really worried about my hair getting gray. Now, I can cut it all off. [Laughter.]

[Audience:] You had to force yourself to come away with a new way of thinking, right?

I tried to come to terms with it before I cut my hair so that when I did cut my hair I felt really good about it.

I did not think, “Oh, I should do this because I am attached to my hair and therefore I should deny myself.” It was not like that. It was more that I had done a lot of serious contemplation about what good it really did me to have long, beautiful hair. What ultimate benefit was it to me? Of what ultimate benefit was it for the sake of others? Did the fact that I had long, beautiful hair help to alleviate other’s problems?

[Audience:] What ultimate benefit is there in having short hair?

There is no virtue in having short hair. It is not the short hair that is virtuous, it is the mind that gives up attachment to your physical appearance that is a virtuous practice. That kind of mind frees you from a lot of difficulties. You could have short hair and be very attached.

[Audience:] What about clothes and robes?

Actually, at the time of the Buddha the monks and nuns wore clothes that were made from rags. They used to go to the cemetery and gather the old clothes and stitch them together. Sometimes lay people would offer nice cloth to the monks and nuns. But even if somebody offered nice cloth they still had to cut it up into patches and sew it together. If you look at my robes, they are all patches sewn together and that is quite deliberate. It is to help us not become attached to having some beautiful, new smooth piece of cloth for robes.

At the time of the Buddha, monks and nuns wore old, scruffy stuff and nobody cared. If you did that nowadays people are likely to get quite upset and think that you are really stupid and do not have anything valuable to say. One of my teachers once said, “Therefore, make sure that your robes look reasonable.” Otherwise we would look like a nineteen sixties era monk or nun [laughter] and that destroys other people’s faith. People do not have real clear minds about this stuff. They often cannot look beyond appearance at the beginning.

Recognizing the harm of attachment

[Audience:] What really matters is the mind that is attached to things. It is not about the hair and it is not about the robes. And the mind can get attached to anything, so what is to be done?

You are right. Our mind can get attached to absolutely anything. We can get attached to incredible things.

Look at pigs. Look at what they are attached to. I think it is real helpful to look at pigs sometimes because their minds are exactly like our minds. It is just that the objects of their attachment are different.

So I think the bottom line is, we have to recognize the harm of attachment. We have to recognize how attachment is like somebody pulling us along like a donkey with a rope through its nose. Attachment just leads us around and when you recognize that the attachment is what makes you bound, that gives you some inspiration not to keep buying into it.

Religion and religious abuse

[Audience:] Do you think religion can seriously warp people? Can you give an example of this?

Definitely, religion does warp people in serious ways. [Laughter.] Definitely. You want me to give an example? I can give you many examples.

I was just at a conference and there was one person who was talking about religious abuse. One example he gave was the fact that women are given away at marriage ceremonies. You never give away a man. You always give away a woman. I think that is quite destructive and an abusive use of religion. I would think that has nothing to do with what Jesus taught. But we call it religion because it belongs to an institution.

Or take the example of parents who say, “I have to beat my kid to a pulp to instill the fear of God.” This is definitely religious abuse. Making people feel guilty and making them feel horrible about themselves have nothing to do with the real teachings of the real religious leaders. These things are misunderstandings taught by religious institutions and can be quite harmful.

That is not what we are talking about here when we speak about giving up attachments. We are not trying to make anyone feel guilty, or lousy, or bad about themselves. The thing is, sometimes we look at the Buddha’s teachings through the filter of our previous upbringing and that creates difficulties for us.

Rebirth

[Audience: inaudible]

This is a difficult thing we have to deal with—not feeling convinced that rebirth exists. I think one of the big hindrances is that we are so habituated with just identifying with this body.

We do have some sense of continuity because we can imagine tomorrow and we can imagine our child growing up and we can imagine getting old. Sometimes it is hard to imagine yourself getting old, but it has been happening so far and I do not think it is going to stop. We can even imagine ourselves dying when we let ourselves. But then somehow when we think beyond this body, we start to have all sorts of doubts.

One thing that is helpful is to look at how much our body has changed. Imagine you could see your entire life and look at how you appear as a baby, as a teenager, as an adult and as a senile old person. Look at the differences in the same body. They are incredible differences. There are also incredible differences in the mental state. And yet this is all a continuity of the same person.

When we talk about future lives, it is just another change in the external appearance, another outside change. Just as the mind has been changing moment to moment to moment and as the body has been changing moment to moment to moment, that process does not stop at death. The mind is going to keep going on one moment following the next even though the body might be a different body. This makes us

think about ourselves a little bit differently than we usually do.

Responding to suffering

[Audience:] When we see the suffering of others, how do we keep from getting completely overwhelmed and discouraged and depressed by it?

This is one of the chief practices of a bodhisattva. A bodhisattva is somebody who cherishes others more than him or herself, who works to benefit others and does so with a happy mind. To have a happy mind you have to protect yourself against being discouraged.

One of the ways that a bodhisattva does this is by remembering that all beings have the Buddha nature and the potential to become fully enlightened beings. Bodhisattvas know that all the suffering happening is something that can be removed because the cause of suffering, which is ignorance, can be removed. So it is not as if suffering is something that is permanent, eternal, everlasting and overwhelming. It is something that arises from causes and those causes can be stopped. I think in that way a bodhisattva has very, very deep faith and optimism. They understand that things change and that everybody has the possibility to generate wisdom and compassion.

