

# LAMRIM TEACHINGS

VOLUME III

INTERMEDIATE SCOPE



Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Chodron

**LAMRIM TEACHINGS**  
**Volume 3**

**Intermediate Scope**

**Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Chodron**

Sravasti Abbey  
692 Country Lane  
Newport, WA 99156 USA

[www.sravasti.org](http://www.sravasti.org)  
[www.thubtenchodron.org](http://www.thubtenchodron.org)

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The merit created by preparing this ebook is dedicated to the good health and long lives of our precious teachers and the flourishing of the Buddhadharma. May all sentient beings meet the Buddhadharma and quickly attain full enlightenment.

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## CHAPTER 1 True Suffering

### The Four Noble Truths In Terms of the Three Levels of Practice

We have been talking about the four Noble Truths in terms of the intermediate level person's path, because that is the level at which the four Noble Truths were taught by the Buddha in the first discourse—how to gain liberation from cyclic existence. Although the four Noble Truths technically falls within the practice in common with the intermediate level person, it can also be explained in terms of the initial and the advanced level practitioners. So we are going to understand the four Noble Truths in a slightly different way; I think it is quite interesting and it helps us see that the Buddha taught in a consistent way.

#### INITIAL LEVEL PRACTITIONER

An initial level practitioner is somebody whose motivation is a good rebirth. What is true suffering in the context of that practitioner? *True suffering* for that practitioner is having a meaningless, directionless life and having worse rebirths. For that level practitioner, the *causes* of a meaningless, directionless life and worse rebirths are first, not having refuge, and second, the ten destructive actions. When you do not

have refuge and are confused, then you are prone to do the ten destructive actions (lack of basic ethics), which are the true cause of worse rebirths.

So, in the context of that initial level practitioner, what are the *cessations*? What is it that they want to stop? They want to stop having a directionless life by having a meaningful life and they want to stop having bad rebirths by having good rebirths. That is the true cessation and what they are aiming for. The *path* to get to that is first, by taking refuge and second, by following ethics and abandoning the ten negative actions.

This is how the four Noble Truths can be explained in terms of the initial level practitioner: you have first, the suffering; second, its causes; third, the cessation; and fourth, the path to actualize that.

## **INTERMEDIATE LEVEL PRACTITIONER**

Now, for the intermediate level practitioner true suffering is any kind of rebirth in samsara, any kind of rebirth within the six realms, and the *causes* of that rebirth: the afflictions and karma. So *true suffering* is this uncontrolled rebirth in the six realms caused by afflictions and karma. The *cessation* of that is nirvana. The Eightfold Noble Path is the *path* to stopping those rebirths and stopping their causes. Specifically, here we are talking about the determination to be free that makes you practice the Eightfold Noble Path and the three higher trainings.

So, again, there is this consistency of suffering or undesirability, the causes of those, the cessation of them, and the path to cessation. Remember, whenever

I say ‘suffering’, it means undesirability. It is just easier to say suffering.

## HIGH LEVEL PRACTITIONER

The high level practitioner’s motivation is to benefit others by becoming enlightened. In that context what is true suffering? True suffering for the high level practitioner is everybody else’s problems and everybody’s unsatisfactory conditions. It is no longer just a thing of *my* unsatisfactory conditions, *my* samsara, *my* cyclic existence, but it is *everybody’s* cyclic existence.

The true suffering at this level is also the practitioner’s own limitation of not being omniscient because they are not yet a Buddha. They do not have the perfect wisdom, compassion, or skill to be able to benefit others due to the lack of an omniscient mind. So their *true suffering* or undesirable experiences consist of two things: everybody’s cyclic existence and their own limitations of not being omniscient.

The *true cause* for those undesirable experiences is the self-centered attitude, because the self-centered attitude is what keeps us from working for the benefit of others and from becoming enlightened. The only reason to become enlightened is to be able to benefit others, so the self-centered attitude is a limiting cause. Another cause is the cognitive obscurations on our mindstream. These are the subtle stains left behind by the afflictions. We have to remove not just the afflictions, but also the subtle stains, what they call the appearance of inherent existence, or the subtle dualistic appearance, which is the cause of the lack of

omniscience.

The *cessation* that we are aiming for here is full enlightenment, which is the ceasing of all of the selfish mind, all of the limitations and defilements on the mindstream, and the development of all the good qualities to their full extent. The *path* to practice this is the bodhicitta motivation, the six far-reaching attitudes of the bodhisattva and the tantric practice. These become the true path that we practice in order to gain the cessation, which eliminates the true suffering and the true causes.

So you see how this pattern of the four things—the undesirable experiences, the causes of the undesirable experiences, cessation and the path to cessation—continues through from the initial level practitioner, to the medium level practitioner and on through to the advanced level practitioner. I personally think that is incredibly interesting. It gives you a lot to think about and another way of rearranging the material. Learning the Dharma material is not just getting it, but it is being able to look at the same thing from a whole lot of different viewpoints because as you do that, you gain new perspectives on it. I find that this way of thinking about the four Noble Truths actually gives you a whole overview to the entire lamrim.

## **Two levels of obscurations**

*[Audience:] What are the subtle stains to omniscience?*

We have two levels of obscurations. We have afflicted obscurations and we have the cognitive obscurations.

The afflicted obscurations are what we are trying to eliminate in the four Noble Truths according to the middle level practitioner. The afflicted obscurations are the ignorance that grasps at a true or an inherent existence, as well as all the afflictions and all the contaminated karma. If you can eliminate all of them, you become an arhat. You no longer get reborn in cyclic existence. But you still have the subtle stain on your mind, so the mirror is still a little bit dirty.

Now, why is the mirror still dirty although you have realized emptiness? They say it is like when you cook onions in a pot. You can take the onions out, but the smell of the onions is still there. Similarly, you can remove the ignorance and the afflictions from the mindstream, but there is still a stain left in the mindstream from them. The stain is the appearance of true or inherent existence. Because of the stains and taints on our mind, phenomena appear to us as truly or inherently existent. The ignorance and the afflictions then grasp at this true or inherent existence. So there is the appearance of inherent existence, and then on top of it, there is our grasping at it.

The grasping is easier to eliminate than the appearance. The grasping is eliminated by realizing emptiness, removing the afflicted obscurations and becoming an arhat. The appearance of inherent existence is eliminated by cleansing the mind. This happens through repeated meditation on emptiness so that you no longer have this veil of the appearance of true existence.

When arhats are in meditative equipoise they see emptiness and only emptiness. There is no veil. There is no appearance of true existence in their meditation

on emptiness. But, once they get off their meditation cushion and are walking down the street, things still appear to be truly existent. The arhat does not believe in that appearance anymore, but things still appear that way. Becoming a Buddha means eliminating that false appearance, eliminating the appearance of inherent existence so that when you see phenomena, you are just seeing them as dependently arising. There is no false appearance.

### **Television as an example of false appearance**

When you watch television, it seems like the images on T.V. are real, does it not? That is a false appearance. When you believe that those are real people and you start getting incredibly emotionally involved with everything that is going on in the T.V. show—“I am behind this character and I am against that character”—that is similar to grasping at inherent existence due to our afflicted obscurations.

The arhat is someone who stops grasping at false appearance, but in post-meditation when he is walking around the streets he is still experiencing the false appearance. The images on the T.V. screen still appear like real people. But the Buddha would not experience it this way. The images would not appear to the Buddha as real people. Buddha would just recognize that as the dance of the electrons on the TV screen.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Turning the TV off would be like going into your

meditation on emptiness where you only perceive emptiness. That is the difference between an arhat and a Buddha. An arhat, when he or she is in meditative equipoise, cannot perceive relative phenomena. When they come out of their meditation on emptiness, they see relative phenomena. They experience an appearance of true existence, so they cannot simultaneously directly perceive emptiness.

In the case of a Buddha, because there is no longer this appearance of true existence for them, they have the ability to perceive emptiness and to perceive the relative dependently existent phenomena at the same time. Whereas prior to that on the path, once you focus on emptiness, that is all you see. There is no appearance of other phenomena to that consciousness.

*[Audience:] What is enlightenment?*

There is a very easy definition. Enlightenment is when all the things that are to be eliminated have been eliminated and all the things that are to be developed have been developed. All the defilements on the mind—the afflicted obscurations and the cognitive obscurations—have been purified and removed. All the good qualities—confidence, responsibility, wisdom, compassion, patience, concentration, etcetera—all these have been developed to the fullest perfection. In Tibetan, the word for Buddha is “Sangye”. “Sang” means to clean or purify, “gye” means to develop or evolve. So just in those two syllables you can see the definition of what a Buddha is and see that it is something to look forward to.

## Suffering of Cyclic Existence in General

If you look at your lamrim outline under ‘B. Training the mind on the stages of the path which are in common with a person of intermediate level’, we talked about ‘1a. The Buddha’s purpose for stating the truth of suffering as the first of the four Noble Truths’, and now we are going on to ‘1b. Actual meditation on unsatisfactory experiences.’

We are now going to be talking a lot about undesirable experiences. It is very important that you have a good attitude when you are studying this and realize that the Buddha taught all about the undesirable experiences so that we can realize where we are at and thus develop a determination to free ourselves. When you start meditating on these undesirable experiences, do not get depressed. Do not sit there and think, “Oh there is the suffering of this, the unsatisfactoriness of that, misery and all this other stuff.” Do not get depressed by this. Try to see it as a way to develop the ability to look at our experience with clear, open eyes and recognize that we have the potential to change it and have a better existence.

So do not get depressed and down by all these things, although it is a bit sobering; it is definitely sobering. But we need to get sobered up because we have basically been skipping through life enjoying the merry-go-round and having a good time. It is like we want to have a good time but we also want to have a little Dharma practice in there for good luck, or we want to be more well-rounded, or we think a little bit of Dharma practice adds some spice or something. But once we start looking more seriously at this, we



begin to understand that what we thought was fun and games is actually rather unpleasant and unsatisfactory compared to what we really could be. So this is definitely a sobering kind of meditation that makes us cut through a lot of our fantasies and a lot of our daydreams.

I think for me personally this has brought about an incredible amount of honesty. By admitting all these undesirable aspects of my existence, I can at least be honest now. I do not need to go through life like everything is hunky-dory. I can just say, "Look, this is what is going on." So it is like overcoming denial.

For those of you who are familiar with therapy, denial is one of our favorite things. "Let us pretend it does not exist and then maybe it will not."

Now we will look at the different types of unsatisfactory experiences. First we are going to think about the unsatisfactory experiences of cyclic existence in general. Then we will think about the unsatisfactory experiences of the specific realms of existence. We are going to be very thorough here.

## **1. NO CERTAINTY**

When we think about the unsatisfactory experiences of cyclic existence in general, the first one is that there is no certainty about anything. There is no reaching a stage in which we have security. We are always looking for security in our job, in our relationships, in our health, in everything. We want it to be secure and unchanging. But the very nature of life is that it does not work that way. There is no certainty in anything because everything is always

constantly changing.

### **No certainty in our health**

Our health is constantly changing; there is no certainty at all in our health. We work so hard to be healthy as if we think, “Now I am healthy and I can put that on the back-burner and go and do some fun things.” But we are never in the state of perfect health where we have some security in it. That state is non-existent.

### **No financial security**

It is the same thing with financial security. We work so hard to get financial security. Who has financial security? Even if you have billions of dollars, is that secure? It is not. You can have billions of dollars today and nothing tomorrow. That has happened to many people. The stock market goes down. People get arrested for fraudulent dealings. Somebody rips open their mattress and steals the million dollars [Laughter.]. There is no certainty that any of these is going to last.

### **No certainty in relationships**

There is also no certainty in relationships. You have probably heard me mention this before, but I find it so interesting in America how we want to get our relationships clear. We want certainty and say things like, “Are we or are we not going to have this relationship?” Have you ever had people say that to

you? Or you say to other people, “Look, there are two choices, yes and no. If it is ‘no’, let us get that straight and forget it. I am not going to talk to you again. If it is ‘yes’, then we have a contract, you will fulfill your part and I will fulfill mine and that is it, we will live happily ever after [Laughter.]”

But there is no certainty in any of that. What do you mean we can decide how our relationship is going to be? Do you mean we are going to decide and then it is going to be like that forever, that it will always be the same way and completely certain and predictable? It does not work like that. We are constantly relating to people. Relationships are always changing. You might make a lot of decisions about how this relationship is going to be, but that does not mean it is going to be like that. That does not mean you have any control over it. Everything is changing all the time.

A part of our mind thinks, “Let us get this clear in the relationship and we are going to get this settled. I am going to confront whoever this was in my past and we are going to settle this once and for all, get it straight and get our relationship put into perspective. Then I am going to live my life.” I do not know of anybody who has been able to do that. Relationships are always changing, changing, changing. They are good sometimes and they are not so good at other times. You do not always have control over it; it is completely uncertain.

### **The nature of existence is uncertainty**

What we are getting at here is the fact that everything

is changeable and uncertain. Our health, finances, relationships—everything is unsatisfactory. Looking at that becomes a cause to want to be free from it.

That everything is uncertain is the very nature of our existence. I think it is so valuable just to think about that and to really imbue our mind with how uncertain things are, not in the sense of making us apprehensive, nervous and ill at ease—because that is looking at uncertainty from an afflicted point of view—but in the sense of just recognizing the changeability and then having a flexible attitude. Then the mind can be flexible and we can go with the flow and roll with the punches. But our mind wants security, certainty. It likes to put things in categories. It wants to fix everything up, get everything straightened and put a bow on it then shove it in a corner. It just does not work like that.

If we can look at that and recognize that change is part of life, then we can relax into the change instead of fight it. The apprehension, the fear and the anxiety is in fighting the reality of change. If we fully accept that change is just the ground upon which our whole life is built, we can be a little bit more relaxed about it and at the same time recognize that we can free ourselves from this unsatisfactory state. This is really sobering to meditate on.

Look at the people in war torn countries. Talk about uncertainty. The way people's lives were before war and the way they are during war, is a complete and total change. You look at World War II and people's lives then—from one day to the other, everything just totally changed. The family, the finances, the environment, health, everything

changed. Recognize that this is entirely within the realm of possibility in our own life. Even though things might seem to be consistent, in actual fact they are changing all the time. Also, we do not have such a great ability to control and predict all those changes because they are very much a result of our past karma.

## **2. NO SATISFACTION**

The second aspect of the suffering of cyclic existence in general is that there is no satisfaction. “I Can’t Get No Satisfaction” sang Mick Jagger. He knew what he was talking about [Laughter.]. Maybe he did not understand completely what he was saying, but it is true nevertheless. If you look at it, everything we do and all the activities we engage in, we try and find satisfaction in them but we cannot. It is as if there is no lasting satisfaction in anything we do.

When I first met the Dharma, this was one of the things that convinced me that the Buddha knew what he was talking about. When I looked at my life, even though I thought everything was pretty OK, going along OK and looking on the up and up, actually I was totally dissatisfied. Everything in my life just bred more and more dissatisfaction. When I was really honest and able to look at that in my life I thought, “Buddha knows something about me that I do not know. This guy knows what he is talking about.”

### **The constant search for pleasure**

It is like we are in a constant search for pleasure and

we never have satisfaction. This is where the mindfulness practice is so important. We become mindful of all the dissatisfaction and the continuing, unfulfilled grasping we have from the time we wake up in the morning. We are unsatisfied because we did not get to sleep long enough. We are unsatisfied because the alarm clock does not sound nice. We are unsatisfied because the coffee is too hot, too sweet, or it gets cold, or it ends and we want more, and so it continues on throughout the day. It is like everything we do looking for satisfaction, does not bring any lasting satisfaction.

### **No satisfaction in sense pleasures**

It is this way with all the sense pleasures. You might get some pleasure from going to an art gallery or hearing a good concert, but in the end you are dissatisfied. Either the concert lasted too long and you cannot wait to leave, or it did not last long enough and you want some more. Even if it lasted just the right amount of time, after a while you are bored again and you need some more to feel satisfied.

It is the same with all the meals we have eaten: have we ever been satisfied? If you had been satisfied, you would not have to eat again. But we eat and are full, then we are dissatisfied later on and we need to eat again. Look at any kind of sense pleasure—sight, sound, smell, taste, touch—has any of it brought any lasting satisfaction? When you make love and have an orgasm, does that bring you lasting satisfaction? If it did, why do you have to keep doing it? Anything we do that we get pleasure from in and

of itself does not bring lasting satisfaction. We will have to do it again. We will have to make more effort to have pleasure and so we have this constant dissatisfaction all the time.

## **No satisfaction in attachments**

Dissatisfaction is a big function of attachment—the more attached we are, the more dissatisfied we are. We can see how attachment is the cause of unsatisfactory experiences and why attachment has to be eliminated. It just breeds constant dissatisfaction all the time. We are dissatisfied with ourselves. We are not good enough. We are not enough this, or enough that. We are dissatisfied with others. We wish they were a little bit more this, or a little bit less of that. We are dissatisfied with the government. We are dissatisfied with everything!

When you look at it, nothing is perfect. We want things to be different and are unhappy and disgruntled. We are in a situation of living in constant dissatisfaction, with a mind that is constantly seeking satisfaction, never getting it and using the wrong method to try and get it. This is the tragedy of samsara. Here we are, sentient beings wanting to be happy and trying so desperately to be happy, but because we do not have the right method to get happiness we are perpetually dissatisfied. We think the method is through sense objects, external things, external people, an external something-or-other and we keep seeking happiness that way. Even though we all want happiness, the method we are using to get it is incorrect. This is the tragedy. This is samsara.

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

... How I am always unsatisfied, how my attachment breeds my dissatisfaction. So we can look at it that way. We can look at it more from the bodhisattva way about how this is the plight of all sentient beings. This is the tragedy of samsara. This is why becoming a Buddha is so important, so that we can overcome this in ourselves and in others.

We can look at it in terms of refuge, because once we recognize the kindness of the Buddha in pointing out to us this whole dysfunctional dynamic, then this incredible feeling of trust and confidence in the Buddha comes up. The Buddha was able to say, “Look, you are constantly dissatisfied. It is due to attachment and here is what you do to get rid of the attachment. Here is what you do to get rid of the ignorance.” When we understand that, even when we understand it just a little bit intellectually, incredible faith comes in the Buddha. We see Buddha’s wisdom and Buddha’s kindness in turning the Dharma wheel and teaching us.

### **3. HAVING TO ABANDON YOUR BODY REPEATEDLY**

Then the third unsatisfactory experience in cyclic existence is our having to abandon our body again and again, having to die again and again. If we all look at our lives, we know our death is definite. It is not the number one thing we want to do today and it is not something we look forward to. If we think about how distasteful the idea of separating from this body is



now, imagine doing that over and over and over again from beginningless time.

Imagine this whole process of leaving the body, the circumstances of aging, getting sick, dying and all the circumstances that lead up to death and how unpleasant that is. Then remember that it is not just this lifetime that this happens. This has happened millions and millions and trillions of times before to us and it is unsatisfactory. If we had our choice, we would rather not die. We would rather not be in this whole position of having to die. But you see, as long as we are under the influence of ignorance, anger and attachment, we do not have any choice in the matter. We may not want to die, but we cannot do anything about it as long as our mind is ignorant. So this is the whole reason for gaining wisdom, the whole reason for eliminating the grasping at true existence.

#### **4. HAVING TO TAKE REBIRTH IN CYCLIC EXISTENCE REPEATEDLY**

Not only is dying again and again a drag, but the next unsatisfactory experience of samsara is getting born again and again. We cannot say death is bad but birth is great, because if you do not have death, you do not have birth. It is a real interesting thing in our society that we celebrate birth but mourn death. Actually they both go together because as soon as you are born, you are going to die and as soon as you die, you are going to get reborn. So why do we celebrate one and mourn the other?

We could celebrate when people die, because then they will get reborn. We could mourn when people get

born, because then they are going to die. Or we could look at the whole thing and say the whole thing stinks! That is what we are trying to get to, the determination to be free of cyclic existence. Instead of just mourning death, let us recognize that birth also is no great experience to go through.

## **The womb experience and birth according to the scriptures**

In the scriptures they go into great detail about how unsatisfactory it is getting born. It is quite interesting because it is very different from a lot of modern theory.

A lot of modern theory says that being in the womb is comforting and secure and that is why people curl up in fetal positions—they want to be back in the womb where they felt safe.

In the scriptures it says that being in the womb is quite uncomfortable because when your mother eats very spicy food, you feel discomfort as a baby but do not understand what is going on. When your mother goes out jogging, you are bounced around [Laughter.]. The womb is kind of claustrophobic—you are shut in and there is no space to move. You are kicking and so forth but have no real understanding of what is going on so the whole experience of being in the womb is quite uncomfortable. You do not know you are in the womb. You are just having all these experiences and do not know how to understand them.

Then at some point you get expelled from this whole closed-in environment when the mother starts having labor pains and the muscles start pushing down

on the baby. They say that it is quite painful for the baby. The opening to the womb is quite small and the baby's head is quite big and coming out through that narrow opening, they say, is like being crushed between two mountains. There is a feeling of being scrunched. Then you come out into the world and it is cold and there is air and then what do they do? They whack you on the bottom, turn you upside down and sprinkle drops in your eyes. So they say that the whole birth process itself and the whole process of being in the womb is quite uncomfortable, quite painful and quite confusing.

Usually we cannot remember this time but I have one friend who remembers being in the womb because his mother slipped at some point, fell down some stairs and he remembers feeling the fall. So I guess some people do have some memory of that time. Sometimes people think, "Oh, if only I could be in the womb again and be a baby again; a baby is carefree and does not worry about the IRS." Realize that it is not fun and games in the womb. It is not something to return to that will give us lasting security. Being in the womb is quite painful and confusing.

## **5. CHANGING STATUS REPEATEDLY, FROM EXALTED TO HUMBLE**

The next unsatisfactory experience is a change in status. We are always changing status. We go from being rich and famous, to being poor and ignoble. We go from having a top quality job, to living on the streets. We go from being respected and praised, to

being deprecated. We go from being born in the god realms with incredible pleasures, to being born in the hell realms. Then we go back to the god realms. Our status is always changing. They say we go from eating nectar in the god realms, to eating molten iron in the hell realms. Now that is a change of diet! [Laughter.] It is a lack of status, a changing status, a lack of security, lack of settlement and lack of something to hold on to.

Look at your own life and how you have changed status. Look at how you have changed status in one person's eyes. One person loves you one year, cannot stand you the next year and then loves you again the following year and cannot stand you the year following that. We may be rich one year, then poor the next year, then rich again and then poor again. We are famous one year and considered as trash the next. This is what samsara is all about and it is not only our own experience, it is the experience of all beings.

I think this is important to meditate on, to see it in our own life and to recognize that this is what everybody else experiences too because that is the foundation of gaining compassion. When we meditate on this in terms of ourselves, we gain the determination to be free. When we meditate on the fact that everybody else has exactly the same experience, then we gain real deep compassion.

## **6. ESSENTIALLY BEING ALONE, HAVING NO FRIENDS**

The last unsatisfactory experience is that we are continually alone and there is no friend that can

intervene, protect us and go through all these things with us. When we are born, we are born alone. When you are sick, you are sick alone. You might say, “Oh, I am not sick alone, I am in this hospital with 500 other people who are sick.” But you experience your own suffering alone. We have no friends in the sense that nobody else can come in and take some of our suffering away. We might have a lot of friends, so to speak, but nobody can remove our suffering of birth; nobody can remove our suffering when we are sick; nobody can remove our suffering when we are depressed. When we are born, we are born alone; when we die, we die alone. This is just the state of existence. It is nothing to get emotionally frantic about because this is just reality and the way things are, but it is something to recognize and to make a determination to free ourselves from through generating wisdom. When we recognize that this is everybody else’s situation too, then we gain compassion.

These six unsatisfactory experiences of cyclic existence in general are quite important to go through repeatedly and it is important to remind ourselves of them often. I think this acts as a really good counteractive measure for when our minds are getting flighty and excited and we want to merely talk about something. You meditate on these six and the mind kind of settles down. It is a very good antidote to a speedy, excited and distracted mind. Like I said before, do not get depressed when you think about them, but just recognize that this is the reality of cyclic existence. This is what we experience under the influence of anger, attachment and ignorance. But it is

also possible to be free of these. That is why the Buddha taught about this, so that we can be free of it.

## **Questions and answers**

*[Audience:] Understanding these six unsatisfactory experiences and the fact that they permeate the nature of our existence—how do we put that together with seeing our options in life and making good decisions?*

Well, this is where we have to get our motivation in life really, really clear. Because if we understand these six really well and we have a firm decision to be free of cyclic existence, then all the decisions we make in life will be based on how this decision can help me to be free from cyclic existence. Right now, most of our decisions are based on how the decision can help us get the most happiness within cyclic existence.

It is like we are still seeing cyclic existence as something wonderful and desirable and trying to make good decisions that will bring us a lot of happiness in cyclic existence. That attitude, in and of itself, is what keeps us going on in cyclic existence. This is because if we are always looking for happiness in cyclic existence, we do not practice the Dharma and then we create negative actions, get distracted and so on. So shifting our decision-making basis to how we can become a Buddha and using that as the criteria for evaluating the options in our life, is going to change things drastically. It does not mean that we have to ignore the happiness in this life. But it does mean that we have to give up craving for it. You may still wind

up with a lot of happiness in this lifetime, but you are not sitting there craving for it all the time.

Even though we call ourselves Dharma practitioners, so many of our decisions are based on how we can have the most happiness in cyclic existence. We are not thinking about future lives and abstaining from negative actions. We are just thinking, “How can I have more happiness right now?” We do not even want the delayed happiness of future lifetimes. We just want our happiness now.

I think it was Maslow, or one of the other famous psychologists who said one sign of maturity is being able to delay gratification. When we talk about from the time when we were babies, to being adults now, yes we can delay our gratification. But in talking about ourselves compared to somebody who has actually entered the path, we do not delay our gratification at all. We want gratification to be real quick and most of our life is geared around that, and that is what keeps us bound in the whole situation of cyclic existence.

*[Audience:] If your whole motivation was to be free of cyclic existence, samsara, then many things would not matter. It would not matter what job you have, or whether you have a job or not. It seems that you would just spend your whole time doing Dharma practice.*

It would be nice not to have to worry about what job you have, wouldn't it? It would be nice to have a mind that was not all hung up in what kind of job you have, a mind that was able to work at this job if you

needed to do it and able to work at that job if you needed to do that and not get all involved with, “Am I making a certain amount of money? Am I getting enough respect? Am I this and am I that?” But taking a job as just a job and if you need the money you work at it, and that’s it. The mind is completely peaceful about it. Would that not be nice? [Laughter.] You do not sound convinced! [Laughter.]

If we thought about it, a lot of the things that we worry so much about, wouldn’t it be wonderful to not worry about them? Making the determination to be free is deciding not to worry about things that are not worth worrying about. Instead to be concerned with something that is worth being concerned about.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

The wish to be happy is something innately within us. It is this clinging on to and craving for happiness from external things that is the cause of a lot of unhappiness. So when we are saying, “May all beings have happiness and its causes,” one of the causes of happiness is non-attachment. On a superficial level when you say, “May all beings have happiness” you may be thinking “May everybody have pizza, chocolate cake and wanton soup.” But when you look at it differently, you will see that that does not bring lasting happiness. So when you say, “May all beings have happiness,” you are really wanting them to have the happiness that is free of thinking that things like money and chocolate cake is important, because their minds will be so much happier when they can direct their energy towards Dharma happiness rather than



getting stuck in a plate of spaghetti [Laughter.].

*[Audience:] Are there beings who are not Buddhas who can realize happiness without craving?*

Yes, some of the high level bodhisattvas and the arhats can do this. I think when you enter the path either by having the spontaneous determination to be free or spontaneous bodhicitta, just by having that (spontaneous determination to be free or spontaneous bodhicitta), you start getting a lot more happiness. Perhaps you do not get perfect happiness, but you get a lot more happiness. Because we realize that so much of the junk that makes us confused and miserable just isn't important. And it's not sour grapes, "Well, I don't want that big job anyway." It's not like dropping out of samsara because you can't get the happiness there anyhow because somehow you're deficient. Rather, it is recognizing that the whole thing of samsara is crazy and who wants to stay in it?! It's also based on recognizing that we have the potential to be liberated. That being confused is not an innate quality, nor an inherent part of ourselves. It may be something we've been for a very long time, but it's not our inherent nature.

*[Audience:] It seems you are saying that if you can accept the sadness of cyclic existence, that that makes you happy?*

It does not make you happy the way we are happy as Dharma practitioners, but it makes you a lot more peaceful. Accepting the tragedy of cyclic existence

does not mean you accept it and do nothing about it. It means that you are willing to accept that that is the way things are instead of being involved in the whole denial process.

If you do not accept that, it is like you are looking at something in your life and consistently trying to get happiness from it but never can. It is like banging your head against the wall because you keep trying to get happiness from this one thing but happiness never comes. For some people the thing they try to get happiness from is food, for some it is sex, for others it could be their relationship with their parents, or their job. Everybody has their own thing and they keep coming back to this thing, acting it out again and again, trying to get happiness from it.

It would be a big relief to finally get to the stage and say, “Actually, this thing is never going to make me happy so I am going to stop banging my head against the wall and I am going to do something else. I am going to stop letting this thing trap me.” I think that brings tremendous freedom. You finally just accept reality and realize, “This is what it is. I am going to stop fighting the reality of it.” By giving up grasping at happiness through this thing, you would probably be a lot more content. Like I said before, this is not sour grapes, because if it is sour grapes then your motivation was not a clear motivation. Rather, it is opening your eyes and saying, “This is dumb! I really do not need to keep doing this. This is really unnecessary.”

*[Audience:] Beings like the high level bodhisattvas who voluntarily take rebirth to help others, do they*

*get all the rest of the package with it (no certainty, no satisfaction, having to abandon your body repeatedly, having to take rebirth in cyclic existence repeatedly, changing status repeatedly, essentially being alone)?*

These six things are describing cyclic existence which is taking rebirth under the force of ignorance and karma. When you are a high-level bodhisattva, you take rebirth under the force of compassion, not ignorance. When you get even further along, when you get to what is called the eighth stage of bodhisattvahood, there is no ignorance left in the bodhisattva's mindstream at all. Then it is purely taking rebirth by the force of your prayers and compassion. So a bodhisattva does not experience these things in the same way we do because the causal factors aren't present in their mind.

But the thing about a bodhisattva is that when a bodhisattva says, "I am willing to experience all of this for the benefit of others," somehow by being totally and completely willing to experience the suffering, they do not experience it. But you cannot say, "I have got to be willing to experience this so that I will not experience it." You have to be really willing to experience it and then, somehow by the force of your compassion, by the force of your good karma, by the force of the wisdom that you generate on the higher level, all these different levels of suffering get peeled away gradually as you progress along the path.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

We associate compassion with being depressed and being miserable ourselves. What happens is, we meditate on others' suffering, we get that feeling of sadness and then we get stuck in it, feeling helpless and hopeless. That is not what a bodhisattva does. A bodhisattva sees a suffering and knows that in actual fact, the suffering is totally unnecessary and is all created by the mind. So for a bodhisattva, they look at it and they would think something like, "This does not have to happen. It can be changed. These people can be free of this suffering."