We get overwhelmed when we see things just in terms of the present and what is happening in the present. If you see suffering disjointed from its causes and its results, then it seems overwhelming. It seems like there is no cause, or there is no control and it is just this horrible thing. But when you start to see

suffering in the context of its causes and its results, then our mind gains some space.

[Audience:] How do we know when to help someone and when not to help?

Where is the point where we stretch ourselves? That is a tricky thing and something that is different for each person and each situation. It might not be immediately clear to us.

There is often a lot of blur in our own mind about knowing where to draw the line and say, “This is my limitation.” Or of knowing where to push a little bit beyond, which is good, or knowing when we have pushed ourselves so much beyond that, actually, we are being destructive and may be doing something with a hero mentality instead of genuine compassion. That is something we only know by looking at our own mind. We have to become real, real sensitive to ourselves. Nobody else can tell us. This is a very difficult thing.

It would be nice sometimes if somebody could tell us what our own motivations are because sometimes we cannot tell our own mind. But who can crawl inside anybody else’s mind? Maybe somebody who is clairvoyant can, but I certainly cannot.

I think in the end, even if other people could tell us, what we have to learn to do is develop that sensitivity in ourselves and learn to assess our limitations. We need to learn when we can stretch a little bit and when we are putting on a phony motivation and being a Mickey Mouse bodhisattva. And we need to learn to give ourselves the space to

make some mistakes instead of thinking we always have to be perfect.

Didn't you wish I had given another answer? Something like, "All you do is you put electrodes on and the machine will tell you your level of motivation." [Laughter.]

Let us sit quietly for a few minutes.

Does "Me First" Approach Make Us Happy?

In modern psychology, the whole emphasis is that we've got to take care of ourselves, as if we had been ignoring ourselves our whole life. Is there any of us, when we really look over our whole life, who can honestly say, "I've spent my whole life just taking care of others and ignoring myself?" Anybody here has done that? If you do, you'll get the Bodhisattva Award. [Laughter.]

But it's just so interesting. We've spent our whole life trying to take care of ourselves. We're always trying to protect ourselves from harm, trying to protect ourselves from criticism, to get as much praise and approval as possible, to fit in with other people because we want to fit in. We try and get as much material possessions as we can because that makes us feel good. We try and make our body healthy and attractive. We try and give ourselves a lot of pleasure. We want to get career advancement and high prestige.

We spend a good portion of our whole life, if not twenty-five hours a day, taking care of ourselves. And yet in pop psychology they're making it seem like we've been ignoring ourselves our whole lifetime and

so we have to get back to basics. Start being selfish because we've been too generous our whole lives. [Laughter.] But if we really look: is that our problem? Is our problem that we've been too generous? Is our problem that we've been so incredibly kind and patient and tolerant that people have taken advantage of us? Is that our problem, that we're just so incredibly forgiving that we never get angry, and so everybody just runs all over us? Is that our problem?

I think we need to start looking again at what is the path to happiness. It's true. We all want happiness. We all want to avoid pain. That's been true throughout our whole lifetime since we've been born. But up until now, have we succeeded in finding the happiness we want, and what kind of method have we used to get happiness? And if we look, we've spent our whole life trying to be happy, and we've used the method of 'me first'.

Even in the circumstances when we've been nice to other people, it's usually because then they'll do something nice for us back. Even the nice things we've done haven't been completely generous and open-hearted and free. We usually attach lots of strings and obligations to them, and if we can't control the other people enough to have strings and obligations, then we have lots of expectations.

And so we've tried to be happy our whole lives using that method, taking care of ourselves first, doing what suits us first, doing what's going to make us more accepted, most popular, most wealthy, most cared for, and where have we gotten? Where have we gotten? Have we gotten any happier?

I'm just asking questions, because I've learnt with

Americans, you can't tell them very much, [laughter] myself included. So I ask questions for us to look at our lives, to check up your own life. Where have we gotten with the whole way we've been living our lives up until now? Where have we gotten to?

So considering that we spent the whole life basically caring about ourselves and ignoring everybody else, we could, for variety's sake, try another method. We always say, change the spice of life (or something like that), don't we? We could try cherishing others and add some spice in our life. But then you'll say, "No, no, no. We don't want to do that. That's too scary. If I cherish others, what's going to happen to me? If I don't take care of myself, who's going to take care of me? If I don't make sure I'm happy, then maybe I'm going to be miserable."

This is our fear, isn't it? I've got to take care of myself, otherwise what's going to happen to me? It is a bad, mean, cruel world out there, and I've got to set up my defenses, do what I need to do to protect myself against it, otherwise it's going to overrun me. That's the way we approach life.

Learning to take care of others

And yet it's so interesting, because the more and more you get into Buddhism, what does Buddhism talk about? The benefit we've received from others. And we start looking over our whole life, from the time we were conceived in our mother's womb, how much benefit we've received from others. And when we really contemplate that very deeply, then this whole notion that the world out there is big and bad and so I

have to protect myself from it, that gets negated very quickly. Because we can begin to see how completely false it is, because when we came into the world, there was no possible way we could take care of ourselves. Nothing. We couldn't feed ourselves. We couldn't even tell other people what we wanted. We couldn't give ourselves shelter. We couldn't do anything. The whole reason we survived from the time that we were infants, is due to the kindness of other people. The whole reason we got educated, the whole reason we can speak, the whole reason we know anything at all, or can do anything at all, is because of the kindness of others.

And so our whole life, we've been the recipient of so much incredible kindness and benefit from others, and yet we perceive the world as this harmful place that we have to defend ourselves against. It's really interesting, isn't it? It's like when we really look at it, our mind is totally out of whack with the reality of the situation, because when we look at the amount of benefit we've received our whole life, compared to the amount of harm, it's like there's almost no comparison. No comparison.

Even if you take the worst, most horrible, miserable day of your entire life, and you think of the benefit you received from others that day and the harm you received from others that day, still, there's no comparison. Say, there was one day where you were beaten really badly, you were attacked and beaten. OK, that's some harm. But where did we get the food that day that kept us alive? Where did we get the medical attention that saved our life? Where did we get the moral support from other people? Where

did we get the skills that we had to cope with a bad situation? The mental skills we have—where did they come from? So even if you look at the most horrible day in your life, still, on that day, we've been the recipient of so much kindness and benefit from others.

So this whole perception we have, that the world is hostile, it's really not like that. But there's something in us that feels really scared to admit that, because it involves giving up the whole way we've organized our lives. We've organized our lives around 'I'. Solid, concrete 'me', 'I', 'my' and 'mine'. My boundaries. My likes. My dislikes. There's a mean world out there. I have to defend myself against it because it's never done anything for me except harm me. Opening ourselves up to receiving kindness from other beings just threatens that whole preconceived way of viewing our life.

I don't think the problem is that we haven't taken enough care of ourselves. It's that we've taken the wrong kind of care of ourselves. Because by approaching the world as if it's harmful, and being antagonistic and defensive and aggressive to the world, we've elicited those same kind of actions in response. It's karma, isn't it? You get back what you put out. So in our attempt to be happy, we've basically created more and more problems for ourselves. Continually blaming it on the other people, on the environment, on the government, or whatever.

And so, we've never really taken the right care of ourselves, in spite of how much we care about ourselves. We love ourselves. We want to protect ourselves. We want ourselves to be happy. In spite of all that, we've never really taken the right kind of

care of ourselves, because if we really understood cause and effect much better, if we stop to really check up what our situation was instead of just acting blindly, we would begin to see that the best way to take care of ourselves would be to take care of others. Because the selfish way of taking care of ourselves has gotten us absolutely nowhere. We have however many years we've been alive to prove that to ourselves. Look over your own life and see if what I'm saying is true or not. But how often have we tried taking care of others, and seen if that's made us any happier?

Taking care of others is something we've never really done, not really with a totally free, open heart, with no strings attached, with complete giving. If we take care of others in that kind of way, with a genuine kindness, then that actually acts as the best way to take care of ourselves, because if we start acting kindly, then that's the kind of energy we attract back to ourselves. If we frame our mind with the conceptual view that the world is a kind, friendly place, then that's the way it's going to appear in our eyes. Our whole experience comes from our own internal mind, not from outside.

So we need to learn to take the right kind of care of ourselves. That right kind of care is to care for others. We care for others not in a co-dependent, ulterior, manipulating way, because that isn't taking care of others, that's taking care of ourselves. People in dysfunctional relationships say that they spent their whole life on others. But they aren't taking care of others; they're taking care of themselves. That's the problem. The problem's that we never genuinely take

care of others.

Taking care of others means letting go of all of our own expectations, all of our own strings and conditions. All those things are what make us so unhappy, because as soon as we take care of somebody else with expectation, then of course 99% of the time, our expectation isn't fulfilled. Why? Because it wasn't realistic. We take care of others with strings attached, and then we get hurt afterwards. It's because we're the ones who put the strings there. If we didn't put the strings there, then there wouldn't be anything for the other person to break. We have control over our experience if we choose to take that control.

Negative Behavior Reflects an Unbalanced Mind

Tonight we're going to finish up the section on cause and effect. There's something about cause and effect that I think is really important to go into. I was thinking about it today. The fact that we do actions, in other words, karma, and then results come from it, it doesn't mean that we're getting punished. It's not a system of reward and punishment. And when we act negatively, it doesn't mean that we're bad people. It just means that we've made mistakes.

In spite of stressing this so much, and having it stressed to me, at times I can still see within my own mind, when I act harmfully, or create negative karma, a part of the mind that says, "Oops, you messed up again, didn't you?" Kind of, "You did something bad!" Kind of this little voice that says, "Oh, I did

something bad again. Wouldn't you know it!" And then this kind of apprehension comes, like, "I do believe in karma. I do believe in cause and effect. I just did something bad. Ai-yai-yai, what's going to happen? What's going to happen to me in future lives?" Some kind of quite uncomfortable feeling. And that really is falling very much into the Judeo-Christian paradigm again.

It struck me that instead of seeing it that way, I can simply recognize that if I have a spiritual aspiration working for the happiness of myself and others, trying to become a fully enlightened Buddha for the benefit of others, then when I notice that I've acted negatively, what that signals to me is that my mind is out of balance. That somehow, I'm not on track towards what I've decided is a really noble goal in my life. And the thing that makes me get off-track is my hallucinating mind.

Lama Yeshe used to say this to us all the time, "You think you're perceiving reality, don't you? You only think you're hallucinating when you take LSD. But I tell you, you're hallucinating now!" [Laughter.] I can't even begin to impersonate Lama Yeshe, but he really emphasized, "You're hallucinating right now!"