So the bodhisattva has a really upbeat look. They completely face the suffering, but they know that it does not have to be there. That is what gives them the courage to hang around and help because they are not overwhelmed by just feeling hopeless, helpless and strung out. They are not sidetracked by getting stuck. I think a bodhisattva is both the perpetual optimist and the perpetual realist at the same time. We usually think that realism means being pessimistic, but from a Buddhist point of view it is not that way at all.

*[Audience:] All the great masters that we really pray for to be reborn, should we not just kind of let them get the fruits of their practice and relax a while?*

That is one way to look at it. But another way of looking at it is that they are bound by compassion. There is one prayer about Chenrezig and it talks about Chenrezig being bound by compassion. To me that image of being bound by compassion is very powerful. We are not talking about being bound by attachment, clinging, or craving. We are talking about

being bound by compassion. So what we are doing is recognizing that the presence of these beings is essential for our own practice as well as for the happiness of other beings. We need these people around and that is why we ask them to come back. I think your way of looking at it is that we are asking them an incredible favor, but I think recognizing that makes us more appreciative of what they do for us. It makes us practice the teachings better because we really have a sense of their kindness.

Let us sit quietly.

## **The Eight Unsatisfactory Experiences of Humans**

Last time, we talked about the unsatisfactoriness of cyclic existence in general and the six different kinds of unsatisfactory conditions we face. It's important to meditate on all of these. We talked about the general ones last time; now we will talk about the specific disadvantages of each realm within cyclic existence.

### **Listening to these unsatisfactory experiences with an open mind**

This is one of the greatest areas in which we have denial and resistance operating, in that, part of our mind does not want to look at the faults of the situation we live in. Part of our mind wants to whitewash everything and say, "Yeah, there are some problems, but actually it's not so bad." There seems to be a strong denial on our part, and, as I start getting into some of these topics, your mind might start to

resist. If you find that happening, just observe it. Observe the resistance. And recognize it but then try to look beyond it because the resistance is coming out of a lot of fear and irrational emotion. If you can notice that and be a bit courageous to try and listen with open ears and an open mind, then you may find that the irrational fears really have no basis.

What we are trying to do here is look very objectively at our situation without whitewashing it. We will be talking about unsatisfactory conditions and recognizing that everything about our existence is unsatisfactory at a very basic level. This really shakes us up.

Although we may admit we have some problems now, we don't really want to change that much. We just want the bad things in our life to go away but all the nice things to hang around. What we don't see is that the nice things and the bad things are interwoven. And it is actually possible to have a happiness that goes beyond either of those. We have to have a far-reaching mind that looks beyond just the small concerns now.

As we start to look at the unsatisfactory conditions of individual states of existence, we will talk about the lower realms of rebirth. Those of you who were here in autumn know what resistance we encounter when we talk about the lower realms. Now that it's been a few months since you heard those teachings, let's look at the material again to see what the resistance is all about.

It's interesting to consider why we don't want to believe it's possible to be reborn as an animal. Some of us may have, at some corner of our mind, a certain

fear about it. “I don’t want to be reborn as a cricket. I don’t even want to think about it. And if I don’t believe it, it won’t happen.”

Or we might be afraid for someone we care very deeply about who died and who created a lot of negative karma. It might be painful for us to think of them being born as a lady bug or a spider or a cockroach. And so, because of our attachment to the person, we don’t want to think of them experiencing great suffering. So, again, the mind blocks it out and says, “If I don’t believe this, it might not be true and then that person won’t have that kind of pain.” So, it’s good to see the resistance in our mind.

There might also be another feeling, “Oh, ME, I can’t be anything else. This is ME. I am ME.” And again, as soon as we start to observe that and see whether it’s true or not, we see that who we think we are is something that isn’t made of concrete. It’s very transient.

Now, I won’t go into too much depth about the disadvantages of the lower realm of rebirth, so you can relax a bit. [Laughter.] But it’s good to recall them, that if we are born into a life form of extreme pain, the life is extremely painful. And if we think of just a human life, where there’s constant physical pain all the time, and then we just think of that as our body, our environment, our life—it is possible for that to exist, isn’t it? Many people in human body experience continuous pain. Why isn’t it possible that there is just another body that’s like that?

Or taking the body of a hungry ghost. Look at some of the photographs coming out of Somalia now. They are human bodies, but they look very much like

the descriptions of the hungry ghost realm: big bellies, big necks, little legs, barely can walk. And when you're that famished, even when you see food, you can't ingest it; it makes you sick. That's exactly the description of the hungry ghost realm, and that's something we know exists here with human bodies. So, why not just another kind of body that has the experience?

And then, animal realms; we can see very clearly they exist. Sometimes we just think of animals as really sweet and cute, isn't that wonderful. I have a great time playing with Achala (the cat). Sometimes when I sit there and I play with him and I see how he gets so excited over something that you dangle—he just gets enthralled—one part of me says, “Oh, isn't that cute?” and another part is really sad, because there is this intelligence that is so easily deceived. Nothing especially wonderful to get so excited about, just the limitations. I look at him and here he is. He has so much contact with the Dharma. So many people complain, “I want to spend more time with the teacher.” He spends a lot of time with me. [Laughter.] And my teacher had many dogs. The dogs spent so much time with my teacher. I hardly ever got to see my teacher. The dogs always were in there. [Laughter.] But then you look at it, how much can the dogs benefit? What do they benefit from it? They hear some mantra, but they can't understand the teachings.

And so if we think of that, just the pain of having that kind of limitation, that we have experienced that in previous lives and have the potential to experience again in the future. If we think squarely about that, it gives us some energy to avoid that and to see that as



something unsatisfactory. And so, the mind might say, “OK, the lower realms are definitely unsatisfactory. I am going to try and get a good rebirth. I want to be born as a human being, or as a demi-god or as a god because those beings have lots of pleasure.”

Human beings—it’s a nice mix of pleasure and pain. Then you hear about the demi-gods, and the gods, “Hmm, sound good.” And so the mind thinks, “Well, that’s not so bad, let’s take rebirth there.” At this point we start to contemplate all the disadvantages and the imperfections of being reborn in an upper realm, and come to see these very, very clearly. We come to see that wherever we are born in samsara, by nature, it is unsatisfactory. In other words, within samsara there is no security anywhere you search.

When we talk about samsara, we are not talking about the planet earth; it is not that wherever we go on earth, or in this universe, there is no security, there is no lasting happiness. It’s not that. Samsara is a body and mind under the condition of afflictions and contaminated actions. And so, whenever we take a body and mind that are under the control of these two, the afflictions and the karma, whatever body and mind we have, no matter where we are born, no matter what’s going on, at the end of the day, it’s going to be unsatisfactory. There isn’t going to be any lasting kind of pleasure there, or security, or solace.

This shakes the foundation of our being because if we look, most of our lives are spent trying to find some happiness within cyclic existence. We say, “Let me just get away from the pain and I’ll latch on to whatever happiness comes my way.” This is like

having the rug torn out from under us, because somebody is saying, “Well, you can grab at all that happiness, but it isn’t going to last and it isn’t really happiness.” Then we think, “Wait a minute. Wait a minute. No, I can’t handle this.” [Laughter.] But I think it’s quite important that we look at this, because it’s only through seeing the disadvantages of our present state that we will ever get the effort and the courage we need to arrive at a state of lasting happiness and freedom.

Also, by seeing the disadvantages of all of the different realms of rebirth, it cuts away at our grasping at utopia. Because part of our mind believes, and so much of our attitude indicates, that if only this would change, things would be OK. I’ve been reading the letters to the editor of *Tricycle*, and it makes me sad because people are continually saying, “This person does this wrong and that person does that wrong, blah blah blah.” The underlying message is, if only all these things didn’t happen, then the world would be fine, and I would be happy. And I think that’s totally missing the point, because the point is “What’s happening inside me?” That’s the whole point.

And so, this attitude of ours that, “If only Clinton gets elected instead of Bush,” or “If only Bush gets re-elected instead of Clinton,” or “If only we pass the better gun law,” or “If only we didn’t renew the most favored nation status for China,” or “If only we’d stop the loggers from cutting down the trees,” or “If only we did this,” or “If only we did that.” We carry these big, tremendous causes with the belief that if only something changes, then basically everything will

be OK.

When we begin to understand that wherever we are born in cyclic existence, there is no lasting happiness, then we begin to see that all this wishing for “If only something would change” is totally missing the point. Because changing all the external things does not cut the root of cyclic existence. The chief cause of our problem isn’t the loggers. It isn’t Bush. It isn’t Saddam Hussein. It isn’t Hitler. It isn’t our boss. It isn’t our parents. It isn’t our kids. That is not the overriding source of all of our confusion and pain.

The overriding source lies within our own mind. It’s our own afflictions, our own contaminated karma. And so, always trying to change outside, always wanting a return to the utopian society, trying to get back to Eden by creating it outside, it just doesn’t work. Understanding the disadvantages of cyclic existence cuts all that kind of fantasy away.

Of course, we have to be concerned with social issues—I am not saying stick your head in the ground and be an ostrich. What I am saying is the mind over exaggerates the importance of these things, and to recognize that as long as there is anger, there will be riots. You can legislate all you want. You can change the economic structure all you want, but as long as there is anger, there will be riots. And as long as there is greed, there will be poverty. You can, again, change the government structure all you want, you can change the education system all you want, you can improve those things externally, but you are not going to be able to cut the root of them, because as long as there is greed, there will be poverty in the world.

And so, we keep coming back again and again and again to the real source of the problem, which lies in the mind. It lies specifically in our own mind. Of course, other people have their difficulties and things like that, but we have to take responsibility for what we're putting out in the world instead of, "If only everybody else didn't have greed, anger, and ignorance!" Yeah? [Laughter.] No. It's "If only I didn't have them, then things will be OK." So, this whole meditation throws us back upon ourselves and teaches us to take responsibility for what happens to us.

When we think about all the disadvantages of cyclic existence and all of its forms, it's quite a sobering meditation, because a lot of our grasping at pleasure, when we begin to analyze more deeply, is really not what it is at. It's very, very sobering, and instead of being afraid of that, it's nice to welcome the sobriety of it. Because if you look at your life, what is it that makes you so confused? It's usually attachment, because we are trying to get the most pleasure out of every single common occurrence that happens in our life. And we get totally confused about how to create the most pleasure. We get confused because if we look for pleasure this way, someone may not like it, and then I will experience displeasure from them. But if I get pleasure for them, that's not going to go well because then I may not get pleasure for myself. And so, we get really stuck and our mind gets confused and we get angry and all that stuff.

Whereas when we get our feet on the ground, "Hold on. Wherever I am born in this cyclic existence, it's not going to be satisfactory. Well then,

why do I need to get so confused, trying to eke out every little morsel of happiness and pleasure? It isn't worth the effort." And somehow when we let go of that craving for pleasure, our mind gets quite peaceful and calm. It's interesting, isn't it? When we let go of the craving for pleasure, that's when the peaceful, calm mind comes. The mind that is constantly craving for pleasure because it thinks there is some lasting pleasure in cyclic existence, that mind is perpetually in turmoil. We just need to look at our own lives; it's so clear.

So, when we start thinking of the faults of the human existence, let's start with our human realm, where we are born right now. Because our usual view is, "Oh yeah, there are some problems, but basically it's OK. I mean actually life is pretty OK. This is some junk but basically it's OK." And what we are trying to get at here is not a depression, not a discouragement about life. We are not trying to take the fun and joy out of life. What we are trying to do is to see our life for what it is so that we can have actual fun and joy, instead of the mind fantasizing about things that don't exist.

## **1. BIRTH**

When we talk about human existence, we talk about specific kinds of unsatisfactory circumstances. The first one is getting born.

You can see right away, this goes completely against our culture, doesn't it? Many things are going to go against our culture. So this is the time to start checking up what we believe in. Because if we look,

really, what is so wonderful about getting born? We always celebrate it. But what is it? As soon as you are born, you start on this whole life of getting old, sick, and dying and all the problems that come in your life. So, what's so exciting about getting born? I heard one person saying, "The thought of having to go through adolescence again is enough to make me not want to take rebirth." [Laughter.] You start wondering what's so great about getting born, because then you start having all the problems of childhood and adolescence and everything else.

And then the whole birth process is painful. Again, as I said before, we usually see the womb as something warm and cozy and wonderful. In the scriptures, it says that the womb is confining and it is dark. You don't have your own space and you are trying to move and you keep on hitting something. What's so wonderful about it?

And then the whole process of getting born is again, a very painful process. So what's so wonderful about getting born? That makes us start questioning what's so wonderful about our body? Because we usually associate birth with getting this body and in our usual way of thinking, this body is our great source of pleasure. Isn't it? Look, all day long we get so much pleasure from this body, the pleasure of drinking coffee, for instance. [Laughter.] The pleasure of eating breakfast, the pleasure of nice soft kiddies to pat [laughter], the pleasure of nice things to see, the pleasure of nice smells, scents you put on your body, scents you smell around you, nice sounds, and music, sexual pleasure, the pleasure of going to sleep. We are looking so much for the pleasure of the body. And so

we usually see our body as a source of pleasure, something that's wonderful, "Isn't it great to have a body!"

And Buddhism says, actually let's look again and see if it is that great to have a body. And so Buddhism says, what is our body? Well, it's skin, blood, internal organs, muscles, skeleton, limbs, nerves. You take any of those things by themselves, and they are not particularly wonderful. And so, what is this body that's so pleasurable?

When you sit here and you just kind of visually imagine what your body is, not imagine, but look at what your body is. Just sit there, and instead of feeling like this happy bubble, well there is a skeleton inside. Why do we get so frightened of seeing dead people? We're basically a walking dead person, aren't we? [Laughter.] I mean, we have this skeleton and all the things that dead people have. What's so fantastic? When we see a human skeleton, we get the creeps, but we're walking around with one all the time! And then we go and hug others. That's what it is, isn't it?

If you peel away the skin and see all the muscles and all your internal organs, it is really nothing particularly beautiful. So, why do we cling to this body as a continual source of pleasure? So excited about getting born and getting another body. Look what it is.

Now, we have to be clear here that Buddhism is very different from Judeo-Christian culture. We may have been brought up with this view that the body is evil, sinful and dirty. I don't know, people are of different backgrounds and religions. You may have some of that in your background. Some of that may

have been internalized. That's not what Buddhism is talking about. Buddhism is not saying your body is dirty, evil, and sinful. "Dirty" in the sense of evil and sinful. We are not making a judgment about the body. "Your body is impure, so you have to punish your body!"—this whole kind of harshness sometimes permeates Christian culture. That is not what Buddhism is talking about. So, if you find yourself reacting in that way, be aware that you are bringing your own background in. And you are not listening clearly.

Because we don't want to hate the body. Hating our body is a form of hatred, isn't it? Hatred is a form of affliction. So, we are not trying to hate our body. Let's get that very clear. It's not a question of hating the body, because that is very afflicted. It's very unhealthy. It is instead, a thing of seeing the body for what it is and what it isn't. And just seeing that basically, what it is—and you are going to laugh, but this is what His Holiness says—your body is basically a waste manufacturer. And if you think, all day long, we eat, we eat, we eat. And then, we go pee-pee and ka-ka. [Laughter.] It's like everything that comes out of our body, from all the orifices .... You look, any orifices you have in your body, does anything pure and beautiful come out of it? Out of your eyes or your nose or your mouth or your ears or any part? The sweat out of the pores. Everything that comes out of our body, we regard as impure, don't we?

And the food ... we look at food. The food looks real clean, but as soon as we put the food in our mouth, if we then take it out without even swallowing it, we wouldn't say it was clean food anymore. It's



like our body makes it dirty. Just look at how we are thinking. We eat this clean food and it comes out as dirty ka-ka. So, when we look at it, what is in this body that is so fantastically wonderful that we have to get so excited about it? If we truly look, we recognize that the body is something that acts as a basis for a lot of our own afflictions and the afflictions of others. Because what is one of our chief sources of attachment? Our body. Yeah? Our attachment to the body is a big one that preoccupies our mind. We waste our life running after attachments to the body. Perpetual discontent.

So, what we are getting here, as I said, is not to hate our body. But rather to see it for what it is. And to work with it for what it is. If I think my body is totally garbage, I am going to go kill myself to get rid of this body, and I am not understanding properly ... because, anyway, I will just get another body. But, it's not a thing of hating the body. It's not a thing of just feeling dirty and disgusting. We are not trying to create a bad self-image. We are just trying to look at that mind that is so attached and obsessed with the body and recognize that there is absolutely no need for that. There is absolutely no need for all the confusion in our life that centers around our body. If we realize the body for what it is and how it is filled with all sorts of impure substances, then, what's the use of worrying so much about how it looks? Why do we get so worried about our physical appearance? And so worried about other people's physical appearance? It's senseless. It's stupid.

So you see, when we see the body for what it is, then this kind of attachment that agitates the mind

fades away. “OK, I keep my body neat and clean. I don’t need to worry about whether it is gorgeous.” Whether I have a gorgeous garbage dump or not, it is immaterial. So, I use this body for what it is useful for—it’s useful as the basis for my Dharma practice, but beyond that I am not going to worry about whether it is too thin, or too fat, or whether the hair is the right color, or this or that. No sense. Just put that down. See, that’s what I mean by saying that this meditation is very sobering, but in that sobriety, there is a lot of peace. Because when you stop being so obsessed with your body, your mind starts to get very peaceful.

Is this coming through? Do you see how our mind is saying yes ... but? “Yes, that’s true. But, there are people that are nicer looking than others, and I want to be one of them and I do get some pleasure from my body. What’s wrong with it?” Nothing’s wrong with having pleasure from your body. But it’s just how much pleasure does your body give you compared to the amount of time and energy you have to put in arranging it all. Compared to if you put that time and energy into real practice, to free yourself from the afflictions and the karma that make you take a contaminated body to start with.

So, we start looking at birth as unsatisfactory. Not hunky-dory. It’s not wonderful.

Another way to look at this body is to recognize that our body and mind that are in samsara are a product of previous afflictions and karma. So, the cause of this body and mind is something contaminated. Isn’t it? How do we get a human body? It’s because we are under the influence of afflictions and karma. So, the cause of the human body is

something contaminated. Then, the effect of the human body, because it acts as a basis for us to generate so many afflictions and thus so much karma, then the effect of the human body is more contamination, more problems, more difficulties. And, the body to boot acts as the basis for our present suffering and problems. So, it's produced from contamination, it gives rise to contamination, and it is a hassle. It is unsatisfactory. It is suffering in nature. Because just by having the human body, we set the stage, we set the basis for so many problems in life.

So again, it is not a thing of hating the body. What we are trying to do is free ourselves from the mind that clings to having a body. If you are a bodhisattva, you can choose to have a body. And you do so out of compassion. Not out of obsession and compulsion. But if you look at us, we are just obsessed: "I've got to have a body! I've got to have a body!" And it is that attachment, that clinging that makes us again and again and again find ourselves in bodies, even human bodies. Of all of them, the human body is pretty OK, but still it's basically unsatisfactory. So, birth is something unsatisfactory.

## **2. SICKNESS**

Now, what happens after birth? As we live our life, we get sick.

So, again, you can see, just by having a human body, you have the basis upon which to get sick. If we didn't have the attachment and the karma that made us take the body, then we wouldn't have all the sickness, and the pain, and the misery from sickness

that comes later. But we have the attachment. We didn't free ourselves in past lives from it. So, again, in this life we were born under the influence of afflictions and karma, with the body that by its very nature gets sick. We can remember all the times we were sick, from the time when you were a little kid and you get sick, and how awful it feels, to the time when you are an adult when you get sick, and how awful it feels. And then we think of future sicknesses.

All of us have the basic necessary equipment for getting cancer, and getting heart disease, and getting AIDS, and getting all the other completely miserable diseases. By having a body, we are totally open to all of that. And sickness is not something that is wonderful. Nobody likes it. By remembering all these unsatisfactory conditions, we are trying to develop the courage to let go of the attachment that keeps us bound to an unsatisfactory situation. We are trying to generate the determination to be free, to have a lasting kind of happiness that isn't so conditioned by these things.

So, when you are meditating on this, think of all the different kinds of sicknesses and imagine having all these different kinds of sicknesses. Because like I've said, we have the basic thing it takes to have them all.

### **3. AGING**

And then, think about aging. Again, very natural. As soon as we are born, what do we start to do? We start aging. We usually see growing up as wonderful and then we turn forty and then it's downhill.

From a Buddhist point of view, we are aging, we are getting old, we are dying from the time we are conceived. So, it isn't like everything is uphill and then everything is downhill. It's more like we're heading towards death from the moment we are born; we are in the process of aging from the moment we're conceived in the womb. So, what's so wonderful about the aging process?

I remember when I was in my twenties, I didn't think aging was so bad, and then when I turned thirty, definitely there was a psychological change going on. Because I started feeling the energy in my body change. And then when we turn forty, there's more psychological change, because again, our body's changing. And then we turn fifty and sixty and seventy and eighty. You just watch what's happening to the body.

And they say in the scriptures that it's very good that we age slowly because we have time to get used to it. Because they say, imagine just getting up tomorrow morning and looking in the mirror and there is an eighty-year-old face. And just imagine all of a sudden being eighty years old. What would it be like to be eighty? Or, if you don't want to be eighty, be seventy, or sixty, you can pick. But think about what it is like to have an old body.

When your body doesn't have as much strength. All the things that you used to like to do and you used to be able to do, you can't do anymore.

I think the people who are so attached to the different athletic abilities, when they lose those as they age—that must be incredibly painful. Because the mind wants to do those same things so much. You

want to skate, or you want to play softball, or you want to swim, but the body just doesn't work anymore.

I think it's important to visualize ourselves being old. What will it be like to have a body that doesn't work so well? A body that is painful when we go downstairs, is painful when we go upstairs. A body that when we sit down, it's painful. Have you ever watched how old people sit down? They kind of lower themselves over the chair and plunk! And then how difficult it is to get up.

A few years ago, I visited my grandmother. She was in an old folks home, in the ward of the people who were the really out-of-it ones. She didn't recognize me, but can you imagine what would it be like, that you don't recognize people? How would you feel not being able to recognize people? It was incredible just walking up toward the ward she was in and hearing the sounds coming out of it. The kind of moans and groans and really unearthly sounds. Because when people are old and senile, just the mouth does a lot of things, completely uncontrolled. People don't know what they are doing.

And then, we walked into the room, and some of the people are lying back in chairs, and some are in these baby chairs with the plate in front. And they're drooped over like this. These are people who used to be healthy and strong and successful in society, the kinds of people that, when we were little, we looked up to. They used to be able to handle things very well and knew what they were doing. To think that that is going to happen to us, if we live that long. And imagine what would it be like? What would it be like

as you start to get senile.

One of my friends, his mother has Alzheimer's. Sometimes she wanted to say things but she couldn't express herself. It's like she knew what she wanted to say, but she couldn't get it out. Imagine being that person. You know very clearly what you want to say, but your mouth doesn't work right to get the words out. So other people look at you like you are really stupid and out of it. How do you feel then? How do you feel knowing that you are losing it? Knowing you can't talk clearly to other people and make yourself understood.

And her mind will get garbled sometimes. She would put lipstick on her toothbrush. They both come out of tubes but you get confused. You put lipstick on your toothbrush. And you put on three or four pairs of pants. What would it be like to be like that? To put on three or four pairs of pants and then recognize that you did something dumb, but you don't know how to get them off? Or recognize after the lipstick is on your toothbrush, that something is wrong? What would it be like to know that you are mentally losing it? You can't control your mind anymore.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Exactly. Right. That's the next point actually. As you get old, how do people start treating you? Even the people who love you very much, when you start to lose it, it becomes very difficult for them to be with you, because it is very painful, they don't like to see somebody they care about lose it. So they kind of block you out and don't go visit you again. They can't

say, “This is causing me a lot of pain.” So they just make up a lot of excuses and don’t come to see you because you are not so much fun to be with anymore.

And then you hear them talking to your friends and to your relatives behind your back and you can understand very clearly, but they don’t know that you can. They’re sitting there talking about how you’ve gone so downhill, how you can’t hold it together anymore, that you are going to die soon and isn’t this a tragedy. Here are all the people you trusted, all the people you loved, all the people you cared for. And they are judging you and they’re ostracizing you, basically because of their own pain in the situation, which they cannot acknowledge.

And then, how does that feel, from our side, to be that person? How does it feel to rely on social security, or rely on Medicare? You used to be in society, able and capable and you could go do this and go do that, and you had enough money to do this and that, and do what you want. Now all of a sudden you’re old and retired, and you don’t have so much money. And you’re at the whim of a lot of bureaucrats; you don’t have so much free choice anymore about what you want to do? And then you hear all your children talking about putting you in an old folks home. And you don’t want to go to an old folks home.

This is another thing. My friend’s mum did not want to go to the old folks home, and when she went, every time he goes and visits her, when he has to leave, she is crying and crying, because she wants to come with, and she can’t. How would it feel to be like that? We’re basically kind of locked up, after we have



been an adult in-charge, capable, able to do everything and now all of a sudden we can't even leave a building by ourselves, they won't let us.

The whole aging process is not a wonderful one. And you can see again, the more we have attachment, the more painful the aging process is. That is one thing to be aware of in this meditation. But even deeper than that, is to recognize that we have to go through all the suffering of aging because we have the attachment that wanted to have a body in the first place ...

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

#### **4. DEATH**

... Again, that's the one thing in life that we know is definitely going to happen. One thing that we definitely have to do is die, and it's something that we do totally without choice. Nobody wants to get old, nobody wants to get sick, and especially people don't want to die. And yet, here it is, without choice. Because we got born under the influence of afflictions and karma, we have to die without choice.

And all kinds of pain go with the death process. We might die very suddenly, so you have the suffering of a sudden death in that you don't get to clarify everything and do what you want to do and clean things up and say goodbye. Or you might die very slowly in a prolonged way and that may involve incredible physical suffering.

This suffering is something we are not free of. It comes through getting a body out of afflictions and

karma. There is the physical suffering that you get as you approach death, and also the mental suffering; mental suffering through having a lot of regret over the negative actions we did in our life and not having done positive actions, and now at the time of death, there is no time to change that situation in any way. There is no time to apply any remedial measures because you are dying, you aren't young anymore, you can't go back and undo the mistakes you did and create a lot of good karma. You didn't purify because you were too busy having a good time, and then death is upon us and we have a lot of regret for what we did, regret for what we didn't do, and fear about the future.

And then the suffering of parting from everything we know in our life. How hard it is, even now, to separate from small things. We separate from a good friend and we missed them. How are we going to feel when we die? There, it's not a short separation. There, it's really goodbye. This is it. So, again, we try to gross over everything in our society. It's like, "Well, we have so many medical advancements, so we are going to be able to cure our sickness. Medicine is going to be able to keep us from getting old. Medicine is going to keep us from having pain when we die." Baloney! It's just not like that. All you have to do is just be with people who are dying. It is not a fun process. Again, you can see that the more ignorance, anger, and attachment people have, the worse the death process is going to be.

So, it is important to think about these things, to see the role that ignorance, anger, and attachment play in them, and to try to lessen these. And then to

see that we are here just having to go through this to start with because of ignorance, anger, and attachment. And get some courage to just say, “This is ridiculous. There is no reason for me to keep following attachment. There is no reason for me to keep following anger. There is no reason for me to allow myself to continue to be ignorant. Because it doesn’t do me any good. If what I want is to be happy, then I’ve got to use my abilities and create the cause for happiness by correctly discerning what is the cause for happiness and what isn’t.” So, meditating on the disadvantages of cyclic existence is very beneficial.

## **5. BEING PARTED FROM WHAT YOU LIKE**

Another thing in our human existence that is unsatisfactory is that we are parted from what we like. Aren’t we? Can you think of things that you had today that you like, that you were separated from? So many things. This is an unsatisfactory condition that goes on continuously day in and day out. We’re together with the person we like, and we separate. We are with some kind of food we like, and we separate. And we are with the song that we like, and we separate. We are in bed and we are relaxing, and then we have to get up.

We are constantly separating from things we like. Again and again and again and again. That’s just totally indicative of human existence. Again, it doesn’t matter whether you are rich or poor; you are going to be separated from things you like. Sometimes you think if you are rich enough, you won’t have to

be separated from what you like. But you will. Rich people get separated from what they like too. Again and again, this happens to us.

## **6. MEETING WITH WHAT YOU DON'T LIKE**

And then not only that. We meet with what we don't like.

If we look, just on a personal level, there are so many problems, so many unpleasant situations. Again, look at today. You can probably think of ten things that happened that you didn't like. If you only think of ten, you are doing very well. You'd probably think of more if you sat down and spent more than 30 seconds. Again and again, so many things happening to us that we don't like. From a small sound that we find unpleasant to a small thing that doesn't look right, to an unpleasant odor, to food that isn't quite as good as we wanted or tastes bad, to things that are rough against our skin, or being too cold, or being too hot. So many things happen to us that we just don't like. We meet with people we don't like. We meet with situations we don't like. And so, we have many troubles, personally.

And then our family has many troubles, as a group, as a small unit, whoever we live with, whoever we are close to, again, more problems. The family meeting with problems. Either someone in the family is sick or someone in the family is doing this or that, family problems.

And then you look at our country. The country faces problems, so many undesirable things happen to the country. Now we think of the whole world and so

many unwanted things happen to the world.

So, whatever level you think on, whether it is individual or family or small group or country or global, we're always meeting things that we don't like, again and again and again and again. And you can see, that just by taking a body that's under the control of afflictions and karma, this is going to keep happening again, and again and again and again. Just by getting born, we get this. Think about this. From the time you were born, all the things you met with that you didn't like, or from the time you were born, all the things you liked that you were separated from. So much suffering. Incredible pain.

## **7. NOT OBTAINING WHAT YOU LIKE**

And then, on top of that, we don't get what we want. And again, how many times, from the time we were born until this very minute, did we not get what we wanted. We want so many things and we don't get all of them.

When you were little, you wanted your teddy bear but couldn't have it. You wanted roller blades, and you couldn't have them. You wanted an "A" on your report card and you didn't get one. You want straight hair, but you were born with curly hair. We just can't get what we want! All the time.

And again, today, how many things we want that we can't get. And how many problems in our life that occur because we can't get what we want. And we think we are adult and we are grown up, but basically if we look at our life, all of our problems are about not getting what we want, or being separated from what

we like, or getting what we don't want. It's the same problems kids have. They're in fact the same thing, again and again and again, and again. Our whole life is filled with this.

So, this is the disadvantage of a human life. What we are trying to do here, by thinking of all these disadvantages, is to say ... because you see, when we talk about the disadvantages of lower rebirth, then it was easy. Lower rebirth—it really stinks, no way I want to go there. I am going to create good karma and go for a good rebirth. But now we are maturing a bit, and we are beginning to realize that even good rebirths do not create lasting happiness. It is a stop-gap measure that protects us from the suffering of the lower realms. But in and of itself, it's not 100% hunky-dory. I think it is important just to put our feet on the ground.

Again, we are not meditating on this in order to blame other people for all the unsatisfactory things in our lives. We're meditating in this way so we can see that this is the very nature of having a body and mind under the control of the afflictions and karma. And since this is the very nature of our existence, what use is it blaming other people? It's not other people's fault. It's not the government's fault. It's not anybody else's fault. We are in the situation. This is its nature. And so by thinking like this, we can develop the determination to free ourselves.

Actually, there are eight disadvantages of human existence. I only discussed seven; I'll save the eighth for next week. There is much to say about that one.

I think it's good to sit and do some thinking about this, to think about it in terms of your own experience.

Imagine yourself being in the womb, being born, being a baby and all the confusion. Imagine yourself having all these different sicknesses. Imagining yourself being an old person. Imagine yourself on your death bed dying. Go through your life and review all the times when you were separated from what you like, when you got what you didn't like, when you didn't get what you did like. And make sure that you make the proper conclusion, which is, I am going to free myself from this situation. Really important you get the proper conclusion out of it. [Laughter.]. Questions?

## **Questions and answers**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

[Laughter.] But see, when you think, “OK, if all this is so bad, then I am going to eke out some pleasure. But what we are coming to is that where you're at right now isn't that pleasurable.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

[Laughter.] No, because where you are at right now is the cause for all that pain in the future. So, it's not like today is happy and the future is suffering. If you have the cause for it all with you right now, what's so wonderful about it? It's like being in Florida knowing that hurricane Andrew is going to hit in 5 hours. Andrew isn't there right now, so you can sit down and have spaghetti dinner, but you know Andrew is going to hit real soon.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

The question is, if taking birth gives rise to being able to hear the Dharma, this present moment is the cause for our future enlightenment, isn't it? That's true. And in that way, we want to look at that and say, "Oh, well, if I have to take rebirth, having a human rebirth is actually a good one in terms of the Dharma. But, I wouldn't need to practice the Dharma if I didn't have afflictions and karma to start with. In other words, if I had practiced the Dharma in my previous lives, then I wouldn't have to rejoice in having a precious human life this time and being able to practice the Dharma. Because I would have done it already. This whole thing would have been over with.

Of course now, although we are in samsara, we have an incredible opportunity in that we have something to look at and rejoice at and feel very positive about. But the purpose of recognizing that it's positive is to encourage us to practice the Dharma. We're meditating on all these disadvantages so that we will practice the Dharma. And if we had practiced the Dharma in the past, we wouldn't be in this mess to start with. That's the whole thing. It's because in the past lives, we didn't practice. I mean, we did do some kind of practice in the past to be able to meet the Dharma in this life. So, we can rejoice at that. But, although the practice we did in our past lives was wonderful, it was also limited. Because if we had practiced better, we wouldn't be going through what we are going through now.

What we are trying to do is get a very balanced way of looking at this.



The disadvantages of samsara—somebody was saying that this is heavy stuff. Really, when we talk about the disadvantages of samsara, it's directly challenging how we live our lives and the on-going attachment that we have to everything in our lives. I was saying I could teach topics like love—I'd probably have a lot more people here [Laughter.]—but I wouldn't be accurately portraying the teachings. Then somebody else commented: "I'm kind of waiting for you to get to the topic of love and compassion—then it will get better; that's kind of nice."

Then I pointed out that actually, it comes down to the same thing. Before you meditate on love and compassion, you have to meditate on equanimity—getting rid of attachment to friends, aversion to enemies and indifference to everybody else. So it's coming down to the same things that we are getting to here—attachment, anger and ignorance.

If you are having the mind of: "Oh, I wish we will stop talking about all the suffering and unsatisfactory stuff and start talking about bodhicitta," you will find that we will bump into our attachment, anger and ignorance anyway, wherever we turn. We keep trying to wiggle out of it. It's as if the Buddha's got to have a loophole somewhere [Laughter.]. When you find one, let me know [Laughter.].

## **Review**

### ***1. Taking birth***

Last time, we talked about the unpleasantness and the unsatisfactory nature of taking birth. By taking birth,

we are then exposed to ageing, sickness, death, and everything else that comes along with it. Our body acts as the basis for so much difficulty that we experience this lifetime. If we didn't have this body, we wouldn't have to worry about cancer or Aids or heart disease.

But it's interesting, because we think: "I have this body and the body is good. It's the cancer and Aids and heart disease that are the problems." It's like we should get rid of those but be able to keep this body. But what we're pointing out here is that the body, by its very nature, is totally open to all of that, so there is no way you are ever going to conquer Aids, cancer, heart disease and all kinds of illnesses, without getting rid of the body that's under the influence of afflictions and karma. You might put disease off for a while, but as long as we have a body that is under the control of afflictions and karma, some kind of sickness at some point is going to come.

## ***2 & 3. Sickness and ageing***

Then of course we also have the disadvantages of sickness, which we don't like very much, and the disadvantages of ageing—the difficulties of the whole ageing process. We talked about ageing in terms of the sufferings of someone in old age, but actually it can refer to the whole ageing process—as you grow up, all the changes you have to go through, adjustments you have to make through childhood, adolescence, young adulthood and middle-age, all the different physical and mental difficulties that go with the process of ageing.

#### ***4. Death***

Then we also talked about death. It's not what we want to do, and yet it's part of having this body. There is no way to avoid it.

#### ***5 & 6. Not getting what we want and meeting with things we don't like***

We also face the situations of not getting what we want and meeting with things that we don't like. Even though we try so hard to not meet the things we don't like and we try so hard to get the things we like, we're not successful.

It's interesting to look at the problems that you encounter on a day-to-day basis and ask yourself which category it falls under. Something happened to me just a few days ago. I was very upset by it, thinking: "It just wasn't fair. It wasn't right. People weren't being open-minded," etc. And then I sat down and I said: "Basically, it all boils down to I'm not getting what I want." [Laughter.] That's because I'm born with a body and mind under the influence of afflictions and karma. So what's there to be so surprised at? It's just the nature of this type of existence to have the problem of not getting what I want. Of course, Buddha said so. It's just that I didn't listen. [Laughter.]

It's quite interesting to look at your different experiences and troubles that way. Either I'm not getting what I want, or I am getting what I don't want. Of course I'm going to get what I don't want! Of course. By not removing afflictions and karma in

previous lives, I'm of course going to get what I don't want in this life.

### ***7. Being separated from the things we like***

Also, I'm separated from the things I like. I may have some really wonderful experience or wonderful thing or wonderful relationship, but then circumstances change and it isn't there anymore. Of course this happens. As long as I'm under the influence of afflictions and karma, that's going to happen.

Reflecting like this, looking at our daily life experience through this framework, becomes a real centering experience. It cures a lot of the belligerence we have towards other people and external situations, because we see that it is not somebody else's fault. It is like: "Why am I here in the first place? It is because I didn't resolve the problem in the previous life. I set myself up for it." So it stops the feeling of fighting with the world, because we are seeing our own situation in a different light, in a broader perspective. I think this is really helpful.

### **8. HAVING A CONTAMINATED BODY AND MIND**

The eighth of the unsatisfactory conditions of human beings is having a contaminated body and mind due to afflictions and karma.

(Actually, these eight unsatisfactory conditions are not limited to human beings. In fact, I've always wondered why they list these eight as peculiar to human beings, because it seems to me that at least,

beings from the human realm downwards go through these. In the upper realms, when you have great concentration, you don't have these unsatisfactory experiences.)

When we say 'contaminated body and mind', it doesn't mean that it is radioactive [Laughter.]. It means it's contaminated by afflictions and karma. Because we have this body and mind that are under the influence of afflictions and karma, we're not free. Everything is contaminated by that.

Again, it's interesting to think about this: "I have a contaminated body and mind," instead of: "This is *me*. Don't tell me I'm contaminated!" [Laughter.] We don't like to be told we're contaminated. But it is true that we have a contaminated body and mind, isn't it? My body *is* under the influence of afflictions and karma. It is so because in previous lives, I had ignorance, anger and attachment. In particular, at the end of my last life, I had a lot of attachment to having a body. My mind desperately wanted a body, so it latched onto another body of this life when it had to separate from last life's body. So I got the body because I wanted it. So in future be careful what you want! [Laughter.] It's under the control of my own attachment that I got a body that then gets sick and old and dies.

And this body is the basis on which the karma of past lives ripens. We created many different karma in our past lives. We might have punched somebody or did medical experiments and killed a lot of beings in a past life—who knows what we did in previous lives! A lot of the results of those actions get reaped on this life's body.

Just look at your day-to-day experiences. You have a stomach ache. Instead of: “It’s that lousy guy at the restaurant I ate who didn’t clean the dishes,” it’s like: “Oh, this is the result of my own karma. I have a body on which this karma can ripen because I have ignorance. And I had a lot of grasping at the end of my last life.”

It’s true that if you have to get born in cyclic existence, a human body is a good one to have. That’s why in the initial scope, we aspire and work to get human bodies and good rebirths in an upper realm in the next life. But now, hopefully our mind is a little bit more mature and we’re not going to be satisfied with just having a good body because we recognize that it’s still under the control of afflictions and karma, and we’re still not free.

It is the same with our mind. Why do we have anger? Why do we lose our temper? Why do we feel lonesome and paranoid? Why do we feel discontent? Why do we feel unloved? All these different mental feelings and emotional feelings that we have—why are they there? Well, in our past lives, we had afflictions. We didn’t purify the mind completely. We didn’t realize emptiness. So there is a continuity of the afflictions, and what we had in our past lives, we have them too in this life.

We had attachment last life, so this life we have lots of attachment. As a result of our attachment, we have discontent. We lost our temper a lot last life, so the seed of the anger continues to this life. These different mental factors just continue on. We have them again in this life because we didn’t solve the problems before.

Why do we experience so much mental pain? In many ways, our mental pain is much more excruciating than our physical pain. In our society, the physical pain is minimal, but there is so much mental pain, especially when compared to, let's say, India or China. Why is there so much mental pain?

Again, so much of it is due to afflictions and karma. The afflictions that come up in our mind now are a continuation of previous lives' afflictions. All the different feelings and emotions that we have that are very painful, are the ripenings of previous life karma. Why do we get depressed? Well, maybe in previous lives we harmed others. Why do we feel lonesome sometimes? Well, maybe in previous lives we were very cruel to other people and kick them out of our home.

Who knows what we did in previous lives! They say we've been born as everything and done everything. I think it's useless to hold on to this goody-two-shoes idea of: "Oh, I wouldn't do that!" We wouldn't? All that is needed is to put us in the right situation, and I bet we would do it. You think we're above doing what happened in LA? I'm sure if we were put in the same circumstances, we would have rioted and done exactly the same thing that people did. Why? Because the seeds are within us. It is just that the karma is not ripening right now. But I think a lot of that potential is right there within us. And this is what we are getting at when we say that we are under the influence of afflictions and karma. Those afflictions are right there. All that is needed is to have the karma that puts you in that external situation and whammo! There you have it.

I think it's a very humbling experience to think about this, just to see what the root of the problem is. By seeing the root of the problem as the afflictions and karma, we also recognize that we can do something to change it, because we can control our afflictions. We have learnt the antidotes to these afflictions. We have learnt methods to realize emptiness to eliminate them. We have learnt methods to purify the karma. The understanding of emptiness is the ultimate thing that purifies the karma.

So we have within us, the ability to change this whole situation. It might be sobering to recognize that it's all there within us, but it's also very helpful because we have the tools that we can use to change it. Whereas if the situation were really as we so often perceive it to be: "Well, this person is not being very nice to me. This person is being unfair. This one is close-minded. That situation is unjust. This isn't right," then there's no way we can ever solve it, because we can't change everything everybody else does.

So our old view of always seeing problems as external is really leading us to a dead end. While this other one, although it might be sobering and it might be breath-taking in an alarming way, it actually is very hopeful at the base because we see that we can change it. We have the guides. We have the tools. All we need to do is do it! Sounds easy, huh? [Laughter.]

So what's missing? Why aren't we doing it? Because we don't see the situation for what it is. Why does a person who has a drug problem not go for help? Because they don't see the severity of their situation. They are painting over it. They are not



looking at how horrible the situation is. So they are not going for help.

Similarly, we have to look at how horrible our situation is, not so that we get freaked out and emotional and depressed, but so that we actually go for help and do something about it. The psychologists always say that as long as you are in denial, then you can't change. It's the same in the Dharma. As long as we're denying what our situation is and painting over it, we're just going to perpetuate it again and again. We need to see the disadvantages of cyclic existence and by that, we develop the determination to be free from it.

This determination to be free from cyclic existence is called, in Western terms, having compassion for ourselves. The Buddhas do not use that terminology, but that's basically what it is. Compassion is not wanting someone to suffer. When we look at the severity of cyclic existence and we don't want to continue to suffer within it, then we have compassion for ourselves and we want to free ourselves from it. And we have love for ourselves, which is the wish for ourselves to be happy, to attain liberation. So Buddhism is definitely based on having love and compassion for ourselves.

And when we have that love and compassion for ourselves, when we have this determination to be free from cyclic existence, then we can generate love and compassion for others. We generate love and compassion for ourselves by looking at our own unsatisfactory situation. We generate it for others by looking at their unsatisfactory situations. We see that they are in exactly the same situation as us. But we

can't recognize others' misery if we can't recognize our own. How can we get in touch with the severity of somebody else' pain if we can't even acknowledge our own pain?

So, wanting to have love and compassion but not wanting to look at our own situation is a contradiction. With this contradiction, we're not going to be able to have real love and compassion. Therefore, love and compassion is not an escape from looking at our own problems. It's done on the basis of having looked at our own problems.

I remember one time Rinpoche teaching this. He was saying this in the context of the equanimity meditation. He was saying that when there is somebody whom you don't like and you wish harm upon the person, then think that the person is going to get old and sick and die. At that time, I was quite upset with somebody, and when I thought that this person was going to get sick and old and die, then all of a sudden, I found that I couldn't be angry with them anymore. How can I wish harm to somebody who is going to get old and sick and die? They're going to suffer. I don't even have to do anything to cause it. How can I wish them to have suffering anyway?! What kind of integrity do I have as a human being if that's what I want?

So, I think recognizing what cyclic existence is all about is very helpful in many ways. It can help us to generate love and compassion for ourselves. It can help us to let go of anger and resentment for other people. It can help us to develop some love and compassion for them, because they're exactly like us. So, this is really a cornerstone.

When the Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths, the first truth of the unsatisfactory conditions is the first thing he taught, so it must have been important. [Laughter.] But you have to remember that he didn't leave it at just the first Noble Truth or the second Noble Truth—unsatisfactory conditions and their causes. He taught all four, which means he also taught the cessation of the afflictions and their causes and the problems, and he also taught the path how to do it. It is very important to remember there are four Noble Truths. Don't get stuck in just one.

So, these are the eight unsatisfactory conditions of human beings.

## **The Three Sufferings**

What I want to go into a little more in-depth now, is what is commonly called the three sufferings. We had the six sufferings. We had the eight sufferings. Now we have the three [Laughter.]. It's just another way of presenting it. We went over this when we first talked about the Four Noble Truths, but I think it's helpful to go into more depth right now. One or more of these three unsatisfactory conditions permeate all realms in cyclic existence. Thinking about this is designed to help us go beyond just wishing for a good rebirth, to see the defects in that and therefore to wish for liberation.

There are three unsatisfactory conditions:

1. The unsatisfactoriness of suffering
2. The unsatisfactoriness of change

### 3. Pervading compounded unsatisfactoriness

I wish there were a nice word for the translation of the Sanskrit term 'dukka', instead of 'unsatisfactoriness', or 'suffering' which is a worse translation.

## **1. THE UNSATISFACTORINESS OF SUFFERING**

The unsatisfactoriness of suffering is feelings, both mental and physical, that all beings acknowledge as painful. This is basically painful feelings, unpleasant feelings. They can be physical ones like stubbing our toe or having an upset stomach. They can be mental ones like getting depressed or anxious. Both the physical and mental sufferings are experienced by animals, by the beings in the hell realms, and by the hungry ghosts. The mental suffering is also experienced by some of the desire realm gods, these gods who live in super-deluxe sense pleasure.

## **2. THE UNSATISFACTORINESS OF CHANGE**

The unsatisfactoriness of change refers to pleasant feelings, happy feelings, things that we normally consider happy. Why do we say that happy feelings are unsatisfactory? Or if you use the old translation, that happy feelings are suffering? (See, that's why 'suffering' doesn't work so well.) Because they don't last very long. And because we have to gather so many external conditions to get them. We have to put

in a lot of energy into getting them.

And also, all the things that we do that bring us pleasant feelings, by their very nature, are not inherently pleasurable. When your knees hurt while you're sitting down, all you want to do is get up. When you first stand up, standing is pleasurable. But if you keep standing and standing, it becomes painful, doesn't it? The same activity of standing, which at the beginning, was pleasurable, later becomes painful. So that activity, in and of itself, is not pleasurable.

Why do we call it pleasurable then when we first stand up? It's because the suffering of sitting down has gone away and the suffering of standing up is very small at that point when we first stand up. But as we stand longer, that suffering, which is initially small, grows and grows until it becomes painful. On that small amount of suffering or unsatisfactoriness that we have when we first stand up, we give it the label 'pleasure'. We label it 'pleasure' because the gross discomfort of sitting down has ceased and the gross discomfort of standing up hasn't yet arisen. It's just a little discomfort. So we call it 'pleasure'.

It's the same when you are eating, when you are really hungry. There is a gross feeling of hunger. It feels horrible. When you start to eat, wow, it's such a pleasure! Bliss! Wonderful! We call that pleasurable, but what actually is it? The unpleasant feeling of hunger has gone away. The unpleasantness of eating is very small. Because if we keep eating and eating, it definitely becomes quite unpleasant, doesn't it? If you sit there and stuff yourself, it becomes very painful. Which is more painful: having a stomach that's too full so you feel like you are going to throw up, or

being hungry? Both are different forms of pain, but they're both physical pain.

The pain that comes from eating is still very small at the moment when you first start eating to assuage your hunger. So we label it 'pleasure'. We label it 'happiness'. But in and of itself, that feeling is not happiness. It's not pleasure. Because if that feeling were inherently pleasurable, then the more we ate, the happier we should be. But quite the opposite happens. It's like with anything that we do, it is pleasurable and nice for a while, and then it goes bad. Just examine the things you do that are conditioned by afflictions and karma, the things we do to seek worldly pleasure. We start out with some pleasure, but if we keep doing the same thing, it invariably goes bad. There's nothing we will be able to find, that if we keep doing, always gets better, because if there were, we would be doing that instead of sitting here.

*[Audience:] How about real love?*

Is it real love? You're with a fantastic person and it's wonderful. But if you're with them for another hour, and another hour, and another hour ... as one person said: "If you say that you've been married ten years and you haven't had a fight, it tells me that either you don't live together, or you don't speak to each other."  
[Laughter.]

People might say: "Oh, this is happiness," but they're picking out certain things that they label 'happiness' on. But with any relationship, with any person, there're difficulties, even if you care about that person very much. Many things go on in a

relationship. The same person who at one time causes us pleasurable feeling, can also cause us to have a painful feeling at other times. It happens all the time. This is why it's an unsatisfactory condition of change, because the pleasurable thing changes into something unpleasant if you do it long enough.

Why doesn't the pleasure last? Because it is in the nature of unsatisfactoriness. Because it's governed by afflictions and karma. So we're coming back to the causes again—the afflictions and karma.

### **3. PERVADING COMPOUNDED UNSATISFACTORINESS**

So, we've looked at unpleasant feelings, the unsatisfactoriness of suffering. We've looked at pleasant feelings as also being unsatisfactory, because they change.

What about neutral feelings, or contaminated feelings of equanimity? We're just feeling neutral. They're definitely better than outright suffering. This is one of the reasons why people develop very deep concentration. At the beginning of their concentration they get incredible feelings of happiness. But then they transcend that and they go on to experiencing feelings of equanimity, just a feeling of neutrality which is supposedly better than some of the happy feelings that you get when you have deep concentration. And yet that is not free of the afflictions and karma, so it's contaminated equanimity or contaminated neutrality.

Well, what is so unsatisfactory about that? Well, just when you have it, you may have a neutral feeling,

but because you're still under the control of afflictions and karma, all it takes is the slightest little change in circumstances, and you will experience suffering again. Take a neutral feeling that you have now, for example, your little toe right now—it's not, I hope, feeling very painful. It's probably not feeling incredibly blissful either. You're probably not thinking very much about your little toes. There is a neutral feeling about it.

But all it takes is the slightest change in conditions, and that neutral feeling becomes a painful one. All it takes is a cat jumping on you with his claws. Or you stepping on a thorn, or stepping on a nail, or going into a bathtub that's too hot or too cold. It just takes the slightest change in condition. It's like almost all the circumstances are there to change it into something unpleasant. That is why being content with a neutral feeling is not liberation, is not satisfactory, because as long as we are under the control of afflictions and karma, the whole suffering will come again.

It's called 'pervading' because it pervades the feeling of pain and pleasure. This whole condition of being under the influence of afflictions and karma pervades the feeling of pain and pleasure because they are conditioned by it. It's pervading because it pervades all of the realms in cyclic existence. Anywhere you take rebirth, you have this kind of unsatisfactory condition. It pervades everything. It pervades our whole body in that the body or any part of it is just set up to experience suffering. It pervades any kind of body. It pervades any kind of aggregates that you get in cyclic existence. They are just set up



for the experience of pain with the slightest change of condition.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Aggregates are the body and mind. It's said that we have five aggregates. One is the physical one, the form aggregate. Four are mental ones—different aspects of our mind.

It's called 'compounded' or 'conditioned' because it arose in such a way that by its very nature, it can experience the other two kinds of unsatisfactoriness. 'Compounded' means conditioned, put together through conditions. It's conditioned through the afflictions and karma.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Yes, it pervades any kind of rebirth that you take in cyclic existence, from the lowest one in the hell realms to the super-duper sense pleasure deluxe in the god realms to even the very high stages where you have total single-pointed concentration. It pervades even these beings, because they have not developed wisdom.

It is said that we ourselves have been reborn in those incredible states of single-pointed concentration before. Imagine this. We've all had single-pointed concentration in previous lives. We've been born everywhere in cyclic existence. We've been born in the form realms and the formless realms where they have this incredible concentration. We may have experienced great happiness and the feeling of

equanimity. But because we never freed ourselves from the ignorance, when the karma that conditioned that rebirth ran out, we are back to a rebirth where there is more pain.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Yes, I think our mind would definitely be a lot more peaceful if we could accept the change, because a lot of the mental pain comes about because we reject change. Accepting the change would eliminate a lot of that pain. It would eliminate the mental pain that accompanies getting old and sick and dying, and all the other kinds of mental pain. We may still have the physical pain, like when we stub our toe. But we won't have all the mental pain that goes along with it, that we add on and that we confuse so often with the physical pain. Sometimes we have a hard time distinguishing what is coming from the physical body and what is coming from the mind. They're different kinds of pain.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

If you are very attached to your body and you experience some physical pain, then a lot of mental pain starts. You start to worry: "Maybe I'm going to get sick. Maybe this is some horrible disease. Maybe I'm not going to recover. Oh, this is terrible! Maybe I'm going to get sicker and sicker. What am I going to do? How am I going to support myself if I get sick? Who's going to take care of me?" All that becomes incredibly painful! That would definitely affect the

physical pain, and the more anxious you get about it, the more difficult it is for the body to heal, and the physical pain is going to increase.

So they say that the wise sees pain as something that arises from contaminated aggregates (*contaminated* meaning being under the influence of afflictions and karma), and endeavor to stop aversion to that pain. What we're talking about is the freaked-out aversion: "I don't want this to happen to me!" The acceptance that you were talking about is: "Well, this is the nature of my body, so if it's painful, it's painful. I don't need to get all freaked out about it. I can accept that." So you stop the aversion to the pain. That already cuts a lot of pain.

The wise also sees pleasure as unsatisfactory and stop the attachment to the pleasure. That is the challenge for America. In America, we are raised to seek more and more pleasure, because this is the foundation for a good economy. [Laughter.] That's how to be a patriotic citizen. Consume! We're taught that if we're going to be healthy, this is what you should want.

It's very interesting sometimes. The societal model of being healthy and the Dharma model of being healthy can be very different. Societal model of healthy is you have great desires and you go all out to fulfill as many desires as you can. And your desires are mostly sense desires. If you happen to have that karma from previous lives and you get them, you're called 'successful'. If you don't have that good karma, then you blame everybody else for not letting you have it. [Laughter.] So it winds up being a big merry-go-round. Therefore giving up the attachment

to the seeking of sense pleasure is a very radical thing for us.

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

Sometimes at the beginning of the practice, we say this very idealistically to ourselves: “Oh, sense pleasure—this is the root of all the problems.” And then we superimpose all our Judeo-Christian ideas of: “Oh, you’re a sinner if you crave for pleasure.” “It’s bad! You *shouldn’t* do it. You’re *not supposed* to do it. Sense pleasure is evil! Lust is horrible!” We imposed all of our very judgmental attitudes on this, and then we try and let go of all the things that we are attached to.

But when we do that, we’re not doing it with a proper reason. We’re doing it with the Judeo-Christian idea of: “I’m bad and I’m a sinner. My body is evil, so let’s squeeze myself, wear a horsehair shirt and go sit in the sea when it’s thirty-seven degrees and whip myself!” That’s not the way to get rid of the attachment. Buddha was very clear about that. Going on an extreme ascetic practice is not the way to cure yourself of attachment.

Or we may push ourselves: “I’m a bad person because I have sense desires! I’m not supposed to have these. I’m not supposed to want these.” All these *should’s* and *supposed-to’s* and *ought-to’s* and then squeezing ourselves to try and become what we think is a good practitioner. That’s not the way to do it either. Because that is not coming from understanding. That’s coming from having an idealized, self-created vision of what it means to be

holy and trying to squeeze ourselves into that, without really understanding what it means to be holy.

This comes from very deep understanding, which means we have to think about it. To think about it, we have to get rid of some of the resistance that we have to thinking about it. Because at first sight, at first hearing, it makes us feel uneasy: “I don’t want to think about this!” So I don’t think about it, or I meditate on the four immeasurables or the purification practice or something else instead. But then it just stays in there and you’re anxious. You’re nervous. You feel weird. Then when you sit there and you crave for chocolate, or you crave for pizza, then you say: “I’m bad. I’m not supposed to do that. That’s sense desire. So I’m not going to have chocolate! I’m not going to have pizza! I’m going to eat oatmeal, three meals a day!” [Laughter.] “No sugar and no milk, just plain oatmeal!” “Uncooked!” [Laughter.]

We do some heavy ‘should’ trip on ourselves, and then we get all tied up in knots! That happens because there’s no understanding. Therefore we have to sit and think about these things, and open our mind to understanding them. It might make some of our previously held beliefs a little shaky. It might make our ego shake a bit. (If you have that perspective that this is making the *ego* shakes, that’s good. If you think that it’s making *you* shake, then that is not beneficial.) So you do the meditation, gain the understanding, and then you lose interest in pursuing sense desire. Instead of having to do some big: “I shouldn’t do this!” trip, it’s just: “Who wants to do this?! It doesn’t bring lasting pleasure, so why am I wasting my time doing this?” This comes from understanding.

While you are in the process of gaining that understanding, when your understanding is still intellectual, you may want to distance yourself from the things that you are attached to, simply because the understanding very quickly leaves us when the chocolate ice-cream is in front of us. It's like, we have a little bit of understanding of: "This isn't going to bring me real, lasting happiness," but we forget that very quickly because of the force of previous habits. So at the beginning, sometimes you may need to distance yourself from the things that you are most attached to, not as a way of punishing yourself, not as a way of making yourself unhappy, but just as a way of not letting yourself be controlled by those things. It's a way of freeing yourself. Instead of those things controlling you, you're saying: "I actually have some choice in the matter."

And then, not just distancing yourself from the things you are attached to, but also using your time to gain understanding of how those things don't bring lasting happiness. Think deeply about the unsatisfactoriness of change, so that you lose interest in those things. And then, when you have lost interest in those objects of attachment, and when you are facing them again, or you are eating them again, you can enjoy them without clinging and grasping and craving, and without sadness when they disappear.

That changes our relationship with these objects. It doesn't mean that by letting go of that attachment, you're never going to have any pleasure again, because what we're trying to do is to understand that attachment is not pleasurable. And this means really piercing one of our biggest afflictions, the affliction of

thinking that objects of attachment are pleasurable and that being attached to them is pleasurable.

## Questions and answers

*[Audience: inaudible]*

If you are referring to an *external* abundance, there're some things where there is just not an abundance of. There isn't an abundance of timber wood that can be chopped down. There isn't an abundance of ozone.

That is different from having an *internal* feeling of abundance. That's an attitude that you have, in other words, the attitude that whatever I have is enough. Whatever I have is good enough. Whatever I have, I'm appreciative for. I'm grateful for. I enjoy. And so there is a feeling of contentment. Maybe that's what a Buddhist translation would be. It's a feeling of contentment so that whether you have a lot or a little, whether there is actually external abundance or external poverty, your mind feels abundant, your mind feels content.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

It's true because we're taught this is the meaning of life. This is the purpose of life. If you don't do it, there's something wrong with you. And not only that, but from our side, we will experience the anxiety of: "If I don't do this, what am I going to do? What am I going to do with my time?" Although we have so many time-saving devices, we're busier than ever. I think we're afraid of the time-saving devices because

we don't know what to do with the free time they provide us. So we create other things that we need and other things we have to do to make sure we fill the time. We are avoiding becoming friends with ourselves. We are looking for something outside rather than learning to sit and breathe and like ourselves, and be friends with ourselves, and be content with being with ourselves because we're a nice person.

This is all an escape from looking at ourselves. What you could do with your time, instead, is to work to purify your mind and free yourself from the ignorance and anger and attachment. Purify the negative karma so that it doesn't ripen. Meditate on bodhicitta. Do things out of bodhicitta for the benefit of others. His Holiness stays very, very busy. He doesn't worry about not having enough things to fill his time. But his purpose of life is not to get better and more sense pleasures.

I think this anxiety that you are stating comes because we haven't been able to see what else we could do. But there are a whole lot of other things that we could do.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Wanting it—it's a difficult word in English because it can be talked about in so many ways. The word 'want' in and of itself can be used in so many ways. We can definitely see that it's better for others and for the Dalai Lama if Tibet were free. So if you can aid in the creation of the causes to bring that about, great. But it's not like: "Tibet has got to be free because I'm



the head of the Tibetans. I want my country back. This is mine! I want to live in the Potala because I want to be with all that gold and treasure and stuff that these people shipped off to China. I want them all back!”

The mind is looking and seeing: “Well, if there is the choice between this and that, this is preferable, because it brings more benefit to self and others. But it’s not out of an attached, clinging mind.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

There is a difficulty with the word ‘desire’ too, because the word ‘desire’, like the word ‘wanting’ in English, is often used in one way. But it can be used to mean a preference, an aspiration, a positive wish, too.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I think to be fully content so that the attitude will never change, you definitely need the realization of emptiness. If you’re developing just some contentment so that you can deal with your life situations better, that’s good, but having the compounded pervasive unsatisfactoriness means that all it takes is for the conditions to change a little bit, and because you don’t have full control over your satisfaction and your feeling of contentment, because you still have the seed of the afflictions inside, it will come up again. So you realize that you may have the contentment now, but as long as the potential in your mind exists for it to be otherwise, then you’re not

liberated. So then you still want to be liberated.