And so that's the thing. When we start acting negatively, it's indicative that we've gotten bent out of shape. We've begun to get involved in our hallucinations thinking that they're reality. When we act negatively, what is going on? We're usually very attached to something, or very angry at something, or extremely fearful or jealous, or very proud and wanting to make ourselves well-known. We're involved in something like that, and if we look at any

of those motivating attitudes, they're all quite out of whack. They're not balanced. They're not in tune with reality. There's an exaggeration there somewhere.

So when we're acting negatively, it's indicative that our mind is unbalanced, that we're hallucinating, and we're going further away from what we've already decided was a noble goal and a beneficial way to actualize our human potential. Rather than get angry at ourselves because we've acted negatively, we should take the negative action as like the burglar alarm going off, the warning signal going off, of "Hey! I'd better look at what's going on in my mind here. Something's out of whack." This is a really different attitude with which to approach our negative actions, instead of just, "Oh, I did it again! I'm always flopping up. I'm so negative! I'd better go do some purification!" [Laughter.]

We can think, "This is an opportunity to learn something about what's going on in my mind. This is an opportunity to stop for a minute and check up what's happening and to get myself balanced again, because if I don't get balanced, I'm going to get further and further out of whack." You can see how this happens. Something happens in our life and we get a little bit angry, but we don't take care of our anger. So then every situation we meet, we get angrier and angrier, because everybody starts appearing to us as if they're harming us and bugging us. Or we get a little bit jealous but we don't recognize it. We don't take care of it. So then everybody starts appearing in a very competitive, threatening way to us. And then we start acting our jealousy out, and then other people

get more and more apprehensive around us.

Purification helps to restore balance

So rather than just fall prey to these recurrent patterns of behavior, to stop and look, “How am I misconceiving things? How am I off-balance?” And get ourselves back and balanced again. That’s how the purification process works. This is what helps us get back in balance.

That’s why it’s advised to do some purification every evening, at the end of the day. We sit down, and we look over the day’s activities, and we check up on what went well, what needs to be improved. We do not do this in terms of “What did I get?” and “How can other people be improved?”, [laughter] but in terms of the motivation that we generated in the morning to not harm others, to be of benefit, to act in a way that will lead others and ourselves to enlightenment. Checking, and seeing what went well according to that. How was I actually able to approach enlightenment or create some of the causes for enlightenment, and then rejoice in that. Did I mess up in some way today? Are my old behavior patterns pushing me on automatic? How can I improve that?

So this is the basis for the purification practice, developing the ability to evaluate ourselves in an accurate way so that we’re no longer so dependent on other people’s approval. One of the big problems we have is we feel so dependent on whether other people like us, approve of us, and tell us how wonderful we are. If they do, we feel that we’re okay. If they criticize us, we feel we’re lousy people. And so we

feel completely dependent on other people for our own self-image, and that's basically because we've never developed the ability to evaluate our own actions in a balanced way. If we could do that, if we have our ethical standards very clear in our mind, and a good understanding of what is constructive behavior and attitudes and what are destructive behavior and attitudes, then we can begin to evaluate ourselves in an accurate way, rejoicing at what we do well, purifying when we mess up, and then we aren't so dependent on other people's opinions of ourselves.

That doesn't mean that we tune other people's feedback out. We still listen to it, but we listen to it and we check up if it's true. We don't just take it automatically as true or automatically as false, but we use this information. Only we know our own internal reality. We might act very negatively, and everybody in our family tells us we're wonderful, "Wow, you're really smart! You're so clever! You did this and that. You've got the best business deal and the IRS will never find out. You're great!" But we know our own internal reality. And if we know we're acting in devious ways, it doesn't matter what other people say.

Similarly, we might be acting with a completely kind and pure open heart, and other people might totally misinterpret what we're doing, and blame us, abuse us, criticize us. But again, if we know our reality, if we're in touch with our motivation, and we know clearly the direction we want to grow in, then even if people come and say, "What in the world are you doing? Why are you going on retreat? You're taking a week off work to go sit with your legs crossed in silence? This is your holiday? You're going

to sit in silence with aching knees? You've got to be crazy!", if you know what's good for your own mental health, you know what's good for the direction you're taking in life, then other people can tell you that you're from Mars or that you should go there, [laughter] and you don't really care a whole lot, because you recognize, of course, that's their opinion, but I know my own reality. I know what's happening in my own mind.

So this process of checking up every evening is really good for helping us to get to know ourselves, and also developing some kind of confidence in the direction to go in our life, especially when it comes to keeping ethical conduct. Because a lot of people may theoretically tell us it's wonderful to keep ethical conduct, but then when we start to and they don't like how we're acting, because we won't lie for them anymore, or we won't snitch things for them anymore, or we won't kill mosquitoes for them anymore, then they might get angry at us and start criticizing us for being so ethical—"Who do you think you are? Goody-two-shoes?" [Laughter.] And they get really upset by that. But again, if we know what we're doing and why we're doing it, then we can be a little bit patient with other people because we know that they don't have those same values. They don't understand, but we're clear on where we're going, and that's the important thing.

[Audience:] What if we check up and then start getting critical with ourselves, even to the point of hating ourselves for our negativities?

One thing that I've experimented doing, which does help, is the taking and giving meditation, the *tong-len*, where we imagine taking on the negativity of others and using it to destroy our own egoism and self-centeredness and negativity, and then giving our happiness and benefit to others. When I get into this down-on-myself thing, I try saying, "As long as I've messed up, and as long as I'm hating myself and feeling miserable about it, may this suffice for all the pain and misery of all other beings."

Being too self-critical and hating ourselves is really one of our big problems. When I think of how other people hate themselves so much, and how much pain so many people live in because of that, then I want to say, "OK, as long as I'm experiencing that, may I take that away from them." During the taking and giving meditation, when I'm breathing in the smoke, I think of taking in others' self-hatred and guilt from them, and then using it to destroy the egoism, the self-centeredness and ignorance in me. And then thinking of all the good things I have, multiplying it, making it more beautiful and more wonderful and giving them away.

The Four Opponent Powers

The four opponent powers are the four steps for purification. To completely purify an action, we need all four steps, and we also need to purify repeatedly. In other words, it's not sufficient just doing it once, because sometimes one or the other of the four powers may not be so strong. Also, we have done

some of the habitual negative actions many, many times, so it's wise to purify many, many times, to make sure that our purification really hits home. We can't just purify once if we have so much energy pushing us in an off-balanced way; we need to purify again and again to build up some force this way.

1. REGRET

Regret is not guilt

The first one is developing regret. Remember that there's a big difference between regret and guilt. Regret is very much just acknowledging our mistake. Guilt is hating ourselves because of it. It really blocks our development, because when we're guilty, we're completely revolved around 'I'. There's no space for anything else in the world, because it's very "I"-centered.

Often, guilt takes responsibility for things that aren't our responsibility. In the case of abused children, very often the children feel guilty for it, taking responsibility for something that isn't their responsibility. Or for example, your kid goes to school without a sweater and gets a cold, and then you blame yourself, "Oh, I should have told them to wear a sweater. I'm such a lousy parent! I'm guilty. It's all my fault!" Maybe it wasn't your fault. Maybe the kid next to your kid had a cold and sneezed all over your child. Guilt often takes responsibility for things that have nothing to do with us. Or if something is our responsibility, then guilt exaggerates that, and then we hate ourselves because of it. So it's quite an

unrealistic state of mind.

I think it's important in our practice, to acknowledge where we feel guilty, and to be very clear about it, and maybe even write it down. Write down the things that we feel guilty about. First of all, determine if they are our responsibility. If they aren't my responsibility, then no need to feel guilty. And if they are my responsibility, how would it feel to have regret for it rather than guilt? What would regret feel like? Do some very deep introspection, do some house cleaning this way, because guilt immobilizes us. It's very difficult to grow when we feel guilty. And there're so many things that we might just habitually feel guilty about.

I speak from lots of experience. [Laughter.] When I made the decision to become a nun, my family was incredibly unhappy. And I began to realize that the whole pattern in my life was whenever my parents were unhappy, I felt guilty about it. Why were they unhappy? Because I was a rotten kid and misbehaved. When they're unhappy because of something I do, obviously it's my fault.

The thing is just to see that kind of pattern. I just saw the same thing coming up again. I wanted to get ordained but my parents were unhappy, and miserable. I felt guilty. I felt responsible for their being unhappy. And I had to sit down and do a lot of introspection and working around with that one. To figure out what is my responsibility in this and what is their responsibility. If I'm acting with an ulterior motivation, or a motivation to harm them, and they are harmed, then I have some responsibility in it. But if I'm acting with a good motivation, and they're

misinterpreting it because of their own mental veils, that part isn't my responsibility. But it took a lot of working with this repeatedly to sort out what belongs where.

Sorting out and acknowledging our responsibilities

This first power of regret is very important, because if we don't do this sorting out in our mind between what is regret and what is guilt, and what is my responsibility and what isn't my responsibility, and if we also avoid bearing responsibility for things that are our responsibility, then our growth will be hampered.

In other words, if we rationalize and justify and push off to others things that are actually coming from us, and not do any kind of housecleaning, we'll walk around our whole life with this incredible, mental malaise. We'll just feel totally rotten all the time, feeling like we're walking on top of a sewer, and we're afraid that the thin layer separating us from the sewer is going to break. And what's the sewer? It's just all this incredible mishmash of our unsorted out feelings and our unacknowledged responsibilities, the whole cloudiness there.

Purification practice is very good because it helps us get some clarity on our issues, even though at the beginning we may not be able to be 100% clear. Sometimes we'll sit and we'll think back about things in our life, and we'll just get confused, because we can't sort out: why was I doing that? Was I acting kindly or was I acting with an ulterior motivation? Sometimes we just start thinking about it, and the mind gets confused even more. Sometimes it takes a

while to sort through things, to know that when we're working on things, there've been issues in our life from many, many years, that we work on them in layers, and in stages.

You work on them like peeling off the layers of an onion. You purify that much, you gain that much clarity. But you acknowledge that there's a whole lot of other stuff that's not clear to you yet. That's OK. We don't have to be clear overnight. So whatever we can get clear about, to feel good about that, to recognize there's a lot of other stuff there, but it's going to take time, and when our mind is ready to deal with that, we'll be able to start making headways on those things.

So you see, this is why we do purification from now until enlightenment, because it's a process of peeling away layers of the onion. We have to go into the purification process with that kind of attitude because we can't squeeze ourselves and force ourselves, "OK. Tonight in my meditation session, I am going to get my relationship with so and so sorted out, completely 100% forever!" [Laughter.] We have to work gradually and clean things out. But as we start to purify, the benefits of purifying become apparent, because our mind gets clearer, we understand ourselves better. We're quicker to catch on to what's going on in our mind, because we've spent some time examining it.