*[Audience:] What is the meaning of liberation?*

Liberation is the state of being out of cyclic existence, not being under the influence of the afflictions and karma anymore. You will not be obliged by the afflictions and karma to take a contaminated body.

*[Audience:] Are all bodhisattvas liberated?*

Not all bodhisattvas are liberated. The lower level bodhisattvas are not necessarily liberated. They just have very firm altruism. When they reach what's called the eighth bhumi, the eighth bodhisattva stage, then they have removed all the afflictions and karma forever.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

There're many bodhisattvas. They don't all advertise. [Laughter.] The real bodhisattvas don't advertise. The fake ones do.

All these material that I have been teaching is all material for meditation. All the things that you are getting here are not teachings to just listen to and then it goes in one ear and out the other, but it's material for doing checking meditations. You have the outline. You have the points to sit and think about according to your own life. And then discuss it with each other and share what you are experiencing; what your feelings and fears are about the whole thing. And ask questions and keep meditating on it.

Let's sit and meditate right now.

## **The Unsatisfactory Experiences of the Demi-gods and Gods**

We have talked about the human realm, meaning human life and what we have now. We also talked about the lower realms. Now we are going to talk about the unsatisfactory conditions of the realms that are higher than human beings. The Sanskrit term for these is 'suras' and 'asuras', which is sometimes translated as 'gods' and 'demi-gods', or 'gods' and 'titans'. They are also called 'celestial beings'. There are different ways of translating these terms.

The term 'gods' sometimes refers to the desire realm gods that experience super duper sense pleasures, but it can also refer to the gods in the form and formless realm who are born there by the power of their concentration. (The desire realms are all the realms where you are involved with your senses, where you have lots of desire for sense pleasures.) Therefore the word 'god' includes both the gods that have a lot of attachment to sensual things and the gods in the form and formless realm.

These beings are said to be higher than human beings not in the sense of their opportunity to practice the Dharma, because actually they have less opportunity than we do to practice. The celestial beings in the desire realm are higher in the sense that they have higher sense pleasures than we do. Those in the form and formless realms are considered higher because they have abandoned the attachment to the

desire realm. They have temporarily suppressed those desires, but they have not gotten rid of all attachments. They still have attachment to the bliss of their concentration. Nevertheless, this is still called a higher realm from the point of view we are talking about here.

According to ancient Indian cosmology, we have Mount Meru in the center and the four continents around it. Human beings live in the continents and the gods and the demi-gods live on Mount Meru. There are some layers of settlements on the lower part of Mount Meru and some settlements on the top part. As usual, the ones on the top that have the better view have more status [Laughter.]. The ones on the lower part are the demi-gods and do not have quite as high status as the gods so they are incredibly jealous.

### **Jealousy and quarrelling**

The god and the demi-god realms are like the people who live in Beverly Hills and the people who live around Beverly Hills. Beverly Hills is like the god realm and the others wish they could be up there but are not. So, they are very jealous and compete a lot. The gods and the demi-gods spend a lot of time fighting and quarrelling. A lot of these fights are instigated by the demi-gods because they are so jealous. Of course they have very good reasons for this. Trees grow in the god realms and bear incredibly delicious fruit but the roots are lower on Mount Meru and in the land owned by the demi-gods. So the demi-gods say, “Look, the roots are in our place. We should get part of the fruit.” The gods answer, “Forget it. The

fruit grows in our place, so it is ours. Take us to court if you want.” [Laughter.]

Thus the demi-gods spend a good deal of their life quarrelling. The gods do not suffer quite as much from the quarrelling because they have a better advantage point on the top of the mountain. But the demi-gods, even though they are in the upper realm and have so much more sense pleasure than we do, they are not as good as the gods and cannot even enjoy what they have, they just kind of burn with the fire of jealousy all the time.

Can you find that part of you that is a demi-god, the part that is just so jealous of everybody and everything, the kind of incredible jealousy that says, “They are more talented; they have a higher status; they get paid more money; they have a nicer house; they are more beautiful; they are more athletic.” No matter how good things are, the demi-god part of you cannot enjoy it and you are always quarrelling with other people. Even though it is nice, the reason why we do not want to seek rebirth in a demi-god realm is that you are completely permeated by jealousy and though you have good things, you cannot enjoy them. You just have so much pain from the jealousy.

## **Warfare**

The demi-gods suffer from jealousy and constant warfare, battle and bitterness. By sending their young people off to fight for the fruits of the trees that are higher up Mount Meru they, of course, get killed. The gods on the upper part of Mount Meru, they spend a lot of time fighting with the demi-gods too. Then as

you go further up, eventually there are certain god realms that are above Mount Meru, that float in space. These are like the people who lived in the locked communities. Nobody can get to them and cause them problems. So, according to your level of good karma and your prayers, you get born either on the upper levels of Mount Meru, or in these god realms that float in space where they are not bothered by the obnoxious asuras who are always fighting.

### **Complete sense pleasure**

They say that you have complete sense pleasure in the god realms. What everybody in America is trying to get, they already have in the god realms, except they have it better. There are beautiful parks and meadows and things like that. Food grows on the trees and is automatically prepared. The ground is made of jewels with golden sidewalks and everything is glittery, beautiful and harmonious. The wind blows through the trees and you hear beautiful music. Beauty is everywhere you walk and all the people are beautiful. Nobody is deformed. Nobody is handicapped. Nobody is ugly. Nobody has to dye his or her hair and nobody has to go to the gym [Laughter.]. Everybody is just completely beautiful.

It is just all wonderful in the god realms and they say you can have all the girlfriends and boyfriends you want. Nobody is going to write an article in the newspaper if you sleep with somebody else's husband or wife. Everything is just wonderful and everybody looks great. They have long life spans too. Nobody has to take lots of vitamins [laughter] to stay young.

## **Seven days before death**

The problem is, while it is wonderful while you are alive, seven days before you die, everything all of a sudden starts to deteriorate. You live this incredibly long life where everything is magnificent and perfect and then in the last seven days, they say that the mental pain experienced by the gods is worse than the experience in hells. Imagine living in this wonderful lush way, then seven days before you die your body starts to deteriorate. All of a sudden you get old and wrinkled and your hair turns colors and falls out. Your body starts to smell and you are laying in bed totally ugly. All these people who love you so much, who thought you were so marvelous and fantastic and wanted to be around you, all of a sudden they do not want to come within two feet of you. It is too frightening and too scary for them.

You experience a sense of isolation from the people you were close to. All of a sudden you are cut off when you are dying and need them the most. So you experience the mental pain of rejection and the pain of watching your own body decay. Your own body that you are so attached to because it was so wonderful, it all of a sudden decays and you experience the mental pain that brings.

## **Rebirth visions**

Then you have karmic visions of your next rebirth. Since you spent a whole life in perfection, the next rebirth is not so good. Imagine going from a perfect life, then seeing that in a few days you are going to be

reborn as a pig, it just totally freaks you out. They say the pain from all these things such as the rejection from others, the deterioration of the body and the karmic vision of one's future rebirth is worse than being born in the hells. And all of this happens simply because of how one lived one's whole life style.

## **Re-evaluating our desires**

I find this really helpful and something to consider whenever our mind gets dissatisfied and we start wanting a god realm in our human realm now. I am speaking about the mind that says, 'if only I had a nicer house'; 'if only I had a nicer car'; 'if only I had a nicer bike'; 'if only I had a nicer boyfriend, girlfriend, husband, wife, and cat'. This is the mind that is always wanting more sense pleasure.

We might think about having been born in the god realm before, not just once but many times. Imagine this incredible place with its surroundings and think about how you must have felt, then think about the incredible suffering at the end of life in these realms and how it all just ends with a crash. That can really wake our mind up and make us question, "What am I doing craving all these things anyway? Even if I get them in this life, they aren't nearly as wonderful as in the god realm. I'm going to have something like a mini god realm death when I separate from these things or when people ostracize me after I lose them. Then I will look back at my life with regret about how I spent it because I have an intuition about my next rebirth and it isn't good."



## **Why we study these realms**

Thinking about this helps to cure a very craving mind. It also helps when our mind sometimes wants just a better rebirth in samsara and is content just with that, “I want to be reborn in the god realm. That would be O.K., I will aim for that.” Seeing the disadvantages of these realms helps us to generate the wish to be free even from those upper rebirths. That is very important.

Going through all the different sufferings and unsatisfactory circumstances in all these different realms helps us see that no matter where we might get reborn in samsara, there is no lasting happiness. By eliminating one realm after another as a possible haven and a possible desirable place to be reborn, eventually we come to the conclusion that there is no desirable place. Therefore, we want to get out of cyclic existence. We want to determine to free ourselves from this mess, because wherever we are reborn, it is very unsatisfactory. It is the pits.

## **Dedicating merit for upper rebirths or for enlightenment**

It might seem funny to you that people who are doing a lot of virtuous things, why in the world would they want to be reborn in the god realm, why would they not just aim for full enlightenment to start with? But look at our minds, look what we usually pray for and look at what we usually want. When are our most sincere prayers? They are when we are sick, or poor [laughter], or when something rotten is happening at

work and so on. Then, all of a sudden, our prayers become really powerful. This is because our minds are still very worldly. We have to completely see through that facade and not dedicate merit just for upper rebirths, but rather dedicate it for full enlightenment. If we dedicate it for full enlightenment, then a good rebirth where we can practice the Dharma will come along as part of the package. This is important to think about.

### **General disadvantages of samsara**

We have also talked a little bit about the different levels of concentration, the four dhyanas, or concentration, or form realms and then the four formless concentrations. The beings there might have a lot of concentration and in the lower form realms they also have bodies of light and it is all very beautiful and so on. Still, you are born in that kind of situation as long as you have the good karma but when the karma is exhausted, where do you go? You most likely get reborn in the lower realm again.

This is going back to what we were talking about with the general disadvantages of samsara: changing status, going up and going down, going up and going down. Even though in these concentration realms you may have bliss, or equanimity, or whatever, still in the end it does not last long. Your mind is still under the influence of karma and afflictions and you crash down again after you die. Understanding this, we will not be content with just a good rebirth, but to really determine to free ourselves from cyclic existence.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **The Origin of Suffering**

Now, when we determine to free ourselves from cyclic existence, what is it that we are trying to be free of? Obviously the unsatisfactory conditions, but we also have to look deeper and want to be free of the causes of the unsatisfactory conditions. So it is not just that we want everything around us to be wonderful and leave it at that. We want a route out and to eliminate the causes for all these unsatisfactory things so that they can never re-appear again. This moves us into the next part of the outline, which is the causes of the unsatisfactory conditions. We are also moving from focusing on the first noble truth, that of the unsatisfactory conditions, to the second one, the causes.

Actually in your Lamrim outline, the overall heading is ‘Becoming convinced of the nature of the path to liberation’ and within that, the first heading is ‘Thinking about the causes of suffering and how they place and keep you in samsara’. This is just recognizing what the causes of suffering or unsatisfactory conditions are and how they function, how they keep us trapped and how they keep us bound. This is important because instead of the cause of our pain and suffering being external, we are at this point ready to admit that the principal cause for everything lies within our own mind.

How do the negative mental factors in our own

mind keep us continually befuddled and confused so that even though we want happiness, we continually create the cause for more problems? We have to come to a real clear understanding how these afflictions work, how they create karma and how the two things (afflictions and karma) together generate one rebirth after another rebirth.

## **How the afflictions develop**

Under this we have the next point in the outline: ‘How the afflictions develop’. First we have to recognize the afflictions. The reason they are called ‘afflictions’ is because they disturb the harmony and tranquillity of the mind. Whenever these things arise, they make the mind off balance and bent out of shape. When you feel bent out of shape and you are not really there and something is bothering inside, that is the meaning of the term afflictions. They disturb the peace of the mind. Within the afflictions, of course, there are different classifications. There are the root afflictions and then there are the auxiliary afflictions. There are six root afflictions. These are called the root afflictions because they are the root of cyclic existence and the root of samsara in that they are the principal causes of samsara. They are also the root of the auxiliary afflictions.

Some time later, we will study one text called *Lorig*; it means mind and awareness. It goes into great detail about all these different mental factors; about the six root afflictions and twenty secondary afflictions, the eleven virtuous minds and so on and so forth. Right now, we will be taking some of the

material about the six root afflictions from that text. I will not be going into it as much in depth as I will later on when we actually study this text, but it will get you going. Actually Geshe Rabten did a book called *'Mind and Its Functions'* and the second part of it talks about some of these different mental factors. It is a book on Buddhist psychology and is quite a bit of fun to study.

## **The Six Root Afflictions**

The six root afflictions are: attachment, anger, pride, ignorance, doubt and wrong views. Then 'wrong views' is actually broken up into another five. Sometimes, they just say ten altogether, but sometimes they just say six and the last one is broken into five. If you are wondering why they do not say eleven, it is because when they count ten, they do not count 'wrong views' as one of the ten; they just count each of the five within. Let us start going through these.

### **1. ATTACHMENT**

#### **Attachment exaggerates and projects**

The first root affliction is attachment which is our favorite one. This is a mental factor that when referring to a phenomena, exaggerates its qualities, or projects qualities that are not there. Then it exaggerates the attractiveness of that phenomena and wishes for it; takes a strong interest in it; clings to it;

craves for it; is stuck to it. This mind is really the elephant glue to samsara. It functions to produce continued discontent and continued suffering in samsara.

When you have attachment you never have enough, or you never have it good enough. There is always discontent and dissatisfaction. This is helpful to know during those days when you are sitting at home feeling discontent, dissatisfied and ruminating. During those moments just recognize, “Oh, there is attachment functioning in my mind right now”.

### **The mind gets stuck**

Then you have to ask, what am I attached to? What am I discontent about? Explore your own mind. You might be discontent because you do not live in a nice enough house, or because not enough people like you, or because you do not have a high status in your career, or because you do not like the way you look, or something like that. The mind is stuck; it is exaggerating something and then craving for it, clinging to it, being tremendously dissatisfied because it does not have it. Often when we can recognize that we are dissatisfied, identify what we are attached to and recognize that there is no sense in being attached anyway, then at that point we can really let go of the attachment and also the dissatisfaction.

### **Attachment keeps us enmeshed**

I explained before how attachment is the driving force behind cyclic existence. It creates attachment, creates

constant dissatisfaction. It also creates constant rebirth in cyclic existence. We arrive at the time of death and what do we want? We want another body. We want more pleasure and we have got to have another body, got to have another rebirth. Then we get that rebirth and body and think, “I’ve got to have this, I’ve got to have that and I’ve got to have these other things.” You get all those things and you are still not satisfied; you always want more and better. So the attachment just rolls on and on and just pushes forth one rebirth in samsara after another. It functions to keep us totally enmeshed in our difficulty.

### **We are taught to crave things**

The thing that is so tricky about attachment is that it looks like it will bring us pleasure because we are taught that we are supposed to want things. Especially in America, we are supposed to want all these things and we are supposed to want them because they will make us happy. We are taught that to be a good child and a good citizen, it always means wanting, wanting, wanting. But we cannot blame it on society. We cannot say, “Oh, society taught me to have so much craving”. Society has its thing, but there is something in us that resonates with it.

There is something in us that, from the time we were born said, “I want! I want! I want!” If you look at babies, they want. They want a lot of things and then, of course, what we want becomes more sophisticated as we grow older. There is a perpetual seeking as if there is a hole inside of us and this feeling of being empty so we are always seeking

something else from outside to fill it. We spend our whole lives like that. Even though we get many things, it never fills the hole.

*[Audience:] Sometimes I find it hard to make myself practice, is attachment somehow involved when we are resisting practice?*

So the question is about resistance to actually practicing. That part of our mind that cannot get itself on the cushion, or cannot do whatever is necessary to counteract an affliction when it is coming up.

It is different in each case. Sometimes the resistance is a very active attachment and is like ‘I don’t want to sit because I’d much rather read a magazine.’ It is not that reading a magazine is so wonderful, but somehow I am attached to the idea of sitting in a chair and relaxing and just spacing out. To turn on the TV, read a magazine and just space out at some level feels very desirable even though intellectually we know it is a total waste of time. So, underlying that, there is some kind of attachment that is finding something desirable in that.

## **Attachment and resistance**

Sometimes resistance is like that. We much rather do something else, “I’d much rather go to the movies; I’d much rather go out to dinner; I’d much rather call up a friend and talk; I’d much rather do something fun! But meditation—my legs hurt, my mind is wrestling, it is not fun! I want pleasure!” So there is a very active attachment to some kind of pleasure, even though it



might not be real specific as to what we want. But we will think of something pretty quick.

Sometimes the resistance is there because of habit. It is as if we can look and know that something is stupid—‘I sit and read one magazine after another, I watch one TV program after another and I know it is not getting me anywhere and I really don’t want to do it’, but there is a force of habit at work. We are very much creatures of habit and we have to break one habit by making new habits. So it takes some level of real understanding that something does not make us happy now or in the future. It also takes a little bit of discipline to get us to shift gears, but we cannot be militaristic about this whole thing and say, ‘I’m never going to do this again. I’m just going to practice’. If you try and squeeze your mind and you do not have very much understanding, then you are just going to get real tight and not get anywhere in your practice. You have to gently nudge your mind.

### **Talking to your mind**

I have one friend who has a very good technique. When she wants to meditate and her mind is being resistant and thinking of all these other things that she really should do which, of course, she does not want to do, she says, “Yes, I know it would be nice to do that, but that is not what we are going to do right now.” [Laughter.] She actually talks to her mind as she would talk to her child, “Yes I realize that is what you want to do but that is not what we are going to do now. We are going to sit and meditate.” She says talking to herself and acknowledging that there is a

part of the mind that wants to do something else, but also saying, “That is not what we are going to do now; there is something else we are going to do,” works quite well.

## **Attachment and the three characteristics**

### ***1. Permanence***

It is very interesting how the attachment functions because it is based on a whole lot of other pre-conceptions. Remember we talked before about the three characteristics of transience, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness? What attachment has underlying it are things that are the opposite of those three. What underlies attachment is a mind that sees things as permanent. So whatever it is that you are attached to, you are seeing it as lasting, as permanent, as if this relationship is here and it will always be here. As if it is always going to be and will never change. So there is this underlying feeling of permanence, of lastingness in something.

### ***2. Unsatisfactoriness***

There is also a feeling that it is going to give happiness. Underlying attachment is the view that this thing is not unsatisfactory by nature but rather, it is pleasurable by nature. So I want it. It has pleasure in it. It has happiness in it. When you look at chocolate cake, it has happiness in it, does it not? You try to put that happiness of the chocolate cake in your mouth. When you eat it you are trying to put happiness inside

of you.

Attachment is why you want to be with your friends. They have happiness inside them and when we get them close to us, we are getting that happiness. Underlying the attachment we are seeing the people and things as permanent and not as changing in nature. We are also seeing them as pleasurable in nature and not as unsatisfactory. So when you are attached to a person, you have a lot of desire for that person coming up. You are not looking at that person's body and saying, "This is a bag of flesh and bones". Rather the mind is seeing it as something pleasurable, something wonderful.

You are not looking at the person's mind and saying, "This is a sentient being that has ignorance, anger and attachment". Rather you are looking at that person and saying, "This person is wonderful and fantastic. They are so sensitive and intelligent." So with attachment we are seeing pleasure inside things that really are not like that at all.

### *3. Selflessness*

Also underlying the attachment we are seeing things as being solid and concrete as if they had a self and as if they had an essence and identity and something that is 'them'. So because there is something that is 'them', there is definitely something there to be attached to. I am not attached to empty space. I am not attached to illusory-like things. I am attached to this body—this is real! So you can see that underlying the attachment, there is the grasping at permanence, the grasping at pleasure and the grasping at self.

When you really look at it, you can begin to understand how attachment is totally inaccurate and how when we are attached, we are hallucinating in abundance. You do not have to take any drugs to hallucinate. As Lama Yeshe used to say, you hallucinate all by yourself [laughter], most of the time we are hallucinating in this way.

### **Identifying our own attachment**

It is really important to begin to identify what is attachment and not just identify intellectually that attachment is a mind that exaggerates, projects and so on. But rather we need to ask, “What in my mind is attachment? When am I attached? What does it feel like when I am attached? What are the things to which I am attached? When I am attached to something, what happens afterward? When I am attached to something, what happened before that made me attached? When I am attached, what does it feel like?”

We need to identify this part of ourselves, that is why we keep coming back to the idea that these teachings are not just intellectual material, but are things that are pointing ways for you to understand yourself. What you are getting in the teachings is just the basic tools, but then you have to go home and think about it. You have to discuss it with other people. You have to meditate on it so that you can really start getting to know yourself better and understand how your own mind works.

### **Understanding our attachment explains our**

## **unhappiness**

I think the more we understand our own attachment, the more we will understand why we get so unhappy and confused. Sometimes unhappiness and confusion just seem to come out of nowhere. But the more we understand the attachment, the more we begin to see our mental patterns and mental ways of conceiving things. We begin to understand why different things arise in the mind. We begin to also be able to see through them and not take them so seriously and not buy into them.

By the force of habit, the mind might still say, “You really need to get this; you really need to do that.” But because we have thought about it enough and the wisdom is strong, the wisdom could say, “Oh yeah, this is attachment, isn’t it? It is habitual attachment. There seems to be pleasure in this thing but actually I know now, that even if I pursue this thing, it is not going to bring any pleasure. I am going to create a lot of negative karma by how I act and think if I do that and I am going to be left with sand having fallen through my fingers at the end of the day and nothing to show for it. So your wisdom becomes quite powerful and it does not buy into the story of the attachments showing.

### **We learn, understand and change in degrees**

Of course this change does not happen all at once. Do not expect yourself to hear this teaching, go home tonight, identify all your attachments, understand completely how attachment works and by the day

after tomorrow at the latest, abandon all your attachments [Laughter.]. I wish it were like that. It does not work like that. All these teachings are things that you are going to understand in degrees. That is why it is important to hear the teaching, but also to do purification practice and to also create a lot of positive potential because those enable your understanding to deepen and deepen and deepen.

## **Attachment and love**

In terms of personal relationships, differentiating between attachment and love can be quite confusing for us. One part of our mind tends to say, “This teaching is ridiculous. I don’t want to hear about attachment because if I have attachment, I have to give up attachment, then I won’t have affection for anybody anymore”. So the mind pushes away the teaching. Then another part of the mind really buys into it, “Oh yeah, everything I feel towards every person is attachment. Therefore, I just have to completely isolate myself from all these people because they all bring up my attachment”. So, we kind of tend to blame the people that we are attached to. “You make me attached, so go away.” It is very easy to do that.

What we have got to understand here is that giving up attachment does not mean we push other people away. It does not mean we isolate ourselves from other people. It means that we give up the fantasizing mind that is making stories where there is nothing. That gives us the space to really see people for what they are, really become fond of them and have love

and compassion for them without this sticky, clingy, wanting mind. It takes some time to do this. It takes years to differentiate between love and attachment.

In many of our relationships, we might have a lot of love and attachment mixed up together. It might be a ratio of 90:10; it might be 60:40; or it might go to different balances at different times. It is not a thing of just being able to look at attachment, draw a little line around it, isolate it and think we have everything in our relationships figured out. We have to give ourselves a lot of time and energy to understand how attachment works and all of its different aspects.

### **Attachment is very partial**

Attachment tends to be very partial. Attachment is towards a limited number of beings. “I am attached to you, you, you and you. Who cares about everybody else?” But love is something that is much more wide spread and can go to many more beings. Attachment only goes to a few. Love can be much more impartial. Attachment is also contingent on how the person acts and what they have and what they do, whereas love is not contingent upon how they act toward us, what they have, what they do, or anything like that.

### **Attachment and aversion**

Attachment arises usually because we see certain aspects in people, over estimate those aspects or the importance of them and we cling to the person as being unique, desirable and we have to be with them. And as long as they have those attributes, that is the

case. But then when they do not have those anymore, when they get ugly, when they lose their job, when they become senile, when they lose all the things that made us attracted to them in the first place, then all of a sudden we do not want to be around them anymore and we do not see anything desirable so instead of attachment, we now have aversion.

### **Attachment is conditional**

Attachment tends to be very conditional—as long as people are a certain way, there is an attraction towards somebody. As soon as they are not that way, then we drop them like a hot potato. Attachment tends to have a lot of expectation with it because it is conditioned; we love people because they have ‘x’, ‘y’ and ‘z’ qualities. Then, we have a lot of expectation that in the future, they are going to continue to have ‘x’, ‘y’ and ‘z’. When they do not live up to our expectations, we get very upset and very disappointed. We feel betrayed, lost, disillusioned because here was this wonderful person and they were this, this, this, and this and they were going to bring me all these happiness and now look what happened ...

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

... But with love, even when a person changes or acts differently, the love can still remain because we are not expecting them to be something for us.

### **A needy mind**



Attachment often comes with a very needy mind. I need this and you kind of fill the job qualification. We are not quite that gross, but at some level we almost are that gross [Laughter.]. It is as if we hire somebody because they have the right qualifications and then when they do not have those qualifications anymore, we say something like, “Excuse me. I expect to have a lot of pleasure from this relationship and I am not getting it. So, what is happening?” That is an outcome of attachment, when we get to that point.

### **Positive feelings**

However, we do not want to make the mistake of thinking that every time we have a positive feeling towards somebody it is attachment. That is very easy to do and I have done it myself. I have seen other people do it too. It is as if we do not want to get too close to people because we will just get attached. So, we pull away thinking that then we will not be attached.

We think that every time we have a warm feeling it is attachment. It is not helpful to get into that kind of cold, aloof stuff. If you look at the meditations on bodhicitta, it is definitely about a warmth, an openness and an engagement. We should not use the teachings on attachment to develop our American extreme of isolation, alienation and individuality. It is very easy to do it. It is incredibly easy to do that. We can take the Dharma and turn it around so that it actually fits our afflictions.

### **Look deeper**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Transience, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness are the three characteristics of phenomena in cyclic existence. But our mind perceives the opposite of those three and that acts as the basis for the arising of attachment. So it is good when you notice that you are attached to something and notice how your mind is thinking of it as permanent. Of course your intellectual mind will say, “I am not thinking that Arthur is permanent. I know it is going to end”. But look deeper [laughter] and look at what is really going on in your mind.

Look at how on one level, if we are really truthful in our hearts, the way we are seeing it is that it is not going to end; it is always going to be like this. We might intellectually say, “Yes, it is going to bring pleasure” and then when we look deeper we say, “Yes, it is going to bring pain.” But when we look even deeper there is actually part of our mind that is convinced it is going to bring pleasure. Again it is a matter of going beyond just words to understand and look at what is happening inside of us and not just intellectualize about it. We need to give ourselves time to understand ourselves and put in the effort. But we also need to recognize that this effort has to be put in for many, many years.

## **2. ANGER**

### **An exaggerated state of mind**

Now we can go on to the second affliction: anger.

Anger is a mental factor that exaggerates the undesirable qualities of someone or something. Then it agitates the mind through being unable to bear that person, or that object, or situation. It also agitates the mind through wanting to harm back or reject, or in seeking to dispel something. So it is an exaggerated state of mind.

## **Recognizing anger**

Both attachment and anger definitely cause physiological changes in the body. This is something that comes up when I talk to professionals. They say, “No, anger is not a state of mind. Anger is a feeling in your body.” That is the way many people actually experience anger. It is like they are not in touch with themselves. So the way they first experience anger is through recognizing that their body is agitated.

Sometimes we will notice that our stomach is tight, that our breathing rate has increased, that there is a lot of tension in the muscles, or that there is a lot of stiffness in the neck. This is the way we actually recognize our anger. We recognize it first through physical symptoms. But it is not that the anger, or the attachment for that matter, is the physiological state of the body. It is the mental state that then has a physiological effect on the body.

So if you can catch the attachment or catch the anger when it is small before your adrenaline gets pumping, it is going to be much easier to control. But if you cannot identify the anger when it is small and the only way you can identify it is after the adrenaline has gotten going, then you not only have the big

mental factor of the anger, but you also have your physiological reaction to deal with. That makes it doubly hard to control the anger. That is why it is always good to catch it when it is small.

## **Manifestations of anger**

*[Audience:] Where does resentment come into all of this?*

Actually, we will get to resentment when we talk about the auxiliary afflictions; resentment comes in there. You see, attachment, anger and these things are not monolithic because when you start to dissect them, there are always different manifestations. With anger, what do we have? We have irritation, annoyance, resentment, holding a grudge, hostility, belligerence and rage. There is an incredible dimension of different feelings, but they are all rooted in anger. Anger is unable to bear and wants to push away, or harm, because it has exaggerated the negative qualities.

Similarly, with attachment, when you look closer, there are also its ramifications. Attachment is like an octopus with different tentacles going out; there is sexual attachment, lust, emotional dependence, a subtle kind of stickiness and grasping, fantasizing and day-dreaming. So again there are all these different aspects of how attachment works. Anger is the same in that respect.

Anger functions to make the mind disturbed and rough; I think we know that. It is the basis for tormenting our own self and others. When we are

angry, we not only feel tormented by the heat of the anger inside—we are very unhappy when we are angry—but we also inflict a lot of pain and misery on other people when we are angry. So it is the basis for torment both internal and external.

It can be a basis also for a lot of misconduct. A lot of our negative actions arise out of anger. So it is the basis of the creation of a lot of negative karma. We can be angry at a number of things. We can be angry at people, physical objects, situations, or at ideas that we do not like. We can be angry at being sick, or at the situation of being sick. We can be angry at an inanimate object like a telephone, or a car when it does not work. We can be angry at the person who harms us and we can be angry at an idea that does not agree with our ideas.

## **Individual anger responses**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Different people have different ways that the anger comes out. Some people are very patient with other people, but with objects and situations—they cannot handle that. Other people, if their car does not work, they are fine and if there is a traffic jam, they are fine, but as soon as somebody criticizes them, they are gone. Other people might be very good at handling criticism and react very well if they lose their job or something like that, but when they get sick they fall apart.

Just as different people have different things that they are attached to, we also have different things that

we get angry about. And the things that we are angry about have a linkage with the things to which we are attached. That is why the people we ‘love’ the most, sometimes become the people we hate the most. The people we are attached to the most may later become the people we hate the most. This happens because we are so attached that we expect a lot from them. They gave us so much pleasure in the past that now, when they are not giving us pleasure and living up to our expectations, we become enraged and feel betrayed.

### **“Reasonable” anger?**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

In America righteous indignation is like a cornerstone of our culture. After all, it is in the Bible, isn’t it—to be morally indignant, self-righteous, take an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth and all this kind of thing? If somebody is breaking God’s laws, ‘By god, you have to go in there and do something about it!’ So, we take this and use it as a justification for our anger. ‘I am not being unreasonable. That guy is being an idiot! My anger is quite reasonable, quite rational, quite justified, it is good that I am angry.’ [Laughter.]

### **Being “honest”**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Sometimes we have this big thing about “Let’s be honest.” I think it is great to be honest, but we use

honesty as an excuse for dumping our anger onto somebody else. You want me to be open and honest. Well, here I am [laughter] and I am going to tell you off [Laughter.].

## **The past**

Anger can be about things in the past. Somebody harmed us in the past. Somebody disappointed us in the past. Or it can be about something that is happening now that we get angry about. It can also be about something that might happen in the future. Look at all the different dimensions our anger takes, 'I am angry because when I was five years old, they took away my teddy bear.' [Laughter.]

## **During retreat**

In the first purification retreat that I did, I remember I was sitting there trying to say Vajrasattva mantra. All of a sudden, I remembered being in second grade and I realized I was mad at my second grade teacher because she would not let me be in the class play. I was still mad at her because of that. She would not let me be in the play because I did not do my homework. The homework was so dumb and boring and I knew it already anyway, so who wanted to do it? I can even remember her name [Laughter.]. It is incredible. We have things from the past that we have decided we are going to still be angry about and that person may not even be alive. The situation definitely is not happening now, but all we need to do is to think about it and we are angry.

It is interesting when you start to do retreat. You start to see how powerful the conceptual mind is; all you need to do is remember something that is not happening now, that is nowhere existing, but still you can have so much incredible emotion about it. It is incredible how our mind works. Especially with a lot of past anger, we can immediately bring the image into our mind and we get angry.

### **Creating anger**

Or we can get angry at things that are happening right now. It is too hot; it is too cold; somebody is criticizing me; somebody is not taking responsibility blah-blah-blah. Or we can get angry about something in the future. I am angry at that person because I am sure that they are not going to come true on their side of the deal. I am sure that this other country is going to attack us and I am really ticked off at it. It is like our suspicious mind makes things very solid and becomes indignant about things that are going to happen in the future. You can see how this is very much a manifestation of our own fear.

We can also get angry at people who harm us or at situations that harm us. We can get angry with people who harm our friends and we can get angry with people who help our enemies. There are all these different classifications of people to get mad at too. You start putting these three together and we can get angry at the people who harmed us in the past, who are harming us now and who might harm us in the future. We can get angry with the people who harmed our friend in the past, are harming them now and who



might harm them in the future. We can get angry at the person who helped our enemy in the past, who is helping our enemy now and who might help our enemy in the future. We are so creative in the number of things that we can get upset and angry about.

## **Reflecting**

It is good to look at this and look at all the different variations of anger. Of course, the really strong anger is very easy to notice. You might start by looking at the times when you have really lost it and the times when you are clearly angry. Look at those things and understand them.

As time goes on, begin to look at other kinds of anger. Look at irritation and when you just feel irritated, or feel like you are gritting your teeth, or just feel bugged, annoyed; start looking at that.

And then look at the patterns in your anger. Is there a certain thing, situation, or person? Are you the kind of person who gets mad at things in the past, or the present, or the future?

Why is that? How are you thinking? How is that working?

## **Our inner laboratory**

His Holiness is always saying that our laboratory is inside of ourselves. This teaching is just a framework. It is just a tool. To really understand anger, you have your own lab right there with you and you need to do the lab work. Your lab comes around with you and you just explore in your lab. You do research about

what is going on inside of you. It is quite interesting, because the more you understand your own anger, the more you are going to tune into where other people are at and how they feel and about what could be going on inside of them. The more you understand yourself and begin to have some compassion for yourself, the more you will start to have compassion also for other people who are just as uncontrolled.

## **Have compassion**

When you see how your afflictions run your life, how out of control you are and how in control the afflictions are, instead of getting angry and thinking, 'My mind is so uncontrolled, how can I be like this?' have, instead, a sense of compassion for yourself. We are trying to be happy, trying not to have pain, but look at what the mind is doing. It is just constantly creating the causes for more and more pain and confusion. This is sad, so have a sense of sadness and a sense of compassion for yourself and wish yourself to be free of that.

Have a sense of tenderness, understanding, and patience with yourself because you know you mean well, it is just that you get overpowered by the afflictions. The more you can have that kind of tenderness and patience with yourself, instead of coming onto yourself with the judgment thing, then the more you can start to turn that same tenderness and compassion and patience towards other people when you see them being angry or acting destructive.

I think that is enough for tonight. Go home and think about all the different points. Do a review

session of yourself. Work in your inner lab and notice what is there.

Let us just sit quietly for a few minutes and do some meditation.

We have been going through the Four Noble Truths, talking about our unsatisfactory experiences, their causes, their cessation and the path to end suffering. We have gone into the unsatisfactory experiences in great depth. So, if you still think you are having fun in samsara, listen to the tapes [laughter] and think again.

We started going into more depth on the causes of the unsatisfactory experiences. These are what we call the afflictions or distorted notions that we have in our mind which put us again and again in problematic situations. There are six root afflictions that are the principal causes of all the unsatisfactory experiences. We have talked about the first two of the six: attachment and anger. Today we are going to talk about the third one, which is pride.

### **3. PRIDE**

Pride is sometimes translated as conceit or arrogance. Pride is not an exact translation for this third root affliction because pride can be used in a positive way in English (e.g. you are proud of your work in the sense that you feel a sense of accomplishment). This is not the kind of pride that we are talking about, but rather a defiled state of mind. Here, we are talking about the kind of pride that is an inflated view of the self, a kind of arrogant view as in you are full of yourself.

Definition of pride: It is a distinct mental factor that, based upon the view of the transitory composite, grasps at either an inherently existent “I” or an inherently existent “mine”.

I will explain what is ‘transitory composite’. This is one of those weird terms that we translate literally from the Tibetan that makes one’s eyeballs roll in English. ‘Transitory composite’ means the aggregates, that is, the body and mind. In other words, the aggregates are composites. An aggregate is a heap that is a composite of mental factors, and it is transitory; it changes. On the basis of the body and mind, this view (of the transitory composite) grasps at an inherently existent “I” or “mine”. It is making yourself full of yourself, making the “I” much bigger than it is, and getting very proud about it.

The way pride functions here is that it prevents the attainment of all other virtue. It prevents us from learning anything because we think we know it all already. It is that pride that makes us disrespect others, have contempt for others, look down on others, thereby preventing us from learning anything and resulting in our having very unpleasant relationships with other people. Just as we don’t like being around people who are very full of themselves, other people also feel that way when our pride is manifesting.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Definitely. That’s why they say pride prevents the growth of all other virtue. We do not develop compassion for others because we think we already

have all the good qualities. We are already so great! Pride is a real strong, solid thing and is a huge hindrance to our practice. As soon as we have this pride thinking we know everything, we set up road blocks in our spiritual path, and then wonder why we don't get anywhere. Pride comes in all sorts of ways. It comes in Dharma ways. It comes in regular ways. It's this mind that doesn't want to be told anything. "Don't tell me what to do. I know. Mind your own business! Look at your own faults!" [Laughter.]

There are seven variations of pride, seven different flavors that pride takes, giving it interesting twists.

### **a. Pride over the inferior**

The first type of pride is called pride over the inferior. With pride, we compare ourselves to others in terms of education, health, beauty, athletic ability, social standing, economic standing, intelligence, etc. This type of pride is where we are in fact better than somebody else in whatever it is that we are proud over. We are proud over the people who are inferior to us and we look down upon them. It is a real haughty kind of smugness that looks down on other people. It is also the kind of attitude that says, "I may not know very much, but at least I am better off than that jerk." It has a very nice way of pretending to be slightly humble, like, "I don't know very much, but in comparison to that idiot, I look really good." We pretend to be a little bit humble but we are actually looking down on other people.

### **b. Great pride**

The second kind of pride is called great pride. This is when we are actually equal to others in whatever quality it is that we are proud about. What this brings forth, is competition. Whereas the first one brought forth a contempt and deprecation of others, this one brings out the full force of our American competition and aggressiveness to get ahead, be better and leave others behind.

If we look in our lives, we'll see that we spend so much time competing with other people. We were brought up as if this were a healthy way to be. We think that the more we can be proud over somebody else whom we are about equal with and beat them, it means we are a better person. We grow up with this weird notion that in order to be good, we have to humiliate others. That makes it more and more difficult for us to cooperate with people, because how can we cooperate with somebody whom we are competing with and trying to humiliate?

When we can't cooperate with other people, then of course we start feeling alienated; we start feeling cut off from other people. Why? Because we are cutting ourselves off. As soon as we get into this competition mode, we are separating ourselves from other sentient beings and pitting ourselves against them to come out ahead, otherwise our whole self-esteem is at stake. This is really a cultural view. Not all cultures function on this. I lived in Asia for quite some time. There, from the time you are a child, you are brought up with this image of yourself as a member of a group. Instead of competing with everybody in that group, your job as an individual is to cooperate with the people in that group because

you as an individual are responsible for the welfare of the group while the others are responsible for your welfare too. Somehow the self is a little bit smaller, there is more humility, more willingness to help other people, and people don't feel as ego-threatened by every small thing that happens.

When we have this very individualistic sense of self and a lot of pride, then we compete with everybody else. People appear to us as a threat because of the way we frame the situation. Sometimes you might wonder in your work, "How am I going to work if I don't compete? This is what it's all about!" But I think many businesses now are realizing that the more people compete, the more tension you find within the company. More cooperation is being encouraged. I think that if we learn to cooperate with other people instead of competing, it really pays off for our own welfare and our own sense of belonging.

### **Why do we have to be best?**

I think it's real interesting to check up, why is it that we feel we have to be best in order to be worthwhile? Where is that coming from? Why do we have to put somebody else down in order to feel that we are good in something that we do? It's like people can't play sports anymore without competing. They can't go jogging without competing. From the time little kids are three years old on their tricycles, they feel like they have to be better than others. Why? What difference does it make whether we are better than somebody else or not? Also, many of the things that we compete for are inconsequential.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I think that's often because of the way the parents respond. Like if the child does something, the parent doesn't say, "Oh, wasn't that fun?" or "Didn't you feel good doing that?" or "Wasn't it nice playing with somebody?" It was like, "Oh, good guy, you beat the other person!" And so, the kid thinks, "Oh, this is how I get my recognition—by beating somebody else." Our attitude depends on our parents also, what they encourage in us as children. In turn our attitude affects our interactions with other people.

### **c. Pride of pride**

The next kind of pride is called pride of pride. [Laughter.] This is when we are comparing ourselves to others and we are actually inferior to the other person. Remember, with the first pride, we were superior; we looked down on others. With the second pride, we were equals competing with them. Now, we are actually inferior to the other person in terms of our youth, beauty, economics, intelligence or other qualities. But we are still somehow competing with them, we are still coming up with some reason why we are better. It's like, "I may not know as much about computers as so and so, and they might be really talented, but I practice the Dharma. I have some special virtue." Or "I may not be able to be as good in jogging or aerobics as somebody else, but at least I am very honest with myself in what I do." We know we are not as good as somebody else but we find some special something or other that we can



attribute to ourselves as special, some way in which we can put ourselves up. It can be the most insignificant thing, but we will find it. It's a way of making ourselves more important than the next person even though the other person is better.

#### **d. Pride of the sense of “I”**

The fourth kind of pride is called pride of the sense of “I”. This is looking at the body and mind and thinking of a self-existent person that is perfect. This is the pride of “I am-ness”, this feeling of the self-existent “I” that it is somehow perfect and together and really got it put together. [Laughter.]

I have a great example from my own life of this one. I was in college and it was the first time I stayed out all night without my parents finding out. The next day, there was this incredible feeling of “I”. It's like “I stayed out”, “I'm an adult”, the incredible sense of this big, perfect, powerful “I”. You know that one? Some kind of exaggerated feeling of “I” as being perfect and on top of it all and just there ruling the world, having the last say in everything.

#### **e. Evident or manifest pride**

The fifth kind of pride is called evident or manifest pride. This is where we have pride about qualities, powers or realizations that we don't actually have, but we think we have. [Laughter.] This is like, “I knew so and so was going to do that. I must be getting to clairvoyance.” [Laughter.] Or “When the Lama taught this and that, I had this incredible feeling. I

must have very strong karma—maybe I am a tulku but nobody has recognized me yet.” People think this, let me tell you. [Laughter.]

Or, things like, “Oh, I heard about what is happening at Bosnia and I just started crying, I think I must almost have the realization of great compassion.” Or “I had this incredibly blissful meditation. I sat down to meditate and I felt I left my body and was floating in space, feeling so light. I must be real close to having calm abiding. My single-pointedness must be getting really refined!” Or “I had this sensation of being empty. I am going to realize emptiness real soon.” The kind of pride, thinking we’ve gotten somewhere on the path when we really haven’t. Maybe we had some good experience, it comes and it goes, but our mind gets really proud over it. Or “Oh, I had this incredible dream—the Dalai Lama appeared to me. Does the Dalai Lama ever appear to you in your dream? And the Dalai Lama gave me teachings in my dream. Does that ever happen to you? No, it doesn’t? Oh, this is too bad.” [Laughter.] We get blown up thinking that our practice is really flourishing when actually there is nothing happening that is special. You see it all the time—people getting so attached to experiences that happen to them.

#### **f. Self-effacing pride/ pride of feeling slightly less**

The sixth kind of pride is called self-effacing pride or the pride of feeling slightly less. There are different forms that this kind of pride can take. One of the forms is “I am insignificant. I don’t know very much.

But I am proud because I have an affiliation with this fantastic person.” Or “My Dharma practice is garbage but my teacher is a reincarnation of Maitreya. Who is your teacher a reincarnation of?” [Laughter.]

We put ourselves down but make a big deal out of being affiliated to somebody special. “I am a disciple of a very famous teacher” or “I studied at this great University. I didn’t graduate with honors but I went to Harvard.” Or “I studied with this great professor.” By affiliation we make ourselves big even though we start the sentence out by putting ourselves down.

Another form in which the self-effacing pride can take place is, for example, thinking, “I am almost as good as somebody who is really top stuff.” Again, I am not quite there, I am self-effacing, I’m putting myself down. “But I am almost as good as Bobby Fisher.” [Laughter.]

And then, the most famous way that the self-effacing pride can work (the one we are really good at), is “I am lousy. Everybody else at the company does their job well but I bungle my job. Wouldn’t you know it?” Or “Everybody else in the meditation group can sit there for 15 minutes without wiggling their legs, but I can’t.” And “Everybody else understands the meaning of this teaching but I am such a dim-wit, it’s just hopeless.” The pride of being the worst one. If we can’t be the best, we’ll make ourselves important by being the worst. It’s the pride again that makes such a big deal out of everything that has to do with ourselves except here, it’s everything that we do wrong.

With the other prides, we are bolstering up everything we do correctly even if it is hardly worth

anything at all. Here, we are making a big deal out of everything we do not do well even if it is quite insignificant. It is a way of making ourselves somehow incredibly central to the existence of the universe.

This is a big one with us. This is the one that ties in so well with low self-esteem. As soon as we start getting into low self-esteem, we set up barriers in our own Dharma practice, by all the wrong conception, and the pride of being a catastrophe. “Nobody is worse in meditation than me!” “Everybody else is going to the Pure Land and I am going to be the last sentient being left here.” [Laughter.]

### **g. Distorted pride**

The seventh kind of pride is called distorted pride. This is when we are proud of our non-virtues, our moral degenerations. “I lied on my taxes well, the IRS can’t get me this time.” Or “I told that guy off once and for all, he is not going to bug me again.” It’s these kinds of situations where our morality is really full of holes but we twist it to make ourselves look so good and such a big deal. “I succeeded in duping that guy. He fell for all my lies. I was clever in this business deal.” Or the person who goes around bragging about how many people they slept with.

These are the different kinds of pride. I find it very interesting to think about each one. Each of them has a slightly different flavor. We can make examples of each one of them in our life. It is a very good mirror to look at our own behavior and the different ways in which we try and make ourselves important.

## **Antidotes to pride**

### ***Think of something difficult***

There are a few different antidotes for pride. The first one I learned was, when you are proud because you think you know a lot, then think about the five aggregates, the six sense organs, the twelve sense sources, the eighteen elements. Meditate on those. “What do you mean meditate on those? [Laughter.] What are they?” Well, that’s the point. You don’t understand them, so your pride goes down. The idea is when you think you know something, think about something quite difficult. This then makes you see that you really don’t know much to begin with. That’s one technique.

### ***Think that our qualities and possessions came from others***

What I personally find a lot more effective is to reflect that everything that I do, know, am or have, actually isn’t mine to start with. It all came due to the efforts and kindness of somebody else. We weren’t born with whatever it is we are proud of. If you are proud because of how much money you make, reflect that you were not born with that money. The money comes due to somebody else giving it to you.

Or if we are proud because of being young and athletic or whatever it is, again, this isn’t our innate quality but it comes because other people gave us our body, and other people grew the food that helped our body to grow and be healthy. If we are proud of our

education (in a negative way), it's not our own doing. It's due to the efforts of all the people who taught us. All those years, they put up with us in school. And so, anything that we are proud over, we can remember how it's not really ours. If you are proud of your car, reflect that it used to belong to somebody else, and you only have it because somebody happened to give you the money that you traded for the car. Somebody gave it. There is nothing to be proud of in having that. Whatever it is, try to trace its origin and see that it isn't ours at all. That helps our pride to go down a lot.

***Recognize the harm that pride brings and the value of humility***

In the eight verses of thought training, there is one verse that says "When I am in the company of others, I will practice seeing myself as the lowest of all. And from the very depth of my heart, I will hold others as supreme." This verse very much counteracts pride. We recognize the harm that pride brings, that it prevents us from learning anything. We recognize the value of being humble. When we are humble, it doesn't mean that we have a low self-opinion. It means that we have enough self-confidence to admit what we don't know and be open to learn from other people.

It's when we have self-confidence that then we are open to learning. When we don't have much self-confidence, we put on the big facade of being quite proud and elegant. We will not let anybody tell us anything. This is quite an interesting thing to be aware of and to practice.

Like when you are talking with people, you asked somebody what you think is a pretty dandy question, and they start telling you things that you already know and understand, you'll go, "Why are you telling me this? You think I am some dim-wit? I am asking an intelligent question. Come on!" We want to cut the other person off, "Oh, I know that already." Or "Oh, I studied that already." Or "Oh, I heard that." Kind of like "Tell me something better. Tell me something that fulfills the extreme of my intelligence." Watch out when that mind arises. Watch out for the mind that doesn't want to hear something that we already know, because we are afraid we are going to lose status. Watch the "I" at that time. Watch that feeling of "Oh, who are they going to think I am if I let them tell me something that I already know." Watch how that comes up and then just say, "This is OK. I might learn something from hearing it again." Try and feel OK with somebody telling you something you already know.

Or even if somebody is talking down to you, try to feel OK with that, like "What do I lose if somebody talks down to me? What's the big deal! That doesn't mean that I am a lousy person."

Before we go on, are there any questions about pride?

*[Audience: inaudible]*

It definitely blocks practice. If we have the idea, "I am this good little meditator", then we are smug in our meditation. We are not really practicing because there is this self-satisfaction and smugness. No progress is

ever made.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Right. For example, you are proud of your new skis, so you want to go skiing all the time to show them off. That becomes a big distraction to your practice. On one hand, you are building up your pride; on the other hand, you are wasting your time.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Yes, that's exactly it. It is very stagnant. Because it is very defensive, it is very protective of where it is at. And it is looking out for threats. I think we have to distinguish between the feeling of confidence or pleasure in what we do, and the feeling of smugness. We shouldn't get those two confused. We should not think that every time we feel good about something that we have done, we are being proud, or we are being smug. That is an extreme.

In the evening when we go home, we are supposed to go through what happened during the day and look at what went well. We are supposed to feel glad about what we did well, the virtues we created and the times when we were able to not get involved in our old negative habits, and have a sense of rejoicing. It is important to feel pleased about our positive actions and a sense of delight at what we have been able to do. But this is a very different sensation from feeling proud about it or feeling smug. The thing is, we often cannot discriminate between the two. If we are not in tune with what is going on in our mind, then we could



very easily mislabel things and think that something is pride when it is not.

What could also happen is that when we look at what we did do well, we generate pride instead of a sense of pleasure and rejoicing. We have to make sure we don't generate pride over the virtuous activities we did but rather, generate a sense of confidence and pleasure. Also, we want to make sure we recognize the difference between confidence and a feeling of pride, so that we do not go to the extreme of thinking that we are being stuck-up whenever we feel good about something. That is not always the case. It is really important to recognize what has gone well during the day.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Yes, it is true. The pride becomes super-sensitive so that we harden against any slight feedback we get that we don't like. We become defensive and even quite aggressive due to our own lack of self-confidence. If we really feel good about ourselves, we will be able to tolerate some negative feedback. We do not feel it threatens who we are. When our self-esteem is shaky, then we cannot tolerate anything. Whether somebody is criticizing us or not, we will hear criticism and we will defend and attack back.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Yes, exactly. How confused we are! It really feels like there is someone there that has to be defended. It feels like there is this real person whose integrity is at

stake because somebody called us a name and it is solid. “YOU CANNOT CALL ME THAT!” The ‘I’ kind of expands to fill the whole room.

#### **4. IGNORANCE**

The next root affliction is ignorance.

Definition of ignorance: Ignorance is a deluded state of unknowing brought about by the mind being unclear about the nature of things such as the Four Noble Truths, cause and effect, emptiness, the Triple Gem (Buddha, Dharma and Sangha).

#### **Different ways to describe ignorance**

Ignorance is a state of murkiness. Actually, there are different ways to describe ignorance. One way is to describe ignorance as just an obscuration. Another way is to describe ignorance as actively grasping at a wrong idea.

Let’s start out with the description of ignorance as just an obscuration, a general darkness in the mind. Ignorance is just this unknowingness, and within this unknowingness, the wrong view of the transitory collection grasps at an inherently existent person (this is the second description of ignorance).

There is an analogy that makes it quite clear. The room is very dim and there is something coiled and striped in the corner. You come along, see the coiled thing and you say, “Ah, it’s a snake!” In actual fact, it is a rope. But you are seeing a snake due to the dimness of the room. The dimness of the room is this general obscuration. The dimness prevents you from

seeing that it is a rope. The Tibetan term for this general obscuration is “mongpa”. To me, it has this heavy sound to it, like “Mud-pa”. [Laughter.] The mind is just like “mud”, it’s thick, it can’t see things. This is ignorance.

Within this general obscuration, there is this grasping at things as inherently existent, as when you think that the rope is a snake. Do you see the difference between the general ignorance and this grasping? Do you see they have different functions? Sometimes we talk about ignorance as being this general darkness or obscuration in the mind, and sometimes we talk about ignorance as being an active process of grasping things to be inherently existent when in fact they aren’t (inherently existent).

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Actually there are two kinds of ignorance. One is innate; it is the ignorance that we are born with, and it has been there from beginningless time. We do not need to learn that. For example, we have an innate attitude that grasps at ourselves as being an inherently existent ‘I’.

Another kind of ignorance is learned. We learn all sorts of philosophy that we use to justify why I am a self-existent, independent ‘I’.

We have both kinds of ignorance.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

The innate grasping at the self or the “I” is this innate feeling of “I”. It’s what makes the baby cry when

they are hurt. It's what makes the baby afraid, it's that very basic raw feeling of there being an independent existing person who needs to be defended, who is being threatened, who is important. Nobody taught it to us. It's just we've had it from beginningless time. That's why they say that ignorance is the root of samsara or cyclic existence. Ignorance goes back to beginningless time and it serves as the foundation for all of the other defilements. Based on this grasping at inherent existence, we generate all the other defilements.

And then, on top of that we develop all sorts of philosophies. For example, we develop the philosophy that there is a soul; there is something that is "ME". We are sure there is a "ME" because if there were no "ME", then after I die, there would be nothing. We'll make up a lot of philosophy. We'll study it at the university and write thesis about it. It's all intellectual interior garbage, essentially. [Laughter.] We fall prey to these wrong philosophies so easily.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Karma and ignorance are different. Ignorance is a mental factor. All the afflictions are mental factors. They are consciousnesses. Karma are actions. Karma is what we do motivated by the mental factors. The afflictions and the karma together caused the rebirth.

*[Audience:] Exactly how does grasping at true existence cause one to have attachment?*

Like I said, there are a few avenues that we can look

at. First of all, if I see something as inherently existent, that means it has a nature or an essence all by itself, in and of itself. With some objects, part of that nature or essence is going to seem really wonderful. For example, the essence of pizza is definitely great, especially when you've been in India for a month. [Laughter.] When we see an object as inherently existent, it's easy to over-estimate its qualities and see them as belonging to the object independent of anything else.

The way you relate to objects also depends on the grasping at inherent existence. If I see myself as this isolated thing that is so real, then my happiness is very, very important. If my happiness is so important then I am going to start to analyze everything in terms of whether or not it gives me happiness. And so I am going to find that pizza does (give me happiness), chocolate does, and marshmallows don't.

[Laughter.] Just by the way I am looking at the "I", that makes me look at everything in terms of how it affects me, whether it gives me pleasure or pain.

These are a couple of ways how grasping at true existence leads to attachment.

## **Different kinds of laziness**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

There are different kinds of laziness. One kind would fall under the ignorance category, the kind of laziness that just likes to lie around, sleep and hang out. Another kind of laziness falls under the attachment category. This is the laziness that keeps ourselves

incredibly busy doing a lot of different stuff. The mind that is perpetually busy doing worldly things is considered lazy, because it is full of attachment. And it is very lazy in terms of Dharma.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Beings who attain certain levels of the path can control their rebirth. At the level of path of seeing, you have direct perception of emptiness. At that point, you have not completely eliminated all the ignorance from your mindstream at the very root, but because you perceive emptiness directly, the ignorance does not have any pull over you. At this point you can, if you have been following the bodhisattva path, out of compassion, choose your rebirth. You are coming back not out of ignorance that wants another body, but out of compassion for the benefit of others. You will have a sense of “I” but you will not grasp at that sense of “I” as being inherently existent. There is a valid sense of “I”.

When we say, “I walk, I sit and I talk”, that is also a valid sense of “I”; we are not making a big deal about “I” at that point. We are not really grasping at “I” as inherently existent. We are just using “I” as a conventional term. “I am sitting here” as opposed to “I am sitting here.” The latter is grasping at inherent existence, while the former is just a conventional usage of the word “I”.

Those beings who have control over their rebirth would have that conventional sense of “I”, but they would not have this very powerful grasping at the “I”.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Remember we talked about the two levels of obscuration previously—the afflicted obscurations and the cognitive obscurations? The appearance of inherent existence is not a consciousness. It is the cognitive obscuration. It is quite subtle. Based on this appearance of inherent existence, we then jump in and say, “Yes, that’s true, that’s the way things really are!” This is grasping at things as inherently existent; a consciousness, an afflicted obscuration. It is much grosser than the cognitive obscuration.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Some people who are beginning Dharma students say, “Where did ignorance come from?” You say, “Well, this moment of ignorance came from the preceding moment of ignorance, which came from the preceding moment of ignorance, which came from the preceding moment ....” Then they asked, “But where did ignorance come from?”

I think we get stuck on this question because of our Christian upbringing. Once upon a time, according to Christianity, everything was perfect, and only later did we get all the problems. Whereas in Buddhism, nothing was ever perfect. It was not as if we fell from perfection. We just never were perfect to start with. You see, we were not stuck with this question of where ignorance came from, because things have never been perfect. Ignorance has always been there.

I’ll stop here for now, though there is a lot more to say. This material is very helpful because this is basic

Buddhist psychology. It is a Buddhist map of the mind. It is a way of looking at what is going on in our own minds and trying to understand it better. For example, do not think about the different kinds of pride as something external to us: “Isn’t it interesting that all those people who didn’t come tonight are the real proud ones?” [Laughter.] Don’t get into that, but rather take the whole thing as a mirror to identify those states in oneself. And the same with ignorance. Instead of understanding it as some intellectual categories, ask “What is this ignorance inside me?”

Let us sit quietly for a few minutes and digest.

It is quite important for us to constantly remember exactly what this class is about. It is so easy to get into a habit of thinking, “Well it is Monday, or Wednesday, so I come here,” and we are not really thinking about what we are doing. We just come out of habit. It is also easy to begin to feel like it is a drag and an exertion. “Every Monday and Wednesday, here I am! I could be doing so many other things besides going to this class.” Then our interest peters out and we stop coming.

### **Think about why we study dharma**

I think it is important to deeply and continuously think about what this class is about and what it is that we are trying to do. We are here because of some very fundamental gut feeling that our human potential is not being actualized in the present state and that we are, in fact, living in a state of confusion. We need to remember that there are means and methods to use



which improve the quality of our life and make our life meaningful for others. It is for this reason we come here to learn.

We also need to remember that what is going on in these classes is a process of liberation. We are not just coming and getting the latest news, nor are we merely hearing a bunch of information and trying to figure it out. But coming here and listening to teachings is actually the process of us together trying to become fully enlightened Buddhas. In other words, something actually quite significant is happening. We, therefore, need to have that awareness and some kind of sense of appreciation and a joy for what we are doing.

### **Use your time wisely**

Years ago I studied in Dharamsala with Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey. Because we were all travelers from various parts of the world, he used to encourage us to use our time in Dharamsala wisely, because soon circumstances would change and we would all go back to our countries and then it was not going to be possible to be in that teaching situation. Indeed that was exactly what happened. The wind of our karma blew us all in different directions.

Geshela is now in New Zealand and I have not seen him for many years. It is very difficult to see him down in New Zealand. The kinds of teachings he was giving at the library are not being taught there anymore. It is very difficult now to hear teachings in the way he was teaching us. The students from that time are now scattered all over the world. The karma that we had together was over. It was really as he

said, according to how much energy we put in and the kind of faith and appreciation we had, then that was what we had to take home with us.

For instance, this last time and every time when I go back to Dharamsala, because I have been going for so many years, each trip makes me think of all the other times I was there. The whole era when Geshe Dhargyey was teaching—that is now over and done. I was fortunate to be there for part of it. That time is not retrievable and is never going to happen again. This last trip I was sitting there thinking, “What did I do all those years? Did I really make use of the time when I was here?” Geshe kept telling us, “Use your time wisely!” and we students kept saying “Oh yes, he is telling us yet again!” But he was really right. [Laughter.]

### **The one thing that makes life meaningful**

When we go somewhere, the only thing that we can ever really, really take with us is the Dharma. When the Tibetans left Tibet, they could not take all their scriptures, teacups, houses and knick-knacks. All they did take with them was the Dharma because they had to leave Tibet really quick. The Dharma is the real thing we have in our hearts and is the thing that comes with us no matter where we go.

When we have the chance to listen to the Dharma, to get the Dharma in our minds and in our hearts, we need to realize that that kind of thing is so difficult to get. It is so incredibly difficult to get Dharma teachings. When you think of all the different places and people in the world and where there actually are

teachers, where there is religious freedom, where people have the time and interest, then you realize that Dharma is actually quite difficult to get. Yet this is the one thing that makes our life meaningful.