Also, when we sit down to listen to teachings, the teachings make more sense to us. That's again why I encourage a lot of purification, because otherwise, if you just listen and listen and listen to lots of teaching, but you don't try and put anything into practice, and

you don't try and purify, then after a while, either your mind's going to get tough like cardboard, because the teachings all seem very intellectual and dry to you, or you're just going to feel like it's all useless.

It takes this kind of purification, accumulation of positive potential, to keep the mind fertile, so that when you listen to teachings, something goes in. So that it doesn't just become intellectual blah-blah-blah. Because it could become so—"There're four of this and five of that, and this is the definition of this and that"—you can know all of that stuff, and yet your heart is totally like a slab of concrete. Purification and accumulation of positive potential are very important that way.

2. RESTORING THE RELATIONSHIP

The second step, I like to call it restoring the relationship. The actual translation is something like the dependent basis. What it means is when we've acted negatively, it's usually been in terms of an object, either holy beings or other sentient beings. In some way, we have damaged our relationships either with the holy beings or with the sentient beings. And so this is the process of restoring the relationships by depending on the very people that we harmed. We restore the relationships by cultivating more constructive attitudes that will act as antidotes to the destructive attitudes that we had when we harmed.

Altruism as antidote to harming sentient beings

In terms of ordinary sentient beings, when we harm them, we might have jealousy or belligerence, or resentment, or grudge-holding, pride, something like this. As an antidote to those kinds of negative feelings that we had towards others that made us harm them and that made us act destructively, the remedial attitude to cultivate in our own mind is one of altruism, bodhicitta, this attitude of working for the benefit of others, of cherishing others, of respecting them, of wanting them to be happy and wanting them to be free of their problems. You can see how this attitude of altruism is the direct opposite to the very self-centered, antagonistic mind that usually is in operation when we harm others.

Taking refuge as antidote to harming holy beings

In terms of harming holy beings, you might wonder, “How in the world do we harm holy beings?” Well, when you steal things from the Triple Gem or you steal things from the Sangha community, or—this is a good one—when you’ve made up your mind to offer something and then you change your mind and don’t offer it. Have you ever had that? I used to do this all the time in Nepal. You bought a box of cookies: “I’m going to offer this at the altar.” And then, “Well, I’m hungry. I’ll eat this box. I’ll buy another box later.” Just things like this. Once we’ve offered it mentally, it no longer belongs to us. So this mind that offers and then takes it back, is actually stealing from the Triple Gem.

There are also times when we’ve criticized the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. For example, I’ve

heard lots of people say, “Buddha left his wife and child to become a monk, that’s cruel. Why in the world did he do that? He’s totally irresponsible!” I’ve heard lots of people say that. Or belittling the Sangha community: “A bunch of lazy bumps. All they do is sit around and mumble prayers and expect us to support them.” I’ve heard many people say that. [Laughter.] It’s very easy to do the same thing.

When we have those kinds of negative attitudes, we’re harming ourselves because the Triple Gem is the refuge. Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are showing us the way to liberation. When we start seeing the beings and the things that are showing us the way to liberation as things that are harming us, then our mind is really out of whack. Isn’t it? The very ones who are the most compassionate, who work for our welfare—when we start seeing them as harming us and we criticize them, then we’re taking our minds totally in the opposite direction from enlightenment. Who’s going to help us then? Very difficult. Very difficult.

We’ve probably all done this. I have. If we haven’t done it this life, we’ve probably done it past lives. It’s important to purify this kind of critical attitude, because if it isn’t purified, then the result is that then either later on in this life or in future lives, we’re separated from the Triple Gem. Then we wind up, let’s say, taking birth in a country where it’s impossible to meet a spiritual path, where even if you have a spiritual yearning, there’s nothing outside to guide you, to help you, you’re there in a total spiritual vacuum, in a desert.

I think it will be tremendously painful, just that whole feeling of separation from the Buddha, Dharma

and Sangha. And if you're born in a place where it's impossible to get teachings, it's impossible to make that contact, then how are we ever going to get the information that's going to help us improve ourselves?

How are we ever going to know the difference between a constructive action and a destructive action if we don't take teachings and have some way to purify our mind and know how to discriminate these things? So it's extremely important to purify the negative karma that we've created in relationship to the Triple Gem.

The way to do that is by taking refuge in the Triple Gem. Because the attitude that was critical of them was pushing them away, saying, "Buddha, Dharma, Sangha is just a pooh-pooh, who needs them?", so what we need to do in fact to re-institute the relationship in a healthy way is to open ourselves up to the benefit we can receive from them and take refuge. When we take refuge three times in the morning and three times in the evening, or when we take refuge before teachings or before our meditation session, this is helping us to purify the mind that has turned its back on the teachings.

Avoid being sectarian

Having a mind that is very sectarian is also a way of turning our back on the teachings. As soon as we get sectarian, "*My* lineage of Buddhism is the best and the purest, most wonderful lineage, and all the others are ... ," then we criticize other teachings, other lineages of teachings. It's so easy for people to get into it. So easy! It's like, "My football team is the

best!”

This is incredibly harmful, because all these teachings came from the Buddha. If you call yourself a Buddhist, how can you criticize any teachings that came from the Buddha? If you criticize teachings that come from the Buddha, again, you’re walking in the opposite direction. If you’re criticizing those teachings, then you’re never going to practice them; if you don’t practice them, how are you going to get the results? So the sectarian attitude is very damaging for our own practice. Taking refuge is very important in this way, to purify that.

[Audience:] Is it okay for us not to think well of other religions?

I think it’s very damaging to criticize other religions. We have to be very clear here: we can say certain ideas do not make sense; certain ideas are not logical. But that’s very, very different from saying that the whole tradition is rotten to the core, because within every single religion, you can find something beneficial. So you can’t put down any religion with a blanket statement and say, “That religion is an awful religion,” because every religion has some ethical conduct as a part of it. Every religion has some talk of loving-kindness.

You can say certain thesis or certain principles of certain religions could be logically refuted, or you can say that the institution of that religion maybe doesn’t act according to the spirit of its founder. You can express that as an opinion. But to indiscriminately label a whole religion as bad is not very smart for our

own practice, and it definitely doesn't lead to harmony in the world.

This is a very tricky thing. Because sometimes people say, "Well, then I have to say 'All religions are one.'" We can't say that either, because all religions aren't one, because they do have different assertions, different beliefs. And whether they are all going to the same goal, I don't know. I can't say 'Yes' or 'No'. I don't even understand my own religion, let alone someone else's, so how can I say whether they're going to the same place or not? If my own mind is completely empty of realizations, how could I say whether St. Francis and the Buddha had the same realizations, when I don't understand what either of them are talking about?

So I can't say, "Yes, yes—they're all one,". And yet I can't say that this one is good and that one is totally awful either. What I can say is, "This one makes more sense to me, and certain assertions in this other one, we need to logically check out whether they're correct or incorrect. But even if they're incorrect, maybe for some people they're beneficial."

Westerners used to go to Asia, and we'd all sit there in Nepal and go, "Rah, rah, Buddhism. We're going to go back to the West. We're going to tell our parents. We're going to tell our friends." And Lama Yeshe used to say, "If somebody else believes in God, you don't need to tear their belief in God down, because if you tear their belief in God down, and they aren't ready yet to accept something else, you might in fact destroy their whole reason for keeping good ethical conduct. At least the people who believe in God don't have ultimate faith in their own ego. At

least they're willing to admit that maybe their ego isn't the biggest know-it-all in the world. That maybe there's something that knows more than their own ego. So to that extent the belief in God is very constructive for those people. And so unless somebody's really questioning and ready and open, don't just go around smashing other people's beliefs."

[Audience:] Can we express any doubt in Buddhism?

In some religions, it is said that if you doubt your religion, it's a sin. Buddha said to not believe in anything he said just because he said it, but to check it in the same way that you would test gold. You wouldn't just go and buy gold, taking somebody else's word for it. There's this whole process, where you rub it, burn it, you do all these things so that you could tell whether it's real gold or whether it's a facsimile. So similarly, the Buddha said, with his own teachings, you check them out and you see if they work or not. You see if they make sense. You don't believe them just because you are told to believe them.

There's this wonderful sutra called the Kalama sutra. All these people called the Kalamas came to the Buddha and they said, "There's this whole spiritual supermarket out there. What do we believe?" Buddha said, "Don't believe it because it's tradition. Don't believe it because somebody has some so-called logical argument. Don't believe it because you're supposed to because of your family background. Don't believe it because everybody else believes it. But you try it. You test it. And if it works, then you believe it." Buddha was really encouraging personal

experience here.

Now there're a lot of things, higher realizations, that we can't have personal experience of at the beginning because our minds don't have the openness and aren't fertile enough to have that. So we have to look and see if it makes sense or if it doesn't make sense. If it makes sense and if we have some kind of confidence in what the Buddha said, because the Buddha had said other things that were true, then we're willing to accept this one provisionally. But it never really becomes our own belief unless we get some experience of it.

Of the ten destructive actions, the last one is that of wrong views. One of the wrong views is negating past and future lives, or negating enlightenment, saying that it doesn't exist, or negating the existence of Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, thinking, "Gee, if I believe that, then I'm a heretic, then I'm going to hell." Rather, we should check it out, and if those beliefs seem to help us, seem to make some sense, then work with them.

If we ever notice that our mind is getting belligerent and angry, then to use that as a burglar alarm, "Uh oh, maybe I'd better check up what's going on here." So again, instead of getting into this thing of, "I'm bad because I have doubt," it's just, "My doubt can be useful to help me gain new levels of knowledge, and if my doubt is getting me angry and belligerent, then I need to look at my mind and see what's going on in it."

[Audience:] What's the difference between doubt, question and criticism?

There're three kinds of doubt. There's the doubt that is inclined towards the right conclusion, the doubt that is in the middle, and the doubt that's inclined towards a negative conclusion.

Take the example of rebirth. Let's say before you come to teachings, you might first of all have a wrong view: "There's no such thing as rebirth. I'm absolutely convinced there's no rebirth!" Then you come to teachings. You begin to have a little bit of doubt, the doubt that's still inclined towards no rebirth, "Well, maybe there's rebirth but I really don't think there is."

And then you study, practice, listen, think about it, then your doubt moves to that second kind—equal balance, "Maybe there is. Maybe there isn't."

Then you keep on going, you're questioning, talking, discussing with other people, then your doubt starts to shift to, "Hmm, I'm not sure if there's rebirth or not, but I think maybe there is."

And then you keep going and going, and then you get what's called the 'correct assumption', and you start thinking, "Hmm, I think there is rebirth. It kind of makes sense some way."

And then you just keep going and thinking about it, and then you can get a correct inference of it, when you know with clear logic that rebirth exists.