When we die, everything that we are spending most of the day doing—our job, cultivating our prestige, thinking about our bank account, house and relationships—where are these when we die? It is completely goodbye to all of these, it is finished with nothing there. It is only the Dharma that comes with us both in this life and at the time of death. It is important, therefore, while we have the chance to learn Dharma and think about it, that we put our energy into that, because karma changes so quickly and the opportunity comes to an end. Then what will we do? We have missed an opportunity to learn the Dharma and we cannot take a time ship back in time and do it all over again. It is really important to wisely use our time.

### **Faith and confidence in the teachings is important**

This is where in our practice some feeling of faith, or confidence, in the teachings is really important. There is a sense of joy in the heart about approaching teachings that comes through realizing and appreciating the rarity and the preciousness of the teachings. Then the mind becomes very joyful, buoyant and not drudging. It wants to practice, hear teachings and do retreats because it realizes the preciousness of the Dharma. The mind begins to have another purpose in life besides just accumulating more and more stuff to put into our drawers at home.

[Laughter.] Then we have to go out and buy more and more drawers because we have too much stuff!  
[Laughter.]

We have been talking more in depth about the causes of our undesirable experiences. We went into depth about all the undesirable experiences and now we are looking at the causes. We talked about attachment, anger, pride and then last week we started on ignorance.

## **Different ways of looking at ignorance**

### ***General obscuration***

If we could only understand ignorance, we might not be so ignorant! Part of the whole view of ignorance is that we do not realize it even exists, we think that we are pretty on top of our situation and understand things pretty well. Last time we spoke about how there are a couple of different ways to look at ignorance. One way to look at it is that it is like a general obscuration, a general dimness, or darkness, in the mind. Then within that dimness, we grasp at things as being inherently existent. So, one way of looking at ignorance is that it is like a fog.

### ***Self-grasping***

Another way to look at ignorance is to look at it as the actual grasping itself. Here is where we get the terms ‘self-grasping ignorance’, ‘concept of self’, ‘conception of true existence’ and ‘grasping at true

existence’; these different terms all fall under ignorance.

### ***Not understanding emptiness***

There are different ways of looking at ignorance. One is to talk about the ignorance that does not understand suchness or emptiness. We don’t understand the ultimate truth—emptiness, the deeper way things exist.

### ***Not understanding cause and effect***

The other way of looking at ignorance is to talk about the ignorance that does not understand conventional things like cause and effect. And then there is also a lot of misconceptions about cause and effect and the path to enlightenment.

We have both of these forms of ignorance.

### ***Two truths—two forms of ignorance: of emptiness and of cause & effect***

We often talk about the “two truths” to which the two forms of ignorance are related—one for each truth. At the time when we are creating positive karma, the ignorance about cause and effect is not manifest, because some wisdom about what to practice and what to abandon has arisen. But, we still have in our mind the ignorance about emptiness.

For example, when we are creating some sort of positive action, like making offerings, helping somebody, or abandoning a negative action, at that

time there is ignorance about emptiness in our mind because we see what we are doing as truly existent. But the ignorance of cause and effect is not manifest at that time, because at that moment we are aware of positive and negative karma and are making an effort to do positive karma.

On the other hand, when we are creating negative karma, we have both types of ignorance manifest. We have both the ignorance towards emptiness and the ignorance towards cause and effect. When we are creating negative karma, we think that what we are doing is OK and do not see it as something to be abandoned. That is what the confusion, the ignorance of cause and effect, is all about—we erroneously think what is to be abandoned, is to be practiced and what is to be practiced, is to be abandoned. So we have everything completely upside down and we create a lot of negative karma which then throws us into one rebirth after another. So, both of these kinds of ignorance are really serious things.

The chief and most serious ignorance is the grasping at inherent existence, the self-grasping. This is the chief one, because from it all the other kinds of ignorance come, as well as attachment and anger and the whole gamut of all our other bad habits. They all come out of self-grasping ignorance. This is the real enemy and this is why we say it is the root of samsara. It is the very root from which grows the whole tree of all of our confusion and problems.

### ***Self-grasping at persons and at phenomena***

The ignorance about emptiness can be discussed in

terms of the self-grasping of persons and the self-grasping of phenomena. Now you are going to say, “Hold on, they are both self-grasping? How can you have self-grasping of phenomena? Isn’t a ‘self’ a person?”

When we talk about self-grasping, the word ‘self’ does not mean ‘self’ as in a person or referring to ‘I’; it means inherent existence. The word ‘self’ in Buddhism can have different meanings at different times. We can talk about the ‘self’ meaning the ‘I’ or ‘person’, but when we talk about the self-grasping, the ‘self’ here means inherent existence. Self-grasping is grasping at inherent existence. The self-grasping of persons happens when we grasp at the inherent existence of people like you and me. The self-grasping of phenomena happens when we grasp at the inherent existence of phenomena. We have both these kinds of grasping. In other words, we are hallucinating on top of everything that exists.

I think it is helpful to understand exactly what the term ‘self-grasping’ means. For instance, we look at the clock and we grasp at it as inherently existent. We look at other people and we think they are inherently existent. We look at ourselves and we think we ourselves are inherently existent. We look at our problems and conclude that they are definitely inherently existent. Everything appears to us as inherently existent.

This is what the ignorance does—it grasps. Then because we have made everything so solid, so reified, we become really attached to some things and averse to other things. We are self-centered, crave for our own pleasure, run after it and will even beat up

anybody who gets in the way of it.

*[Audience:] Does self-grasping of person includes all of the 'my, me, mine' as in my ear?*

No. When you are grasping at your ear as inherently existent, that is grasping at phenomena.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

'Mine' is another way of saying 'I'. 'Mine' is the one who possesses all these things. That is the self-grasping of person. But when you are grasping at your hand, or your foot, as inherently existent, that is the self-grasping of phenomenon. Self-grasping of phenomena is grasping at any of the five aggregates as inherently existent.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Well we can also grasp at emptiness as inherently existent. Emptiness is not conventional reality, emptiness is ultimate reality. But all the other things, including the person, the 'I', are conventional truth. In other words, everything except emptiness is a conventional truth.

We can go into ignorance a little more when we come to the twelve links. I will ask you at that time how much depth you want me to go into as it can be quite confusing; actually it can be quite interesting too. The twelve links is the teaching about how we get born, die and take rebirth in cyclic existence. It teaches how one thing links to another, then links to



another and so on, and we wind up going through one life after another. Ignorance is the first link in that whole process and that is why we say it is the root of cyclic existence. It is the main thing that keeps the merry-go-round going. We do not even realize we have ignorance because we think the way we perceive everything is exactly the way it exists. So ignorance is really ignorant. [Laughter.]

## **5. AFFLICTED DOUBT**

The fifth of the six root afflictions is called the ‘afflicted doubt’. ‘Afflicted doubt’ is a mental factor that is indecisive and it also wavers towards the wrong answer. It is not the kind of doubt that wonders, “Where did I put my car keys?” It is also not the kind of doubt that is inclined towards the right answer or towards something that is actually correct. It is not the kind of doubt that says, “I am not sure if rebirth exists, but I think maybe it does.” This latter is the kind of doubt that is inclined towards the right conclusion. What we are talking about here in this fifth root affliction is the doubt that is inclined towards the wrong conclusion. So it is the doubt that says, “I really do not think rebirth exists. I am not absolutely positive, but maybe it does not.”

Here we can see how this afflicted doubt functions. It obstructs us from creating virtue because if we have doubt about cause and effect, or doubt about rebirth, or doubt about the existence of enlightenment, then our energy gets scattered. For instance, look in your own mind and look at what is one reason why it becomes so hard to practice sometimes? One of the

reasons is that sometimes our mind is not convinced the whole thing is true and there is lots of doubt. Some of the doubts in our mind are towards the right conclusion and some of them are towards the wrong one. The doubt towards a wrong conclusion acts as a brick wall because it makes us lose our energy for practice. We think, “What am I doing? Maybe there is only this life. Why should I do all these practices if there is only this life? Why do I have to put so much energy out?”

### **Afflicted doubt impedes our progress**

Afflicted doubt impedes our progress and impedes us from doing virtuous things. It prevents us from even trying. They say that doubt is like a two-pointed needle. You cannot sew with a needle that has two points. You start to go this way and it jams on the other point of the needle. When you start to go that way, it jams. This is what the afflicted doubt is like. It won't let the mind move and it won't let us practice. It is that kind of skeptical, tough mind that is always listening to teachings and saying, “Yes, but .... Yes, but ....”

Sometimes we do not have much afflicted doubt, but sometimes it comes very forcefully—our mind is completely exploding in doubt. When we have a lot of doubt, we cannot just tell ourselves not to have it. We cannot say to ourselves, “I should not have doubt, I should have faith. I should be a good Buddhist.” That does not work. That makes the mind even tougher and more obstinate.

## **Recognize the doubt**

When we are having a lot of doubt, we need to first of all recognize that the doubt is there. In other words, we need to be able to recognize when we have it, instead of just following along and acting on it. We need to be able to recognize when it is there, ask questions and try to specify exactly what our doubt is about and exactly where we are stuck. Then we can discuss it with our Dharma friends and our teachers, and try to get some resolution.

Sometimes, depending on how your doubt works, it is not even a reasonable doubt with a good question. It is just obstinate skepticism that wants to pick a fight. I know that my doubt can sometimes be just like an obnoxious little kid. It is good to be able to identify that in the mind. When that type of doubt arises in the mind, it is good to know we have been through that before and where that takes us. We can then say, “I’m not going to get involved in it this time.” Being able to identify this doubt allows us to keep it from overwhelming us. Do not tell yourself you are bad, that you should not think that way, because that does not do anything except make you angry. I know this from experience! [Laughter.]

## **6. AFFLICTED VIEWS**

The sixth of the six root afflictions is called ‘afflicted views’. An ‘afflicted view’ is an afflicted intelligence that looks at the aggregates—the body and mind—as being either ‘inherently I’ or ‘inherently mine’. An ‘afflicted view’ is also a kind of afflicted intelligence

that, based on that wrong conception, develops further wrong views. ‘Afflicted views’ function as the basis for a lot of our wrong views and misconceptions. They explain how we get stuck intellectually, how we get stuck emotionally and how we generate all sorts of misconceptions.

## **Five kinds of afflicted views**

The above is a general definition of ‘afflicted views’. There are five kinds of ‘afflicted views’ which we will go into now. Sometimes instead of the six root afflictions, they talk about the ten root afflictions, because the sixth root affliction has five branches. You have the first five root afflictions, and the sixth root affliction is divided into five.

### **a. View of the transitory collection/composite**

The first of the afflicted views is called ‘view of the transitory collection’, or ‘view of the transitory composite’. The Tibetan term is ‘jigta’.

The transitory composite or the transitory collection refers to the aggregates—the body and mind. The aggregates are composites; they are collections. They are transitory. They change. But on the basis of these aggregates (body and mind) which are just collections of phenomena that are changing, this view thinks that there is an inherently existent person—a solid, reified, concrete person. There is a wrong view of there being ‘I’, ‘We’, ‘Here I am’. This wrong view is a form of ignorance. It is an afflicted intelligence. I think it is quite interesting that they call

this affliction an intelligence. In other words, it discriminates something. It is intelligent but it is a completely wrong kind of intelligence because it conceives of the aggregates of body and mind, as being an inherently existing ‘I’ or an inherently existing ‘mine’.

When the view of the transitory composite conceives an inherently existing ‘I’, ‘I’ is the agent—as in ‘I am walking and I am talking’. ‘Mine’ is a way of looking at ‘I’, but is the one that possesses all these things—the eyes, ears, legs, hands, nails, teeth. ‘I’ is the agent who is doing something, ‘mine’ is the ‘I’ that possesses things.

### *‘I’ is merely imputed*

We really feel like there is a possessor of these things, don’t we? We talk about, “This is my body. This is my mind. This is my tooth.” We think that there is a ‘mine’, a real solid, existing person that possesses all these things. This is a wrong view because there is a person that possesses these things, but the person that possesses these things is not solid and inherently existent. The person exists by being merely imputed. That is the only way the person exists, but this wrong perception adds extra flavor and thinks that there is something else there.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

The ‘I’ exists by being merely imputed. It is just amazing what that means. When you look at your aggregates, there is a body and there is mind. There

are all these different parts of your body and all these different parts of your mind—different consciousnesses, different mental factors. And that is all there is to it. That is the basis of imputation. On the basis of that, we conceive ‘I’. But there is no ‘I’ in there at all. There are just all these parts of the body and all these parts of the mind. There is no ‘I’ in there that you can find in any way, shape or form. The ‘I’ exists merely because our mind looks at the body and mind and conceives of ‘I’ and gives it a label. You can’t find ‘I’ anywhere inside those aggregates.

***The body and parts of the body do not exist inherently***

*[Audience: inaudible]*

The aggregates exist, but they do not exist inherently either. What is ‘body’? ‘Body’ exists only because there is the basis of imputation or the basis of designation—all these different parts. On the basis of all these different parts in a certain form, we conceive, “Oh, there is a body.” But aside from our conceiving a body, there is no ‘body’ in all of those parts. The body does not exist inherently. The body exists dependently. All the parts of the body exist dependently. None of them exists beyond being merely labeled.

Due to our ignorance, we think there is something there that is not merely labeled. We think that there is something in the body that really is the body. But there isn’t, so it is like we go through our life grasping at phantoms. There are all these parts and they are

just like space, but we cannot let them be space; we try and grasp at them; we want to solidify them. You can see how so much difficulty in our life comes from that.

***An unchanging 'I' cannot exist***

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Yes, like a statue, a solid thing that goes into different situations; there are some philosophical schools that see 'I' as being like that. But then, is the 'I' changing, or not changing? If you say that it is not changing because it is the one thing that does not change, then it cannot be in different situations, because as soon as something goes in a different situation, it changes. If you say that the 'I' is inherently existent but changes from time to time, that statement is a contradiction. It cannot be both. If it were inherently existent, it could not change at all. You would have to just be that solitary thing and independent, not relating to anything else.

*[Audience:] This is really difficult to understand.*

Yes, it is. If it were easy, we would already be Buddhas [Laughter].

I think that whenever the mind starts to feel, 'No, there is really something there', then we can say to ourselves, 'OK, if there really is something there, then what is it? Find it! Put a line around it and isolate the thing that is it.'

## ***Becoming offended as an example***

To me a prime example of this is getting offended. When you feel like your feelings are hurt and you are offended, there is such a strong feeling of “I am hurt! I am offended! I am neglected! I am unappreciated! I, I, I ....” We are completely sure that there is an ‘I’ that is feeling all those things. We are completely sure that there is this solid ‘I’ that other people do not appreciate, one that they reject and that they are offending and mistreating. We are sure it is there. We feel it so strongly.

Try to hold the feeling of that real strong ‘I’ that is offended and mistreated, then say to yourself, “Exactly who is this ‘I’? Who is it who is offended? Who is it that is not getting treated properly? What is it? Let me find it, isolate it and put a line around it.” Do that, then start to investigate and look at all the different parts of yourself and try and find that thing that is being mistreated, unappreciated, ignored and trampled upon. We feel so vividly that it exists. If it existed, we should be able to definitely find it. Yet when we look, when we try to isolate something, what are we going to isolate? Are we going to isolate any part of our body or any part of our mind and say “Ah, that is the ‘I’ that is offended!”?

### ***The ‘I’ exists by being imputed***

*[Audience:] Then how does the ‘I’ exist?*

The ‘I’ exists by being imputed, but what this wrong view does, is it makes this ‘I’ concrete. That is why



we should always analyze, always check. Like in the Korean Zen tradition, they use the questions “Who am I?”, or “What is it?” like a koan. We say ‘I’ am feeling all these things, so this tradition asks, ‘Who is feeling? Who am I? What is this?’ When you see something desirable, ask, ‘What is this? What is this thing?’ Therefore the mind is always checking and investigating. There is an appearance of this thing as real, but we check to see if the appearance is actually true.

This ‘wrong view of the transitory composite’ is a real tricky one. There is a whole lot to say on this one, but I will not go into all the different things. Just figuring out what is the wrong perception of ‘I’ is the basis of a lot of philosophical debate between the different Buddhist schools. Within the Buddhist teachings there are different philosophical tenets and each of these philosophical tenets defines this mental factor in a slightly different way. There is a lot of debate going on and the debate is all aimed at us fine-tuning our own investigating abilities to understand our own mind.

Exactly what is this wrong conception of ‘I’? What is this appearance of ‘I’? What is the object to be negated when we are meditating on emptiness? In other words, how am I really thinking of ‘I’? That is the question, isn’t it? Do we ever sit and examine how we think we exist? We go through our life with such a strong feeling of ‘I’ all the time and yet, do we ever examine and ask ourselves what is this? How does this ‘I’ exist? We are always feeding it. We are always protecting it. We are always trying to make it happy. But what in the world is it?

[Audience:] *Is it useful to debate how the 'I' exists?*

Yes, because the debates get us to look at exactly how we think we exist and what is the wrong conception of 'I'. When we have a strong feeling of 'I', are we thinking of it as being the same as the body and mind, or are we thinking of it as different from the body and mind? Are we viewing the aggregates and thinking they are the body and mind? Are we viewing the 'I' and thinking that it is inherently existent? What is really going on here? There are these different levels in the meditation on emptiness and there are different levels of the object to be negated, different levels of wrong conception about 'I' that we start peeling away. The grossest level is this idea of a soul. The grossest level of the conception of 'I' is that there is this permanent, part-less, independent self, or soul, and when we die, it floats up and goes on as some unchanging essential core that is me. This is real prominent. You find it in Christianity and in many religions.

### ***The soul***

[Audience: *inaudible*]

Yes, it is the Christian idea of a *soul* and the Hindu view of *atma*. Also, when you look in the new age things, they are talking about *essence*. It is so interesting. We are always trying to figure out who we are, but in Buddhism we should be trying to figure out who we are not! [Laughter.] In other words, I am not some kind of soul that is there, permanent, part-less

and independent—that is the grossest level of concept of ‘I’. When you get into the tenet systems, you start looking at that and figuring out why there cannot be a soul and why having a soul is logically impossible.

### ***The mere ‘I’***

*[Audience:] So what is this sense of self, the sense of an ‘I’ then?*

It is the mere ‘I’. “What do you mean it is the mere ‘I’? We want something to grab onto!” What is the mere ‘I’? That is the whole point! The mere ‘I’ is just that which is merely labeled on the basis of whatever aggregates happen to be manifest at that particular moment. The body and the mind are constantly changing, constantly changing, and on top of that whole flux of constant change there is just the appearance and the label of mere ‘I’. That’s it, folks!

### ***Continuity of subtle body and subtle mind***

*[Audience:] Then why do we refer to ‘I’ when we talk about rebirth?*

Because linguistically we do have the word ‘I’ and because we do say a person is reborn ...

*[Teachings lost due to change of tape during recording]*

... We talk about mere ‘I’ but then part of our mind says, “Hold on, tell me what the mere ‘I’ is. I want to

know. I want something to pin point and say that is what is reborn and I want to be able to see that coming out of one body and going into the next body.” Well there we are, grasping at inherent existence again, aren’t we? Our mind just does not feel comfortable letting things be merely labeled, merely designated. We want them to be something. So we ask, “Who is reborn?”

There is a continuity of extremely subtle body and extremely subtle mind that goes from one lifetime to the next, but it is changing moment by moment. On top of that changing continuum, we label ‘I’. That is what is reborn, but there is nothing solid there, nothing you can identify. You cannot say, “Here is the extremely subtle body and mind that is fixed and permanent in space and now it is being reborn.” You cannot say that because if it were fixed and permanent, how could it change and be reborn? To be reborn implies change and that means it is not the same in the second moment as it was in the first moment. So if something is constantly changing, then where is the inherent, fixed essence that is supposed to be in it?

***Every time we act, we change***

*[Audience: inaudible]*

If there were a fixed ‘I’, an inherently existent ‘I’, then rebirth would be impossible. Enlightenment would be impossible. Even talking would be impossible, because if there were a fixed thing that was unchanging and inherently me, then I could not

do anything at all, because every time I act, I change.

***Stuck In daydreams, hopes, nostalgia and fears***

*[Audience: inaudible]*

When we are talking in Buddhism about being in the present, we are not negating the existence of the past and the future. The past and future definitely exist so it is not a question of saying there is no past and there is no future. There was a past, because you were a little girl. There is a future because you are going to become something else in the next moment. So past and future do exist, but the thing is we solidify them. What Buddhism is getting at, is to not solidify things and to not think that the past is existing right now, or that the future is existing right now. Do not get stuck in our daydreams, or our hopes, or our fears, or our nostalgia. But we are not negating the existence of past and future.

***Why care about the next life?***

*[Audience:] If there is no connection between the 'I' now and what 'I' will become in the next life, then why should I care what will happen in the next life, because there is just this life?*

Well, because you still exist. The mere 'I' is reborn. The mere 'I' does exist. When you think of your childhood, you were a very, very different person then. But this sense of 'I' and this person who wants to be happy and not have pain, this sense of 'I' is in a

continuity from that little girl until now.

When you were a little kid, the adult you did not exist and the little kid could have said, “Oh, why should I study? Why should I go to school and get a career if the connection between now and the future is just this merely labeled thing?” Yet there is continuity. Although the person we are going to become in the future life is not existent right now, that person will exist and at that time we will have that sense of ‘I’. The person tomorrow is not exactly the same person as who you are now. But you know that when you get there, that person is going to want to be happy. [Laughter.] So that is why we care.

***Is it ‘wrong view’ or ‘self-grasping’?***

*[Audience: inaudible]*

The ‘wrong view of the transitory collection’ is regarding how we look at our own self. When we look at another person as inherently existent, that is just self-grasping of persons and not ‘wrong view of the transitory collection’. However, if that other person is grasping at themselves as inherently existent, then that is their own ‘wrong view of the transitory collection’.

**b. View holding to an extreme**

***Nihilism and eternalism***

Now the second of the afflicted views is called ‘view holding to an extreme’. This is an afflicted intelligence

that refers to the inherently existent ‘I’ or ‘mine’ (that was conceived by the view of the transitory collection) in either an eternal way or a nihilistic way. I will explain what these two terms mean.

From the wrong view of the transitory collection, we have this feeling of a solid, independent, concrete person. This second view, ‘view holding to an extreme’, looks at this solid, independent, concrete person and says one of two things. It can either say, “Ah, this thing is eternal, this is solid, unchanging and never becomes anything else.” Or it looks at that solid person and says, “After a person dies, that person does not exist anymore and there is nothing there at all.”

So here is where we get the two extremes called nihilism and eternalism (which sometimes is called permanence). You will hear these two terms very often in teachings about emptiness, because we tend to fall to two extremes. With the first extreme we make the ‘I’ unchanging. This ‘I’ survives death, continues indefinitely, it is a soul. That is the eternalistic view of this inherently existent I.

The flip side of that is the nihilistic view saying, “When I die, my body disintegrates and I completely disintegrate; there is no person there. So, therefore, there are no future lives and there is nobody who accumulates karma, or experiences the result of karma.”

When we are trying to meditate on emptiness, we tend to flip flop between these two extremes. One moment our mind is grasping at an ‘I’ and the next moment, our mind is saying, “There is no *I*; There is no solid *I*; There is nothing that exists at all! There is

just space.” This is why understanding the middle view is so difficult because it means going beyond getting stuck in these two extremes.

### ***Having the nihilistic view is dangerous***

They say, of these two extreme views, the nihilistic view is the worse one. We are already eternalistic and grasping at the inherently existent ‘I’ as continuing on forever. With that view we just create a lot of negative karma. But the nihilistic view is so dangerous because it throws karma out of the window. At least, if we are grasping at inherent existence, we might have some idea of karma and value it and that is to our benefit.

You hear a lot of people say, “There is no good and there is no bad; it is all empty.” If that is so, then there is no need to keep ethics because it is all empty and good and bad are just a creation of our mind. Therefore, we can do anything we want. That is an incredibly dangerous nihilistic view that comes from misunderstanding emptiness. You hear many people talking like this.

That is why understanding the middle path is so subtle, because you are trying to understand that things are not inherently existent, but they sure do exist and they sure do function. There is a real subtle distinction there. In one text by Lama Tsongkhapa he praises the Buddha for delineating this middle view in such a fine way and for being able to balance everything, because it is so easy to flip flop.

### ***Religious, ethnic and nationalistic identities***



*[Audience: inaudible]*

When we start thinking about this, we can see we are full of wrong views. Grasping onto religious identity, ethnic identity, or nationalistic feelings and things like that are all based on this wrong view of the self. It is all based on creating something where there is nothing [laughter] and viewing it with all sorts of incredible meaning. Conventionally, we can say, “I am a woman”, or “I am Caucasian”, or “I am this or that,” but try finding somebody who is a woman, or somebody who is Caucasian, or somebody who is Buddhist and drawing a line around them, and it will be very difficult.

### ***Teaching children***

*[Audience:] Is there a way to keep us from becoming so self-grasping in the first place and to teach this to kids?*

One thing that I think is real helpful and which I think we can understand as a kid, or even as a grown—up, is whenever we start getting this strong feeling “This is mine!”, then just stop and ask, “Who does this belong to?” Also, when I look at this clock and say, “This is mine! You can’t play with it!” what inside of this clock is mine? Where can I find the ‘mine’ inside of this? What am I going to point to as ‘mine’? I think even kids can understand that. There is a ball, or a truck, if it is ‘mine’ what is ‘mine’ in the whole thing? So I think that is one way kids can begin to approach it.

### **c. Holding wrong views as supreme**

The third kind of wrong view is ‘holding wrong views as supreme’. This is an afflicted intelligence that either looks at the first view (‘the view of the transitory collection’), the second one (‘the view holding to an extreme’) or fifth view (‘wrong views’, to be explained in the next teaching) and says that all these wrong views are the best views to have [Laughter.]. When you start looking in your mind, you can start to see all these different things. You can begin to identify all your different wrong views and then identify the wrong view that thinks that these wrong views are the best views to have.

It is like somebody might be prejudiced and then there is another mind that looks at their own prejudice and says, “Oh, but being prejudiced is good. It’s right! Everybody should be like this.” So now you not only have the prejudice, but you also have the view that thinks the prejudice is the best way to believe.

I will leave the next two wrong views for the next session. They are interesting. One is called ‘holding bad ethnics and modes of conduct as supreme’ and the other one is just called regular old ‘wrong views’. [Laughter.]

Are there any questions?

#### ***Definition of ‘afflicted views’***

*[Audience:] Can you please give again the definition of ‘afflicted views’?*

The definition of afflicted views is either an afflicted

intelligence that looks at the aggregates as an inherently existent ‘I’ or ‘mine’, or in dependence upon that view, it is an afflicted intelligence that generates all kinds of other wrong views. That is why afflicted view is a broad, overhanging category for ‘wrong view of the transitory collection’, ‘view of the extreme’, ‘holding wrong views as supreme’ and the other two that will be explained in the next session.

## ***Pride***

*[Audience: inaudible]*

So you are noticing how much pride plays a role? That’s real good. That is exactly how you should be looking at the teachings, taking it and becoming aware of what is going on in your own mind. The pride comes up all the time. We are always making a big deal out of *me*. It is really funny. I think this is also where we have to develop a sense of humor, to be able to laugh at ourselves and at how we think sometimes. I think a sense of humor is really important; we need some way of being able to laugh at our own garbage, instead of expecting ourselves to be perfect, because that is a kind of pride, isn’t it? “I shouldn’t have all these afflictions. *I* should be a gold-star Dharma student [Laughter.]”

## **Review**

### *a. View of the transitory collection*

We have been talking about the afflicted views. We

talked about the view of the transitory collection or jigta. I just want to review this a little bit. The view of the transitory collection looks at the aggregates and conceives an inherently existing 'I' in there. There is an intellectual form of it and an innate form of it.

The innate form is what every living being has, regardless of philosophy or whatever. It is just the basic underlying energy that keeps us grasping at ourselves as concrete personalities. We don't learn it from anywhere. We just carry it with us since beginningless time because we have never realized that we are hallucinating.

Because we don't realize we are hallucinating, we develop all sorts of philosophies to justify this innate feeling of 'I' and 'mine'. All these philosophies that we develop, they are the intellectual forms of it. So we develop philosophies that say, "Yes, there is a permanent soul. It flies up in the sky and goes into the next body." We develop all sorts of philosophies to justify that there is some essence to each individual as a human being. So you get the Christian concept of soul with the philosophy and theology that supports it, or the Hindu concept of *atman* and the philosophy and theology that supports it. The view of the transitory collection (also called view of the perishable aggregates) that exists in our mind due to studying and believing in incorrect philosophies, theologies, or psychological notions is what is called the acquired or intellectual form of this wrong view of the transitory collection.

When we realize emptiness, we use it to cleanse away both the intellectual or the learned form, and also the innate form. That is also why it is very

important to develop this discriminating intelligence so that we do not start believing in wrong philosophies when we hear them. It is really easy to start believing in wrong philosophies.

My teacher in Dharamsala said if you had a Samkya (this is one ancient Indian school that the Tibetans have been refuting for centuries) come here and they presented their argument, you would probably believe them. [Laughter.] So he was saying that it is important to learn the teachings on emptiness and learn how to analyze things. Then when we hear a philosophy (and we hear it all the time, all you do is pick up a magazine and it is teaching us some kind of philosophy), we have some discriminating wisdom to be able to tell what exists and what doesn't exist.

*b. View holding to an extreme*

And then, we talked about the view holding to an extreme. Having grasped at an inherently existent *I* and *mine*, we think that such an *I* is eternal, unchanging and goes from life to life. It is like a conveyor belt, an unchanging entity that goes from life to life.

Or we go to the other extreme and think that when we die, there is absolutely no self at all; it completely disintegrates. This is the kind of view that many people who commit suicide have. They think, "When I die, I cease to exist." This is the nihilistic view: grasping at an extreme view, thinking that, "If I kill myself, then all my problems end. Then there is nothing. There is no self. There are no problems. There is zero." This is the kind of wrong philosophical

view that can lead people to kill themselves. It is really a tragedy because the problems don't stop when they kill themselves. The *I* doesn't go out of existence just because the body deteriorates.

*c. Holding wrong views as supreme*

Then there is the wrong view holding the previous two views and bad ethics and bad conduct as correct. The wrong view that holds all the other (wrong) views as the best views to believe in. We have all these wrong views but we think that they are really right on, smart and wise, and we are definitely going to hold on to them.

This is as far as we got last time.

**d. Holding bad ethics and modes of conduct as supreme**

The fourth of the afflicted views is called holding bad ethics and (wrong) modes of conduct as supreme. This is an afflicted intelligence that believes that the purification of mental defilements is possible by means of ascetic practice and inferior codes of ethics that are inspired by mistaken views. There are two parts: (1) holding the bad ethics and (2) holding the wrong modes of conduct as the right ones that lead to liberation.