Then you keep meditating and practicing, and then you get to the point where you can actually, with clairvoyant powers, see past and future lives. Then for sure, you can't go against that. You see, it's this whole process of stretching the mind, expanding it, making it grow.

Criticism is more like wrong view, saying, "This doesn't make any sense. I absolutely don't agree with

this. It's just hog-wash. Anybody who believes in it is a jerk!" That kind of criticism is very close-minded. It's really proud and arrogant. "I know what's right. And anybody who believes that is an idiot."

Whereas the doubting, questioning mind, there's some space in it. There's some openness, and depending on which of the three kinds of doubt you have, there's more or less openness. You learn. You think. You discuss. If you don't doubt and think and discuss and get more information, then you'll never grow. If you just say, "I believe!" and then you think, "I must be an 'A', number one, disciple because I believe", then when somebody comes and asks you a question, you can't answer because you'd never thought about it yourself. And then you get really fanatical and dogmatic with the other person, "Don't you doubt! It's very negative if you doubt," because this is what you've been telling yourself for so long. But what you really mean is, "Don't doubt, because if you doubt and ask me questions, I don't know what to say because I don't even know what I believe. So, don't stir the pot!"

[Audience:] If we see someone making a mistake and comment on it, is that being critical?

In terms of your criticism of certain people's behavior, you can be critical with an angry mind, or you can be critical just with "Well, I've observed this" kind of mind. When you're working with people, you might have to observe somebody else's mistake, and you might have to comment on it. Some people would say that's being critical, but it depends on whether your

mind is being critical. If somebody hasn't done something by the deadline that they said they were going to do it by, and you're pointing out that they haven't done that, you can point it out with a nice, balanced mind, or you can point it out with an angry mind. It's a big difference.

3. DETERMINATION NOT TO REPEAT THE ACTION

The third opponent power is to make a determination not to do the action again. In one way, we want to say the line, "I'm not going to do that again," with as much power as we can because the more powerfully we say it, then the more actual possibility there is not to do it again. But at the same time, as much as we want to make it powerful when we say this, we also want to be very clear that we're not lying to the Buddha, so I think you have to have both of those in your mind at the same time.

There may be some things in our life that we've looked at that we can say, "I do not ever want to do this again," and make it quite firm, and be pretty confident that we won't ever do it again, because we've seen that we don't want to act in that way. And then there might be other things in our life, for example, if we said, "I'm never going to idle gossip again," then that would almost be like a lie. [Laughter.]

So I think what we have to do there, is set some kind of useful time period for ourselves, like if we realize, "Oops, I got involved in idle talk again today as usual," then to say, "For the next two days, I'm

going to make this a real strong focus and I'm going to try to be very, very aware of my idle talk, and really try hard not to do it for the next few days." So set ourselves some kind of time limit where we can focus on working on this.

Generally, the stronger our determination not to do it again, the easier it will be not to do it again. One of the reasons we habitually keep on doing the same things is because our determination not to do it again isn't very strong, and one of the reasons for that is because our regret for having done it isn't very strong. So it all comes back to regret. The stronger the regret, the more we're going to have the determination not to do it, then the easier it's going to be to change our behavior patterns. To develop regret, we have to think deeply about the disadvantages of the action, the disadvantages for others, the disadvantages for ourselves and become convinced of that. That's one of the chief things for giving ourselves the 'oomph' to break some of those habits.

[Audience:] How do we deal with the issue that when we drive, we're killing insects on the roads?

When you're getting in your car, you're not deliberately driving in order to kill the insects. You do know it's an outcome, but you're not motivated to do that. You lack the intention to do it. Some ways to actually avoid the harm to others, is don't drive unless you really need to, and carpool when you can. And to be careful about these things and not just get in our car and go here and there and all around the city when we really don't need to. But to plan our errands

in a way where we drive as little as possible, and to carpool when we can so that with fewer vehicles, fewer animals get squished.

And then also, at the end of Pearl of Wisdom Book II, there is this mantra for your feet for when you walk: you say the mantra and then you spit on your feet or you could just blow on your feet. You can do that on your car tires, and you can make prayers—I do very often—I pray that no insects are going to get killed, let alone people or animals, by going in this car. And then feeling, “Knowing that there’s risk to other beings’ lives when I drive around in my car to go to places for my own pleasure and amusement, then at the least, I want to try to be of benefit to the people that I will be meeting on the trip.”

4. REMEDIAL ACTIONS

The remedial practice is basically any positive action that you do. They specifically describe six actions, but it could be any others. I’ll give you the six:

1. Reciting sutras, for example, the Heart Sutra.
2. Reciting mantras, for example, when people do the Vajrasattva practice or the Chenrezig practice.
3. Meditating on emptiness. This is the supreme way to purify. Meditating on emptiness is the way to really cut our afflictions.
4. Building statues or paintings or commissioning them, not modern art paintings, but paintings or statues of the Buddha and the deities and teachers.

5. Making offerings to the Triple Gem, offerings on the shrine or be a benefactor to people who are studying the Dharma, like some of the monks or nuns in India.
6. Reciting the names of the Buddhas, for example, the thirty-five Buddhas.

These are six remedial actions that are specifically spelt out, but in actual fact, any positive action we do—reading a Dharma book, coming to class, studying, doing some meditation, doing community service—they all become remedial actions. Lama Zopa was saying one of the best ways to purify is to take precepts, because if you take a precept not to do something, then you are actively not doing it and you're purifying that negative karma.

So that's concluding the section on karma.