This point is usually explained in terms of distinguishing Buddhism from Hinduism because this is the cultural environment which Buddhism was in at that time. Wrong ethics include practices like animal

sacrifice, which still goes on today. People in other religions do animal sacrifice too, so it is not just a Hindu practice. In Nepal about this time of the year, they slaughter hundreds and thousands of sheep and goats as an offering to the deities. It is really quite horrific. But many people believe that by sacrificing another living being, you please the gods and in that way you create good karma and you prevent catastrophe. This is an example of believing wrong ethical systems as the best ones, because killing animals is non-virtuous but one believes that it is virtuous. This is mistakenly believing that wrong ethical practices are the path to liberation.

Here is an example in the West, of holding bad ethics as supreme. There was one article in a recent issue of the Tricycle. This man was commenting on the issue of teachers having sexual relationship with their students. He was saying that the guru's function is to tear down all the students' trips and barriers. He said there just shouldn't be any barriers and if the teacher does that by sleeping with their students, it is OK. This is a very good example of holding wrong ethics as supreme. That is not the Dharma teacher's function. If somebody has sexual hang-ups, they work their sexual hang-ups out in the course of psychotherapy and in the course of whoever it is that they are having sexual relationships with. But that is not the Dharma teacher's responsibility. [Laughter.] But this is printed in an American Buddhist magazine. So, people believe all sorts of things!

There is another story illustrating this kind of afflicted view. One time before when the Buddha was still practicing on the path, he was following the

instructions of one teacher who has many disciples. One day, the guru told his disciples to go out and steal things from the villagers to bring back to him as offerings. All the other students thought, ‘Well, ... we have great devotion in our teacher. Our teacher told us to steal, so stealing must be virtuous.’ So they all dutifully trotted out to steal from the villagers, except the Buddha who went to his teacher and said, “I can’t do what you say because it is non-virtuous.” And the teacher said, “Oh, at least one disciple got the point of the teaching”. [Laughter.] Just because the teacher says to go and steal, it does not make it virtuous. You do hear incredible stories of Naropa and Tilopa, but that is talking about a whole different category of disciples than ordinary beings. They can do things that are far beyond our capability because they aren’t even seeing things like we are.

So those are two examples of bad ethics.

In terms of holding wrong conduct as supreme, that would be saying things like bathing in the Ganges purifies your negative karma. Again, the examples are usually in terms of Hinduism. I will get into some of our home grown American ones in a minute. [Laughter.] The examples you find in the text are like bathing in the Ganges purifies your karma, or self-mortification eliminates afflictions. Even today, if you go to Rishikesh in India, you will find these yogis who have not sat down for years, or who have been standing on one foot year after year, or who have chained themselves to a tree and sit there year after year. People engage in all sorts of ascetic practices thinking that these purify the mind.

We have our Western equivalent of that. If you



want to read a good book, it is called 'Through The Narrow Gate'. It is about a woman who became a Catholic nun. This was before Vatican II, and she was describing the process of beating herself. In the monasteries, they used to beat themselves with a small hair whip of some sort. That was seen as a way of taming the mind, of becoming humble, of taming the flesh because the flesh was evil. Or wearing these shirts full of nettles—they are incredibly uncomfortable. Now the Vatican doesn't allow it. But it was only in 1965 that they stopped these kinds of things.

The Buddha did this kind of practice for a while before he attained enlightenment. He stopped it because he saw that it wasn't getting him anywhere except he lost a lot of weight and became very weak.

We also have our own version of it in the West. For example, the born again vegetarians. It is like the way to liberation is just becoming totally fanatic about not eating anything that has chemicals. Everything has to be organic and no this and no that thing are allowed. Just this really fundamentalist attitude, as if totally purifying the body of impurities would make the mind pure. Granted that being a vegetarian is great, but when we become fundamentalist about something or when we think that something is the path to liberation when it is only an adjunct to our healthy body, then we're getting confused. It may be a good practice, but thinking that it brings liberation is a mistaken view.

Another example of wrong conduct is meditation machines. You will find them in New Age shops. When I was on tour a few years ago, I went to one of these New Age shops to give a talk. I walked in and

there were many people in a kind of lounge chairs, with their high heels off, ties loosened. I don't know how much money they had to pay for this. They wore a kind of cap and goggles and it was supposed to do something to their brain waves. You hear all these different beeps that are supposed to realign the brain waves. The goggles are flashing lights that are supposed to realign your brain waves. They are supposed to put you into a meditation state. So all you do is hook yourself up to the machine and that leads you to meditation. This is an example of holding wrong conduct as supreme, thinking that to do meditation, all you have to do is hook yourself up to a machine and that will put you in a meditative state. I tried it because they wanted me to. I don't know what it did to the other people, but it didn't do anything at all except make me want to take it off because it was very uncomfortable. [Laughter.]

There are lots of things like this, not just meditation machines. I went into another office in another city, and there you sit down on one of these things and they play this music and show shapes on the wall, and the shapes grow smaller and bigger, and that's supposed to help you to meditate. [Laughter.] All it does is to reduce the size of your pocket book!

Another comparable idea in the West would be the idea of curing afflictions by taking a pill. The idea of, 'I am in a bad mood, so I take a pill.' This is holding a wrong mode of conduct as the path to liberation. When you get too much into this reductionist view of the mind, seeing the brain as the mind, then it is very easy to start to think that the way to stop afflictive states of mind is just simply to change the brain

chemistry. I think that drugs can be very useful when there is a malfunction of the brain chemistry. I am not denying that. But the view that thinks that that's the way to solve mental problems and that it is the only way to solve it without looking at controlling one's anger and trying to be patient, just thinking that the way to control the anger is by taking a pill, that is an example of holding a wrong conduct as supreme.

### ***Rituals—a tool to train the mind***

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Instead of seeing a ritual as a way of training your mind, you think the ritual in and of itself is the important thing. In other words, thinking that sitting there and going blah blah blah is what creates the merit, not your mind transforming through doing that. Or thinking that doing all the fancy things is what creates the merit regardless of what your mind is doing. That is a wrong view, thinking that the ritual in and of itself is the valuable thing.

The ritual is a tool to train the mind. You hear the Buddha speaking out about this quite a bit in his time, because during the time when he lived, there were all the Brahmins doing all these rituals, and you could only have a Brahmin come and do your ritual because only a Brahmin is qualified, and you make incredible amounts of offerings and it was very much seen that just doing that ritual was the value. And they were incredibly complicated rituals.

Some Buddhists get confused because they see that the Tibetan Buddhists have all these rituals but

Buddha spoke out against rituals. Buddha spoke out against seeing a ritual in and of itself as the virtuous thing, as the path. But rituals are definitely a way of training the mind for meditation. In other words, your mind should change by doing the ritual. It is the change in your mind that is the virtue, not the words that you are saying.

### **e. Wrong views**

The fifth of the afflicted views is called wrong view. This is another afflicted kind of intelligence. You will notice that most of the views are called afflicted intelligences, because they are intelligences. They are somehow discriminative but they are afflicted and they discriminate in a completely wrong way. You kind of make up your logic and come to the wrong conclusion. Wrong view is an afflicted intelligence that denies the existence of something which in fact exists. Or something that doesn't exist, it says it does exist. It is the mind that believes in the exact opposite to what exists or doesn't exist. It functions to act as the basis for obstructing our creation of any kind of virtuous conduct. There are tons of different wrong views and we probably still have many of them very well entrenched in our mind.

### ***Belief in God***

One of the chief wrong views is the belief in God. Of course, here it is said in a Hindu context, that Ishvara created the world. A Western version of that is saying God created the world. That is a wrong view. From a

Buddhist point of view, you are saying that something exists which doesn't exist. And that is harmful because if you believe that God created the world then you are very likely to negate karma. Or you are very likely to mistake the path of liberation as being you have to please God. God created the world and God sends you to heaven or to hell, so then the path becomes to please God.

We grew up with lots of these wrong views. We have to be very clear that while we call these wrong views, we are not criticizing the people who believe in them. We are not saying that people who believe in God are stupid, that they are wrong, blah blah blah. Lama Yeshe, for example, used to say that it is very good that people believe in God because at least they don't believe in their ego and they might start thinking about compassion and some kind of ethics. Whereas if they didn't believe in God, they would be totally hedonistic.

From a Buddhist point of view, if you say God created the world, it is considered a wrong view because you run into all sorts of logical difficulties. I think this is something that Buddhists need to think about a lot. I have one friend who has been a Buddhist for many years and she said she still has not completely worked out the thing about God because she went to Sunday school for years when she was little and it was really well entrenched. This is why I think a lot of the logical and philosophical teachings are so important because it makes us look at a lot of the concepts we grew up believing. Instead of just believing things because we have been taught that when we were kids, we look at them logically and say,

“Is this logically possible? I am an adult now and I can decide clearly what exists and what doesn’t exist. I am going to think about it, instead of just believing things.”

The difficulty, for example, with believing in God is that if God created the universe, what created God? If you say nothing created God, then that means God was causeless. If God is without a cause, then God must be permanent, because anything that has no cause is a permanent phenomenon. Anything that is a permanent phenomenon can’t change. So if God can’t change, how can God create something? Whenever you create, you are involved in change.

### *Is there a beginning?*

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Buddhism doesn’t talk about a beginning. There is a great story related to this. The Buddha was incredibly practical. He said, “If you get shot by an arrow and before you take the arrow out, you want to know who made the arrow, what it is made out of, who shot it, what his name was, what his family background was; you need to know all these before you take the arrow out, you are going to die. Instead, when you have an arrow stuck in your body, you take care of the present problem and don’t worry about the origin so much.”

That is why when people asked Buddha about the origin of the universe, he didn’t answer those questions. There were some questions Buddha didn’t answer, but it is not because he didn’t know the answer. It is because the way the question was put,

you couldn't answer it. For example, the question: 'What is the origin of the universe?' The assumption underlying that question is that there is an origin. You can't answer it. There is no origin. We get kind of stuck because we say, 'But there *has* to be a beginning!'

Why does there have to be a beginning? You see, this is taking out another childhood view. You look, why does there have to be a beginning? You have a number line, the number line has no beginning, absolutely no beginning. It doesn't have to have a beginning. 'Square root of two' doesn't have an end to it. *Pi* doesn't have an end to it. There are a lot of things that just don't have beginnings and ends.

In terms of our particular universe, we could say that all the material things in this universe depended upon the prior existence of other material things. His Holiness always traces it back to space particles. Before that, all those particles existed in other universes. If you want to talk more Western language, you just trace it back to a big bang, and before the big bang, there was an incredibly dense glob of material. Well, that intense glob of material had a cause. There was something that existed prior to it. So, you just have to keep tracing it back and back and back. This universe might come into existence and go out of existence but there are many universes.

So it is just like this glass can come into existence and go out of existence, but there is a whole lot of other things around it. It is the same thing with our universe—it can come and it can go. But there is a whole lot of other material objects there, and things just continuously get transformed. Thinking that there

is a creation, thinking that there is a creator—these are wrong views.

### ***Are we reborn to learn lessons?***

Another very popular wrong view in the New Age group is that we were reincarnated to learn lessons. We heard this at the conference, remember? One person who was sexually abused was saying, “Maybe I had to go through this because this was the lesson I had to learn.”

From the Buddhist view point, this is a total misunderstanding because Buddhism never talks about having lessons to learn, because if you have lessons to learn, then you believe that there is somebody who made up the lessons, which means that you are believing in some kind of God or somebody who is running a puppet show here. Again, from the Buddhist viewpoint, there is nobody running a puppet show. There is nobody teaching us lessons. Whether we learn from our experiences or not is completely up to us. There is no lesson plan that we have to complete. There is no God we have to please. Nothing like this. Things arise because of causes. That’s all. So thinking that there are lessons to learn is a wrong view.

### ***Karma is not a system of reward and punishment***

Thinking that karma is a system of reward and punishment is also a wrong view. It isn’t reward and punishment. We don’t get punished when we do things wrong, because from the Buddhist viewpoint, it



is not like you did something wrong. If you create that cause, it brings that result. Doesn't mean that you are a bad person. Doesn't mean you are a wrong, evil, sinful person. It is just if you plant that seed, you get that kind of flower. So seeing karma as a system of reward and punishment is a wrong view.

### *Existence of the mind*

One of the most prominent wrong views nowadays is thinking that the mind doesn't even exist. And this is what you find in scientific circles. You find different kinds of wrong view in scientific circles. There are some scientists who are really reductionist and say the mind doesn't exist. There is only the brain. Then you get another kind of scientists that says the mind is a function of the brain. It is a property, an emergent property of the brain.

From the Buddhist viewpoint, both of these are wrong views. To say that the mind is the brain is to say basically that there is no consciousness, that there is only brain matter. It is confusing conscious experience (which is formless because it perceives things, experiences things) with the physical organ that is necessary as a support system for consciousness in our body. From a Buddhist viewpoint, the physical organ of the brain, the nervous system or the sense organs are part of the physical body. But the conscious experience of pleasure and pain, perception, contact, feeling, recognition and discrimination, these are all conscious experiences that are considered mind or consciousness. They depend on the nervous system

and the brain when we are talking about gross levels of consciousness, but they are not the brain.

During one of the meetings with the scientists, there was one scientist who was so reductionist about this. So His Holiness said, “If you had the brain of somebody you love on the table, would you look at that brain and say, ‘I love you’?” Because if you say that the brain is the mind, then if you love somebody and the person is the mind and the consciousness, then you should be able to look at the brain and love the brain. But that clearly is not our experience.

***Discriminating between conventionally existing self and ultimately existing self***

*[Audience: inaudible]*

What we have to do here is to discriminate between a conventionally existing self and an ultimately existing self. An ultimately existing self is what Buddhism is refuting, because an ultimately existing self would be something that you could find independent of other things, something that is findable upon analysis. That kind of self is what is getting refuted. But Buddhism is not refuting the existence of a conventional self.

The conventional self exists by being merely labeled on the basis of the body and mind. So, from the Buddhist viewpoint, you would need both the body and the mind to appropriately say ‘self’. In other words, when somebody is dead, we don’t say the person is there. We say the person is gone. That’s because the mind isn’t there. We need both the body and the mind in some gross or subtle form to be able

to label 'self'.

The scientists negate the conventional self. But if we say that there is no (conventional) self, then it seems contradictory that linguistically we talk about self. We talk about people. This is where Lama Tsongkhapa was really astute. He said, "I am not disagreeing with worldly convention and worldly use of language." We are not saying that there is no self whatsoever. Because if we say there is absolutely no self at all, then to say 'I am sitting here' would be an invalid statement. Lama Tsongkhapa said, "No, we aren't negating the 'I' that is sitting there, because we have conventional language and we speak, and that language works, and I *am* sitting here."

What we are negating is that there is something findable in things that is an intrinsic essence that is them. That's what we are negating.

### ***Mind as an emergent property of the brain***

One other topic that also comes up continually is this belief that the consciousness is just an emergent property of the brain. This is where the scientists get really fuzzy because they don't have a definition for consciousness or mind. Even those of them who say that it is an emergent property of the brain don't really know how to define it. They say that the consciousness comes out of the brain. When there is no brain, there is no consciousness. And when the brain dies, there is no consciousness. So when death happens, it is zilch. Everything is gone. Again from the Buddhist viewpoint, this is making the consciousness a physical phenomenon.

His Holiness explains that when we talk about gross levels of mind, our gross consciousness depends upon the body as a support. In that sense, when the body becomes weak, you can see the change in the consciousness. For example, when you are very sick, it is difficult to concentrate. When somebody starts to die, they lose the ability to hear, see, smell and taste. The gross consciousness needs the gross body.

But from the Buddhist viewpoint, it is possible that when the gross body dies, the extremely subtle consciousness can continue to exist. Therefore from the Buddhist viewpoint, we would say, “No, consciousness is not an emergent property of the brain because the brain can die but the extremely subtle mind doesn’t depend on the brain as the organ for its existence. The extremely subtle mind can exist in the body even when the brain is dead. An example is Ling Rinpoche who mediated for 13 days after he was brain dead.” Or just a couple of months ago, right before I arrived in Dharamsala, Rato Rinpoche died, and he meditated for eight days before he left his body. There was no breathing, no heart beat and no brain waves, but the consciousness was still meditating.

### *The extremely subtle mind*

*[Audience: inaudible]*

When they talk about the extremely subtle mind, they say that it is one nature with the extremely subtle energy or extremely subtle wind. This extremely subtle wind is seen as the physical aspect of things,

but ‘physical’ in this context does not mean material. This extremely subtle wind is not made out of atoms.

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

... In the death process, when the gross body is losing its energy, then the gross mind dissolves as well. It dissolves, dissolves and dissolves until you get to the extremely subtle mind which is one nature with the extremely subtle energy. But this extremely subtle energy isn’t material that is made out of atoms.

You can’t find it with a microscope. It is said to be the energy that the mind rides on.

When one becomes a Buddha, the conscious aspect of the unified entity, that thing that we can’t separate, becomes the Buddha’s mind, and the extremely subtle wind gets transformed into the Buddha’s form body, the sambhogakaya. But they are one nature. They are inseparable. You can’t chop them up. It is like you can’t separate the wood of the table from the table—the table and the wood are one nature. You can’t get rid of the wood and have the table. They are the same nature. It is the same also with this extremely subtle energy and the extremely subtle mind. It is basically like looking at a phenomenon from a conscious viewpoint or from an energy viewpoint, but it is the same thing. As to how do they know that this exists? It is meditators’ experience.

In part of the Highest Yoga Tantric practice, when you work on the completion stage, what you are trying to do is to access the extremely subtle level of consciousness without dying. So, there are meditators

who, while they are alive in their body, have such control over the energy and over their mind that they can access that extremely subtle consciousness in their meditation, use it to realize emptiness, come out of their meditation session and say, “Ah! This is what I experienced.”

***Is this extremely subtle mind and energy equivalent to the concept of a soul?***

*[Audience: inaudible]*

We all have the extremely subtle level of mind and wind. It becomes manifest when we die and then it goes into another rebirth. But it is not a soul. Here we have to be very clear what we mean by the words we use. When I say there is no soul, I am using the definition of ‘soul’ as a concrete, findable, personal entity, something that is that person. Unchangeable. Eternal. Somebody else might use the same word and give it a different definition.

The extremely subtle level of mind and wind is not a soul because it is something that changes moment by moment. People who are doing very deep meditation, through their practice of the winds on the completion stage of highest yoga tantra, can access that extremely subtle mind without dying. They do it in their meditation.

In general, it is very important, when we discuss with people, to find out what they mean by the words they are using. Often when people ask me whether Buddhists believe in God, I can’t even answer that question until I ask them what their definition of God

is. Because if you ask five people what God is, you are probably going to get ten answers. Everybody has their own definition.

Part of people's definition of God are things that Buddhism might agree with. Like some people say God is the principle of love. Do Buddhists believe in love? Yes. So if you say God is love, yes, Buddhists believe in love, no problem. If you say God is love and God created the universe, then we are going to get into some difficulties. [Laughter.] There are some logical problems here. Whenever you have dialogue with somebody of another belief system, it is important to keep asking them for their definitions of the words that they are using.

### **Other issues (in response to audience questions and comments)**

#### ***Responding to physical pain during meditation— how not to get worked up***

*[Audience: inaudible]*

We get disturbed because we experience a painful physical sensation, and then our mind reacts and produces more experience. Even just a simple thing—our knee hurts—there is the sensation of what the knee feels like, then there is the unpleasantness of that sensation, and then there is our mind saying, “I don't want this to happen! How come this always happens?!” Our mind gets tight because the knee is hurting. Because the mind gets tight, then the stomach gets tight. And then your stomach hurts, and your

mind reacts to the stomach hurting and say, “How come I have this body where my stomach and knee are always hurting and now I am freaking out! It shouldn’t happen like this! Life should be different!”

So we get all tangled up in how life should be different and there is so much suffering in the world and how come I have to bear all this suffering and I just can’t stand it anymore. And if only I had some chocolate, it might all go away! [Laughter.] You see how we start with just one small thing but we don’t just let it be. We jump in and we make all these incredible interpretation of it. Some of it is our emotional interpretation, then we add our philosophical interpretation, and pretty soon, we have created our whole experience.

It is our conceptualization, doing all this thinking about I want this to happen and I don’t want that to happen and how this is feeling and how it shouldn’t feel like this. “There is something wrong with me because I am feeling this, or maybe something is right with me, I might be getting somewhere; oh, this is great! I am getting somewhere, isn’t this wonderful? I have to go tell somebody.” We just watch. All it is, is changing experience. It is consciousness changing, never being the same, one moment to the next moment. The body, sensations, never being the same, one moment to the next moment. But you see, our problem is we believe everything we think and we get completely wrapped up and identify all these experiences so strongly as *I* and *mine*.

Advanced meditators probably notice there is some sensation in the body and they might even notice it is a painful sensation, but then they will stop there. It



will be, “Oh, there is that sensation, that sensation is unpleasant”. But there wouldn’t be all this thing of, “Oh, I am having an unpleasant sensation and my knees are hurting. I don’t want it to hurt. How come it always hurts when I sit and meditate. I will never get enlightened like this. Maybe if I sit here too long, it is going to do permanent damage to my knees but my meditation teacher said that I should sit here and learn to endure the pain. But if I do that, it is going to permanently damage my knees. But if I move my leg, then everybody in the room is going to know I am moving it, then I am going to look like an idiot again and I am always looking like an idiot!” [Laughter.]

When you are sitting in meditation and your knees get sore, start with the small things. Try to differentiate between the physical sensation, the painful sensation, and the mind’s reaction to all of that. And try and just observe your own experience and determine which component of this is just physical sensation, which makes it unpleasant, and what is all the other stuff that your mind is telling you about. In this way you discriminate all these different experiences that you are having.

The thing is they all seem to be one experience. What we need to do is to slow down and observe that there is a whole lot of very different experiences there. If we can isolate them, then we can see that it would be possible, at a more advanced stage than we are at now, to feel the sensation of the leg hurting, to even recognize that that is an unpleasant sensation, but not to go any further than that, but just to accept that that is what exists at that moment.

We can also be completely aware that it is existing

at that moment but it is not going to continue forever. When our knee is hurting, we feel like it is going to continue forever. We feel like it is a permanent feeling. It is never going to end. But I think when you get into the process of cultivating wisdom, then you realize that the experience you are having is going to change. And then you can even bring the compassion practice in. When you are feeling an unpleasant feeling, say, “I am experiencing this and may it suffice for all the pain and misery of others.” And then, all of a sudden, you don’t feel the pain very much because now you are thinking about compassion.

### ***Dealing with emotional pain***

*[Audience: inaudible]*

To control the pain, you have to stop wanting to control the pain. As soon as we start fighting against something that does exist, trying to make it not exist, we make it bigger. It is very interesting to watch what happens when we experience emotional pain, which in some way is much more prevalent in our culture. When you start having a painful mind, try to just experience that emotional pain, and then watch the tendency of the mind to react to that emotional pain and build the whole story.

Let’s say somebody criticizes us. We feel a little hurt. We don’t just feel that hurt feeling but we then say, “This person is criticizing me. Oh look at me, I am always making mistakes. Isn’t this terrible? I am really a disaster! Who does this person think they are anyway, criticizing me blah blah blah.” And we go

through a whole conceptual process. This is what we do during meditation—we watch how we tell ourselves stories. We are so creative and our mind will just build these incredible stories based on one small sensation.

So the thing to do is to be able to observe this whole process of how it happens. What we usually do is we jump in and we join in. We don't even recognize we are telling ourselves stories. We are believing everything we think. So what we do in meditation is just to watch this incredible process without jumping in it. Then you can start differentiating all the different components and seeing how so much of our unhappiness is self-created, completely unnecessary. And if we can't see it in ourselves, we can very often start by seeing it in other people.

We can definitely see it better in other people, can't we? When your friend comes to you and starts telling you their problem, saying, "Oh, I was just with my boyfriend and he said this. This jerk! How come he is always doing that ...." When somebody starts telling you their problem, can you see how part of it is due to their way of thinking? [Laughter.] If they only shifted their way of thinking by half a degree, the whole problem would cease to exist. We can see it so clearly in other people. So the thing is, start seeing it in other people but then recognize that you are doing the exact same thing.

***Addiction—how much of it is physical craving and how much is mental craving?***

*[Audience: inaudible]*

It is very, very tangled up. For example, coke does create a definite chemical imbalance and it makes you crave the coke to rebalance it. But in rebalancing it, you get further out of whack. It creates a physical response. But the mental experience, the conscious element of that, is consciousness.

There might be a physical trigger to it, but it is a conscious experience and then our mind, like I was saying before, might take that initial sensation and add on a whole lot of philosophy to it. Like saying, “I am going to feel good if I have this and besides, this is a physical addiction, I had better have it.” “This is too uncomfortable and all my friends are doing it and blah blah blah.” This is what is really interesting when you do breathing meditation—observe your distractions. Because you will notice all the stories we tell ourselves.

At a conference that His Holiness had with some scientists, one scientist was talking about physical craving and addiction. His Holiness said, “Have you ever noticed, in the recovery process, what is the difference between two people who are equally addicted, but one has a very strong motivation to stop the addiction and the other person doesn’t?” I thought, “Wow!” because the scientist who was talking was really reductionist and saying that whatever was happening was just physical, and there His Holiness was putting in motivation and will. Where do you put that in? I think there is a difference between somebody who tries to break an addiction when they have strong will and motivation and somebody who doesn’t. The whole interplay of body and mind affect each other a lot.

***The danger of reaction and conception in our emotional experience***

*[Audience: inaudible]*

We have so much experience but because we have never stopped and observed our experience, we are just simply in the process of reacting all the time. We have an experience and we react, and then we react to our reaction, instead of stopping, looking, and experiencing it, thereby stopping the whole reactive process. Because we haven't been able to stop and look at it, it is this whole big jumble. Which is why when we sit down to watch our breath, it is so difficult.

Basically, affliction is affliction. But what we get attached about and what we get angry about can be different in different cultures. We tend to just jump in and react so much to our emotions. I really notice this when I came back to America because more than any other culture I have lived in, people here say they feel emotionally repressed. But more than any other place I have lived in, people talk about their emotions non-stop. If you go and live in Singapore or India, people don't just say, "Hi. Oh, I am in the middle of an identity crisis and blah blah blah. I am feeling this and I am feeling that." [Laughter.]

I think it is very good to be aware of and be sensitive to our emotions. But what we have done is not just being aware and sensitive, but we have started reacting to them. It is good to be aware and we need to know; acknowledge our emotions and know what they are. But what we have gotten into is a

whole different reaction-response, build-the-emotions-up process, because we have not been able to sit there and look and say, “Anger is going through my mind right now.”

I remember one meditation, it was so incredible. I shouldn't be telling you this, because I was leading a meditation at that time when it happened. [Laughter.] When you are sitting on the Dharma seat, people think that you are a great meditator. [Laughter] I was sitting there and I started getting very angry, though I can't even remember what it was now. I just watched this incredible anger come out of, I don't know, probably some small thing. Incredible anger coming in the mind! And I just sat there and watched it, and then it just faded out of the mind. And the whole time the body was just sitting there, of course feeling all these different physical responses, because when anger comes, your body reacts. It was like a big wave and then it left. And then when it left, I could ring the bell. [Laughter.] Couldn't do it until it went away. But it was incredible to just sit there and watch the anger come and watch it change and go away.

Once you start doing purification retreat, you will see it. Oh, incredible! You start doing purification retreat. You are trying to do some mantra. You are trying to bow to the Buddha, and then you start remembering all these things that happened before, and you start getting really angry, really sad or really jealous. And then, all of a sudden, you realize that the person you are so mad at isn't there in the room. “What am I mad at? The person isn't here. The situation isn't even happening. I am here alone in this room. What in the world am I mad at?” It is like my

mind just created this concept and gotten mad at its own creation.

Just amazing. You start seeing the power of conception.

### ***The importance of thought training***

*[Audience: inaudible]*

You will see that we keep running the same video again and again. You begin to run the same video and then you begin to realize this is a video. You may say, “I am sick of this. Let’s turn the station”, but you can’t turn the station because part of your mind believes that the video is true.

This is where I think that the Mahayana thought training is so spot-on. This is where you have to pull out all these thought training techniques.

I will give you a very good example. One of my videos is rejection. I get rejected. Nobody likes me. Nobody wants to be with me. I am getting rejected. When I was in Dharamsala, one of my Dharma teachers whom I wanted very badly to visit was extremely busy. I couldn’t see him very much. When I went to say goodbye to him, I was so sad and after I left the room, this video starts playing, “Genla is too busy. I am always rejected!” [Laughter.] And I said, “Oh, yes, here is this one again.”

And then I said, and this is where thought training comes in, “This is a result of my own negative karma. I don’t know what I did in a previous life. I have probably interfered with somebody else’s relationship with their teacher or I probably was very cruel and

very rejecting of other people. Whatever I did, I have created the karma to repeatedly experience this kind of situation. I could see very clearly that Genla was not rejecting me. There was no rejection involved in this at all! But my mind was interpreting it that way. My mind was re-running that video and there was no reason for it.

So, when I finally said this is the result of my own negative karma, then I said “Oh, OK.” I said, “OK, I am experiencing the result of my own negative karma. It is painful. There it is. I had better watch how I relate to people in future or I will continue to create this kind of karma.” It was incredible that within five minutes, my mood was totally different.

This is an example of just changing the way you look at a situation. You change the way of interpreting the situation. This is what thought transformation, thought training is about. Instead of re-running the old video, the old interpretation, you look at it from a different angle.

We have to start taking responsibility for our experiences. We often blame our parents when we are re-running the twelve-year-old-video or the eight-year-old-video. We can't create a different worldview. That is why it is so important to practice, on your meditation cushion, thinking about the people you are going to meet and your buttons that are likely to get pushed by being in that situation, and then thinking, “How else could I look at this thing so that I don't start re-running the same video, so that I don't push my button basically?” That is when Dharma practice takes hold and you start to change. Because it is a thing of taking responsibility.



Let's sit quietly for a few moments.

We have been talking about the Four Noble Truths, and what unsatisfactory experiences are. We have discussed in depth about the causes of the unsatisfactory experiences, in particular the six root afflictions. We are at the sixth affliction: the afflicted views. There are five sub-divisions of afflicted views. We are now at the last of the five sub-divisions of afflicted views: wrong views.

### **Wrong views (continued)**

Wrong views are afflicted intelligences that deny the existence of things which in fact exist or accept the existence of things which in fact do not exist.

#### ***Wrong views: existence of a creator God and the non-existence of the mind***

In the previous session, we talked about how thinking that there is a creator God is a wrong view. Another wrong view is found in science, which is thinking that the mind does not exist (only the brain exists); thinking that the mind is the brain, or that the mind is just an emergent property of the brain in the sense that all there really is, is just physical materials.

That is a wrong view because if you begin to think that there is no mind whatsoever—the mind is just the brain or the mind is just the chemical activities—then you end up negating past and future lives. When you negate past and future lives, then, ethics becomes very unstable.

Also, if you believe that there is just the brain, then it's very easy to think: "Oh, the path of liberation is just to drug the brain. Since there is no mind and no consciousness but only the brain, any feeling of unhappiness or misery must be due to the chemicals or electrons in the brain. So, just put in a drug to resolve it. That becomes the path to liberation."

That is why it is considered a wrong view; it leads you to all these very strange behaviors.

### ***Wrong view: Human beings are by nature evil***

Another wrong view that is prevalent is to think that human beings are by nature evil. You hear many people talk about that. I remember debating this when I was in school: are human beings by nature good or are they by nature evil?

It is a common belief that people are by nature evil, that selfishness, attachment and anger are all intrinsic parts of the mind, and nothing can be done to eliminate them. That is a wrong view because in fact all these afflictions can be removed.

If you don't believe that they can be removed, then you will not believe in the possibility of enlightenment, the possibility of any kind of improvement of one's own mental state, or the improvement of society, because you are just stuck in the belief: "I am inherently selfish. So is everybody else. The whole world stinks!" And then you live your life like that. Without making any kind of effort to improve oneself or to contribute to others, then of course nothing improves.

So, there are all these wrong views and we have to

look in our own hearts and see how many wrong views we have. We may not espouse them publicly, but, for example, a corner in our heart still thinks that there is a creator God, that if we just please this creator God, we will be OK. What corner of our heart thinks that selfishness is an intrinsic part of the mind and that human beings are by nature evil?

What part of our mind or heart thinks that there is no mind, that the mind is just the brain? So, we have to search these out within ourselves.

### *Other wrong views*

Or we may have certain wrong views about karma. Like I was saying in the previous session, we **believe that we were born into this life because we have lessons to learn**, as if there is some grand lesson planner who is designing all these lessons. Or **thinking karma is about reward and punishment**.

Or **thinking that there is eternal heaven and hell**, limiting karma to just this life and then after this life, you experience eternal bliss or eternal damnation according to your karma; thinking that these after-life states are permanent, eternal and unchanging. This is a wrong view because those experiences last only as long as the causal energy is there. Any kind of karmic actions we've done only last for a limited amount of time. After some time, it expires, it exhausts itself, and those good or bad states and rebirths all end. If we think that they are eternal, then again, we get stuck. So, what part of our mind still thinks like that? What part of our mind kind of thinks that when we die, we are going to get judged, and somebody will

send us to heaven and hell?

The reason I am emphasizing this is because we grew up with all sorts of beliefs. It could be that we didn't examine the things we listened to when we were little. We just believed them and they got kind of mixed up with our feelings about acceptance and society, so that we believe certain things not because we have really thought about them and believed them, but because we think if we don't, we are not going to fit into society. And so, it is very important to look inside and see what is really going on, and what we believe in and why.

Another wrong view is **thinking that there is one universal mind**. This is another very popular belief these days. "Everything is one. One universal mind; we are all chips off the old block." I remember Lama Zopa Rinpoche's teaching on this. He said: "Well, if there is one universal mind, then, I am you and you are me. That means I can go into your house and take anything I want because it is my stuff." [Laughter.]

So, we get into certain difficulties again with this idea of one universal mind. And also, if there is one universal mind, then, it being one single thing, how can there be many parts to it? And then, how did one universal mind get fragmented into all these different bits? So, you come into quite a few difficulties in terms of explaining all these.

I remember one of my teachers saying: "There is an infinite number of wrong views, so, we can only go so far discussing this, otherwise we won't get through the Lamrim."

All these things are very interesting to look at. I was thinking about the philosophical study that we

[Sangha members] do a lot of in the process of our training. The studies are designed very much to take out a lot of these wrong views that have been found in previous cultures and in our own culture. We take them out, lay them on the table and look at them in a logical way and see what's going on.

A lot of the philosophical studies are aimed at that, because if we can clear away all of our intellectual wrong views, then at least there is a chance that we can develop a correct intellectual understanding of emptiness. On the basis of that, we can then meditate and actually experience emptiness. If our mind is cluttered with all sorts of wrong views, and we make up our own philosophy, then, we tend not to follow karma very well and create a lot of causes of suffering, and also we tend not to meditate on emptiness or on altruism because we don't believe in them.

So, that's concluding this root affliction of wrong views. We have finished the six root afflictions on the outline.

## **The Secondary Afflictions**

The next category is the secondary afflictions. There are twenty of them. Actually, there are more than twenty. Someday, we will go into these in depth and also discuss the ones that we think exist that aren't listed here. This isn't an exhaustive list.

These twenty afflictions are called 'secondary' afflictions because they are aspects or extensions of the root afflictions. Also, they are called 'secondary'

or ‘proximate’ because they occur in dependence on the root attitudes. They derive from the six root afflictions that we have just discussed. I am not going to go very in depth into these twenty because some time in the future I would like to teach *Lorig*—the study of mind and awareness—and we will go much more in depth then.

## **Getting in touch with ourselves**

So here, I will just briefly go over them to give you a little bit of a taste, but I think even that will give us a lot more awareness of our own mind. When you hear the definitions of these, try and recognize them in yourself and understand how they work in yourself.

All this stuff that we have been going over now is really rich for meditation because this is basic Buddhist psychology. So, when you go home, reflect: “What is anger? What are wrong views? What is this wrong view of the transitory collection? When I have this, what does it feel like? What does it feel like when I have attachment? What am I attached to?” It is a framework with which to look at what is going on in our mind and be able to identify different mental events which are our own experience.

When we say we feel out of touch with ourselves, it basically means that we are not able to identify what is going on in our own mind. Hearing about the twenty secondary afflictions will give us some tool to look at our own experience.

## **WRATH**

The first one is called “wrath”. “Wrath” is a mental factor that, due to an increase of anger, is a thoroughly malicious state of mind wishing to cause immediate harm.

[Laughter.] Have you ever felt that? Wishing to cause immediate harm because I am totally bananas and out of control?

When you know the definition, you can then think of specific examples in your own life, so that the next time you start getting into that state of mind, you are able to notice: “This is an affliction. This means that I am not viewing things in accordance with reality.” Even if you just remember it for a minute, it gives you a little bit of space in there right away, so that the wrath doesn’t completely overwhelm you.

When you read the newspaper tomorrow about what all these different people are doing, relate them to the six root afflictions and the twenty secondary ones: “Which affliction was this? What could be motivating that guy? Could it be wrath? Could it be any of the other ones?” Maybe some kind of wrong view thinking he is doing people a favor by destroying their property because it helps them renounce attachment. [Laughter.]

Also, when we look at the afflictions that others might have in this way, we should also try to recognize these in our mind and think of the actions that they caused. You go both ways between motivation and action, and, action back to motivation. Then it helps you to understand.

## **VENGEANCE/ GRUDGE-HOLDING**

The second one is called vengeance or grudge-holding. This is a knot in the mind that, without forgetting, firmly holds on to the fact that in the past one was harmed by a particular person, and wishes to retaliate.

Vengeance is deeply entrenched anger. Somebody harms us, and we make a very strong determination never to forget it or forgive the person. We hold on to our anger as if it is our most valuable possession. And of course, we wish to retaliate. We want to get even in whatever way we can.

Sometimes we can be very up-front about it. Other times, we don't feel so good about feeling angry at somebody. Instead of feeling angry, we just sit there with our hurt. But if we examine our mind closely, we may find that there is a part of us that really wants to let the other person know that they have hurt us. We want to retaliate, don't we? We want to cause them some kind of harm so that they recognize what they have done to us and how badly we are hurting. Hurt, grudge-holding, anger and lack of forgiveness—these things are all intertwined there.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

We think that if we get our revenge, we are resolving the conflict. But are we in fact resolving the conflict? Does vengeance really bring what we think it's going to bring?

*[Audience: inaudible]*

What does abuse mean? What's getting abused? Is



abuse what the other person is saying to me, or does abuse also have to do with how I take what the other person says to me? If the other person is condescending towards me and I look at them and say: “This person has some kind of problem that they are acting out. Their behavior towards me really has very little to do with me and my qualities. It is more a statement of where they are at.” Then, am I being abused?

I don’t think so. Maybe from the other person’s side, they might have the motivation to be abusive. But from my side, it becomes water off the duck’s back; it isn’t the oil that soaks into paper.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

There are two things we have to do here. First, figure out how our mind is going to react to it. Second, figure out what we will do in the relationship.

Sometimes we forget to look at how our mind is reacting to a situation; we think resolving a situation means just changing the external situation. This is our old habit, isn’t it? Something happens, we don’t like it. We don’t check our reactions; we just want to change the outside.

So, I think the real challenge in the situation is to use it in this way: “How am I reading this situation? Why am I reading it this way? How is that making me feel? When this person talks badly to me, do I believe what they are saying at some level? Is that why I don’t like it? Or, even though I don’t believe what they are saying, I’m afraid other people are going to believe it, and I am going to lose my reputation.”

In other words, what is it I don't like about what this person is saying? Use the situation to do some research about ourselves. Use it to understand ourselves better, to understand what is going on within us, what we are attached to or what we are feeling uncomfortable with, and resolving that at some level.

We could then look at the external situation and we might say: "Well, these are just stupid remarks. If I say something to the other person, they might not understand it; it might make the situation worse. So, I am just going to ignore it."

Or, we might look at it and say: "I have the kind of relationship with this person whereby I can give them some feedback. It might help them." It really depends upon the situation.

Also, if we want to give feedback, how do we do it? Here is where communication training comes in. Using what they call the xyz statement, we go in and say: "When you do X, I feel Y because of Z." We are saying how we feel in response to somebody else's behavior without telling them that they are the cause of our behavior. That often becomes a very effective way, or a more effective and less offensive way, of resolving things.

But as I have mentioned, before we immediately jump in to fix the situation with the person, first look at why this thing is bothering me so much. This is where it gets interesting, isn't it? Somebody else is gossiping about me, saying all these harmful things ... have you ever heard how people gossip about you? Sometimes I have the great fortune of hearing what people say behind my back. It is so interesting. It's like: "Hmm, that's very interesting. I did that.

Really?” [Laughter.] “Is this really what is going on? This is very interesting.”

And then watch that part of the mind that feels: “Oh, maybe what they are saying is true.” Or watch that other more fishy part of the mind that says: “What they are saying is garbage and it doesn’t hurt my image of myself. But, oh my goodness, what happens if the people I like believe it? Oh no! Then, I am not going to have any friends!” Watch how the mind gets so fearful about “What happens if other people don’t like me because they believe all this horrible stuff? And they are all wrong!”

And then, it is very interesting to just try saying to yourself, “Well, so what if other people don’t like me? Am I going to die because a few people don’t like me?” Kind of: “Can I make some space in my mind to consider what it might be like to actually give people permission not to like me?” It is very interesting.

Why does everybody have to like me?

## **CONCEALMENT**

The third one is also very interesting. It is called concealment. This is a mental factor that wishes to hide one’s faults whenever another person with a benevolent intention (who is free from non-virtuous aspirations such as closed-mindedness, hatred or fear) talks about these faults.

Concealment wants to hide our faults whenever we get bad feedback from a person who has a good intention when they are giving us this negative feedback.

This isn’t necessarily a denial of the faults. It isn’t:

“No, I am really not a mean, nasty person.” It can be that, and we have some anger mixed in it. But concealment can also be just putting it on the shelf. You know how we close down sometimes when we get negative feedback? We just say: “Oh yes, you are right.” We put it on the shelf and forget about it. So it is like not really acknowledging and wanting to hide our faults.

It could also be called ‘repression’. [Laughter.] We repress it; we suppress it; we just shove it down. Or we deny it. “Faults? Me? Oh really? No, I am sorry. You are talking about the other person.” [Laughter.]

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Sometimes we think of denial as an active thing, saying: “No I don’t have it.” Kind of a forceful counteraction: “No, I don’t have it!” Whereas concealment can be more subtle; it can be just a brushing away of somebody’s comment or a pooh-pooing of it. Or just a general dismissal of it, instead of this active thing of: “No, you are not talking about me.”

It is interesting to think about this. When the concealment gets mixed up with anger, then you tend towards defensiveness. If the concealment gets mixed up with pride, then you may start denying: “Not me, surely not me.”

## **SPITE**

The next one is called spite. This is a mental factor which is preceded by wrath or vengeance. It is an

outcome of malice and it motivates one to utter harsh words in reply to unpleasant words said by others.

So, what it means is you get pissed off at the other guy and swear at him. [Laughter.]

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Yes, it is an outcome of malice—you do want to do the other person harm—and it motivates you to utter harsh speech in response to their harsh words, their unpleasant words.

It may lead to a lot of fantasies of telling the other person off. It can be the one that motivates you to go to a punching bag or go in the middle of the field and scream or throw pillows. Spite can build up because of vengeance, or it can come just “Boom!” right there.

## **JEALOUSY**

The next one is jealousy. This is a mental factor that, out of attachment to respect and material gain, is unable to bear the good things that others have.

We are attached to respect, popularity, approval, or material possessions. We cannot bear that other people have these things and we don't, that other people have opportunities, possessions, talents that we don't. This makes our mind incredibly unhappy. Jealousy is one of the real ‘good’ ways to make ourselves miserable.

*[Audience:] Why don't they call it 'envy'?*

It could be called ‘envy’; it is just a matter of translation.

## **MISERLINESS**

The next one is miserliness. This is a mental factor which, out of attachment to respect and material gain, firmly holds on to one’s possessions with no wish to give them away.

It is quite interesting to see that on one hand, attachment to respect, popularity, approval and material things can lead us to jealousy where we can’t endure that other people have these and we don’t. On the other hand, it can lead us to miserliness where, what we do have, we don’t wish to share with anybody. Behind miserliness, there is this tremendous fear: “If I give it, I won’t have it, then what?” There is a lot of fear that leads to this clinging, so that even though we may not use something, we won’t give it away.

There is a kind of miserliness where we can’t even use what we have ourselves. You have these nice clothes, but you can’t wear them because you are afraid of getting them dirty and ruining them. [Laughter.] Or you have this money saved up but you won’t spend it because “Then I won’t have any money left in the bank account.” Meanwhile, the money is sitting in the bank account and you are not using it. “But if I give it away or if I spend it, I won’t have it.” “If I spent this money, then I won’t have this money to spend, so, I can’t spend it.” [Laughter.] So we have it all the time. “Oh, if I eat all these cookies now, I won’t have them later.” Forget about sharing

them with anybody else. [Laughter.] It's just like: "Oh, I can't eat them now because I might want them later and I won't have them later."

## **PRETENSION**

The next two are very interesting. One is called pretension. An alternative translation is 'deceit'. This is a mental factor which, when one is overly attached to respect and material gain, fabricates a particularly excellent quality about oneself and then wishes to make it evident to others with the wish to deceive them.

It is very interesting how attachment to respect, popularity, approval and material things can motivate so many other things, isn't it? It motivates this pretension, where we fabricate a good quality that we don't have at all, but we make it look like we have it to others. And then we try and convince others that we do have it because we want to deceive them.

This is the mind that, even though we have no idea what we are talking about, volunteers to give a speech because we are attached to praise, reputation and promotion. It's the mind that, even though we don't have a particular spiritual quality, puts on a big show like we do: "Oh look, I am so generous. Please take this." We appear to be very generous because we want them to think that we are such generous, incredibly nice people.

Pretension is the mind that fabricates a quality that we don't have and try to deceive other people into believing it. We present ourselves as some kind of extraordinarily fine meditator who understands things,

presenting ourselves as this creative person who knows exactly how to solve all the problems in our workplace, presenting ourselves as a talented musician whenever we meet somebody who values this talent, and wanting to impress them. Very pretentious!

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Sometimes we do deceive ourselves. Sometimes we do know what we are doing at some level, but... it's like we know we are being pretentious, but at the same time, we don't know. You know that state of mind? Where you kind of, you know, you are not acting completely up-front, but you can't actually admit it to yourself. But if you just sit for about 2 seconds and look at your mind, it is quite clear and obvious that you really know it. You know that kind of mind? Where you actually know what is going on in your own mind but you don't want to even admit it to yourself? So, it can be that also.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I heard an incredible story when I was in Singapore. There was one family—a very refined, educated family. Their daughter came home with this fiancé whom she met at college, who was going into economics. The father was talking with his future son-in-law about a prominent economist, but the future son-in-law didn't know who that person was. So, he got a little bit suspicious. He started investigating, found out and told his daughter that this guy had been



lying to her up, down and across, completely fabricating this person that he was.

How do we feel when we are actually taken in by somebody else' deceitfulness and pretension? I think it's sometimes worse when people do fall for it than when they don't.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

We have to check whether it is due to a lack of confidence in ourselves—we can do something but we think we can't, and so we're afraid to say we can. Like maybe we can actually do this work but we're afraid we're not going to be perfect at doing it. And so, out of our fear of not being perfect, we exaggerate that and think we can't do it at all. It is like if I can't do it perfect, it means I can't do it at all. We undersell ourselves. So, it boils down to developing some ability to evaluate ourselves instead of getting caught up in our fears.

## **DISHONESTY**

Now, there is another one that is related to pretension. It's called dishonesty. Or it's sometimes called dissimulation. This is a mental factor that again, is overly attached to respect and material gain, and wishes to cheat or confuse others by keeping one's faults unknown to them.

So, this is deliberately hiding our bad qualities.

Concealment is when somebody gives us some negative feedback and we say: "What are you talking about?"

Dishonesty, on the other hand, is: “I know this isn’t really true, but I’m definitely putting this under the rug and I am not going to reveal the truth to anybody.” This is hiding our dirty laundry. That is what it should be called instead—hiding your dirty laundry. [Laughter.]

## **Feeling vulnerable**

It’s very interesting, because there is a lot of talk about being vulnerable. And I think when we are very attached to our dirty laundry, we make ourselves vulnerable. When we are completely willing to admit our dirty laundry, then we are not so vulnerable in front of other people, because whether they know or whether they don’t know, we don’t feel that their knowledge harms us. But when we feel that other people’s knowledge of our bad qualities harms us, and we try and hide them, then we will feel vulnerable.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I think in many ways it does, when we are not just honest in saying what our garbage is, but also feel comfortable about saying what it is. In other words, there is a certain level of honesty with ourselves.

If we are honest with ourselves, but we do not want anybody else to know (because if they know, they might not like me), then at some level I am not totally accepting this about myself. In this case, I will feel very vulnerable, because what happens if they find out what a real idiot I am? But if we feel kind of OK about being an idiot... [Laughter.]

I mean ... why can't we feel OK about being an idiot? Why not? Who is perfect? So, if we are idiots, we are idiots—there we are. If we feel OK about whatever our weakness is...OK doesn't mean being smug and complacent, it just means that we don't feel: "I am a horrible person because I have this!"

We might have a certain weakness, or we might have done something very nasty in the past. The more we try and cover them up, the more they ferment inside our own mind. And then they poison our relationships with other people. So these two—pretension and dishonesty—go together.

We hide all of our garbage and pretend to be this great person. Everybody thinks we are really wonderful. But how long do we keep it up? How long can we keep it up? And then, as the guise begins to break and all of our stuff begins to come out, we are putting ourselves in worse positions. Other people have been harmed and hurt. We've all been on the side of somebody else's deceit, pretension and dishonesty. We remember how lousy we feel when we wake up to what that person is, when they haven't been square with us. And now we are hurting other people with our own dishonesty.

And so, this is coming back to the first precept in Buddhism about non-harmfulness. Harmfulness does not necessarily mean going out and punching somebody in the nose. I am sure you have seen so many people who work in service jobs suffering from this. So, make sure we don't inflict it on others.

## **COMPLACENCY**

The next one is called complacency or smugness. This is a mental factor that, being attentive to the marks of good fortune one possesses, brings the mind under its influence and produces a false sense of confidence.

‘Attentive to the marks of good fortune one possesses’—in other words, we know what our good qualities are, brings our mind to the awareness of our good qualities, and it then produces a false sense of confidence in response. So we get complacent. We get smug. We get haughty, kind of like: “I am so good at doing this. Why should I make any effort to change? Why should I?”

*[Audience: inaudible]*

It is definitely a lack of humility. It functions in the same way as lack of humility, in that it prevents our growth. We have become very smug, very complacent. Whatever level we’ve got to, whatever qualities we have either in a worldly way or a spiritual way, we are kind of self-satisfied. And so, this is a false sense of confidence.

This is different from having an accurate sense of confidence. Having an accurate sense of confidence is perfectly OK. We actually need to recognize our good qualities—that is important to do. But complacency sets in when we get a false or afflicted sense of confidence in reaction to it. Instead of saying: “Yes, I have this. I can use it, and I am going to use it for the benefit of others,” it just kind of sits there. You know how smugness is. [Laughter.] It prevents a lot of growth. And it can lead to pride.

## **HARMFULNESS**

The next one is harmfulness. Another translation is 'cruelty'. This is a mental factor which, with a malicious intention devoid of any compassion or kindness, desires to belittle and disregard others.

We want to be cruel. We want to hurt others. We want to put them down. So, it causes a lot of harmfulness towards others.

Compassion, we can see, is the opposite of this one. This one wishes to cause harm to others, compassion wishes to remove the suffering of others.

### **Review**

So, let me just do a review. We will finish the rest of them next time.

We finished talking about wrong views which was the last of the afflicted views of the six root afflictions.

And then we moved on to the proximate afflictions which are called 'proximate' or 'secondary' because they are aspects or extensions of the root ones, and they occur in dependence on them.

We talked about:

1. Wrath, which, due to an increase of anger, wants to cause immediate harm
2. Vengefulness or grudge holding, which firmly holds on to a wrong which is done to us and wishes to retaliate
3. Concealment that wishes to hide or not acknowledge our faults when other people point

- them out with a kind motivation
4. Spite, which is preceded by wrath and vengefulness and motivates us to speak harshly. It makes us want to speak harshly in response to other people's unpleasant words.
  5. Jealousy or envy which, out of attachment to respect and material gain, is unable to bear the good things that other people have.
  6. Miserliness which, again, out of attachment to respect and material gain, firmly holds on to what we have without wishing to share it, or even use it ourselves.
  7. Pretension which, out of attachment to respect and material gain, fabricates an excellent quality about ourselves and then wants to make other people believe it.
  8. In conjunction with that, there is often dishonesty, which again, out of attachment to respect and material gain, hides our dirty laundry, our bad qualities, our past, in an attempt not to make them known to others. To make people think we are other than what we are.
  9. Complacency which, being aware of our good qualities, brings the mind into a false state of confidence, a kind of smugness and self-satisfaction.
  10. Harmfulness which, with a malicious intention devoid of any compassion or kindness, desires to belittle and disregard others.

## **The way to meditate**

The way to meditate on these is to go home and think about what these are. Think of examples in your own life, of when you have had these in your mind. And kind of think back: “What was I thinking? What was my mind like? How did it make me act? How did it affect other people? Which of these are active in my mind right now? Am I being pretentious and dishonest to somebody now? Am I harboring a lot of hurt and vengefulness right now?”

See what mental factors are kind of there, under the surface, if we scratch a little bit. And then, what things have been manifest and active in the past and how have they made us act?

### **Question and answer**

*[Audience:] How do we overcome these afflictions?*

This is where thought training and the application of antidotes come in. For example, the antidote to all the afflictions related to attachment to respect, approval, and material things, is to meditate on impermanence. Think about how respect and material things are transient—they come and they go. Then that eliminates that attachment, which in turn eliminates the miserliness or the jealousy or the pretension or the dishonesty.

Or, when you see spite or vengefulness or wrath, you do the meditations on loving kindness and remembering others’ kindness to us, or remembering that the harm that they give us is due to our own negative karma.

So, this is where we have to pull out all the other

teachings that we have received and think about them in a way that helps us see the situation from a Dharma point of view, so that all these different confused emotions don't arise.

### **Training the mind in a new world-view**

This again reminds us that all the Dharma teachings we have received is not just information. This is like a world-view. If you train your mind in the new world-view, then you will be able to prevent the afflictions from manifesting in the mind, simply because you are seeing the situation in a very different way.

So, it's not just a thing of saying to myself: "Oh, I shouldn't feel this; this is naughty!" Rather, it is viewing the situation in a different way. Sometimes, it also involves recognizing the disadvantages of these things, which then stimulates in us a feeling of integrity, like: "Hold on, I don't want to act like this. I have my own dignity as a human being and I don't want to act like this." Just that kind of stimulation of our sense of integrity or self-respect makes us look at those attitudes and say: "I don't really believe that. I am not going to act according to that."

*[Audience:] Could you explain how to do the thought-training technique of giving our suffering to the self-centered attitude?*

We see ourselves and our selfishness as somewhat separate. It is like the selfishness is attached on to us, but it isn't our intrinsic nature. So then, when we have some unpleasant experience, instead of feeling: "I am



having this unpleasant experience,” to recognize: “This is coming to me because of my own self-centeredness. Since my own self-centeredness caused it, it can have the pain.” So we take all this pain, we look at our self-centeredness and we say: “OK, here’s the result of your action. You feel the pain!”

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Conventionally speaking, there is “I” and “other”, but these are not inherent categories. We can say that my Buddha nature and your Buddha nature are the same in the sense that both of our minds are empty of inherent existence, but this is not saying that we have the same mind. We have the same Buddha nature, but on an ultimate level of existence, neither one of us has any inherent existence.

The idea of one universal mind—my understanding of it—is different from what we were just talking about, about everybody having Buddha nature. One universal mind is this idea of there being just one universal mind, one self, one God, one Brahma. Somehow, that got broken down into all these false senses of individuality. And so, the path to liberation is to merge with this one universal mind. So instead of the path to liberation being to realize your Buddha nature and your own lack of inherent existence, it is this merging process. According to these philosophies, the path to liberation would be to merge with this one universal thing; it has nothing to do with realizing emptiness.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Yes. It's very interesting that Buddhism talks of 'non-duality' but not of 'oneness'. Buddhism only goes as far as saying 'non-dual', because the thing is, as soon as you say 'one', 'one' implies 'two'. So, Buddhism only talks about non-duality. It's a subtle thing that I find that is actually quite powerful, because to me, there is a different taste when we talk about 'non-duality' than when we talk about 'oneness'.

'Oneness' is like trying hard to put everything together, whereas 'non-duality' is really in the spirit of emptiness. It's saying, it is not dual, but it is not saying what it is. It's just it is not dual. So, there is nothing to grab onto—don't grab on to duality. When you say 'oneness', it is very easy to grab onto 'oneness'.

So, let's sit quietly for a few minutes.

## **LACK OF SELF-RESPECT**

We have been discussing the various afflictions that are the causes of our unsatisfactory experience. We are looking at the second of the Four Noble Truths in depth. We finished talking about the six root afflictions. Last week we started going over the twenty secondary or auxiliary afflictions. And if you don't remember that, the affliction that made you forget is coming up in this teaching [Laughter.].

I think it is very helpful to try and recognize the afflictions in our daily life. If you just come to teachings, hear a list and you say: "Oh, yes, that sounds familiar", but you don't look over your notes—they get thrown in the back seat of the car or the top of your bookshelf until the next session—then nothing really sinks in, and nothing really gets

transformed.

If you take whatever we have gone over and try and recognize these different mental factors in your life, then you get a whole new way of understanding yourself. For those of you who feel that you are out of touch with yourself, who don't know who you are, this is the way to get in touch with who you are: through the practice of being mindful, of being aware of what is going on in your mind.

So, we are going to talk about the rest of the secondary afflictions.

The next affliction is called lack of self-respect. It is sometimes translated as “shamelessness,” but I don't like that translation at all. To understand what lack of self-respect is, we have to understand what self-respect is. Self-respect is a mental factor which, because of personal conscience, or for the sake of our own Dharma practice, we abstain from acting negatively.

Let's say you have taken a precept not to drink. You go for a Christmas dinner where everybody is drinking, but you say to yourself: “Oh, I have a precept not to drink. This is an issue of my own personal integrity. I am not going to break my word and go against what I have already decided to be.” This is an instance of doing something out of a sense of personal conscience, out of self-respect for our own ethical integrity.

When it is translated as “shame”, it means a sense of shame in that you are not going to act negatively because of care for yourself. But the word “shame” in English is so loaded and it has so many different

meanings that I think it can be easily misunderstood. Therefore, I prefer to use “self-respect”. It has to do with your own personal dignity; it is about how you want to act and how you don’t want to act. You abandon acting negatively when situations present themselves.

“Lack of self-respect” is the mental factor that does not avoid negativities out of a sense of personal conscience or care for your own practice. For instance, suppose you’ve taken the eight precepts for the day and one of the precepts is not to eat after lunch. Your friend says: “Ah, you took the eight precepts, but look, there is pizza here for dinner. You’ve got to eat the pizza!” And you just go right ahead and eat the pizza, not at all caring about your own dignity for having taken precepts.

This is a very interesting mental factor. The next mental factor that we are going to talk about is very interesting too. You know how sometimes we check up at the end of the day, or sometimes we look at what we have done in the past and we go: “Wow, at the time I was doing that, I knew I was doing something crazy, but I just didn’t do anything about it.” Has that happened to you? [Laughter.] That was the “lack of self-respect” functioning. If the opposite, that is, the sense of self-respect was functioning, we would not have gotten involved. We would have somehow been able to not go with the negative flow.

## **INCONSIDERATION FOR OTHERS**

The next secondary affliction is called inconsideration for others. Here again, to understand “inconsideration

for others,” we have to understand “consideration for others”. Consideration for others is similar to self-respect in that we abandon negative actions. The difference is in the case of self-respect, we abandon negative actions out of a feeling for our own integrity and our own Dharma practice, while in the case of consideration for others, we abandon negative actions because of how it is going to affect others.

“Inconsideration for others” is not caring at all about how your behavior affects others, not abandoning negative actions even though they might be harmful to others. This is the one that is operating when you get so angry that you tell somebody off and you don’t really care that you are hurting their feelings. This is also the one that is operating when you are with people who don’t have a lot of faith in the Dharma, they are kind of getting to know the Dharma through looking at you, and you just “go bananas” and act in a way that makes them lose faith in Buddhism.

I think this is probably even more pronounced once you take ordination, because then people will know you are a Buddhist. They kind of look to you as an example. When you act in a negative way, then because of your personal behavior, many people lose faith in the Dharma. Of course, we can say that people should not lose faith based upon one person’s behavior. It would be better if they look deeper into the teachings. But the fact is, it happens.

So, “inconsideration for others” is not caring about how our actions affect other people, or even acting dishonestly at work and not caring whether it affects your students, your colleagues, your employers, your

employees or whoever else; not caring at all about how our own unwholesomeness influences other people—either harming them directly or making them lose faith in humanity.

### **Negative qualities that masquerade as positive qualities**

You can see that “lack of self-respect” and “inconsideration for others” go hand in hand, in the sense that they both involve a lack of self-restraint. Their opposites—self-respect and consideration for others—are positive qualities that we should cultivate. However, we have to make sure that we don’t confuse them with some other qualities that are very similar, but which are negative.

For example, self-respect can sometimes be confused with the sense of pride. “I wouldn’t act like that!” “I am not going to lie because I wouldn’t act like that.” “I am not going to take drugs because I wouldn’t ....” You know, this kind of haughtiness, being ethical not because you value your ethics, but because you are haughty.

Haughtiness and self-respect are two different attitudes. When you abandon negativities out of a sense of pride and haughtiness, you might have a good [immediate] outcome, but your mind is caught up in an affliction. When you abandon the negativity out of genuine self-respect and not wanting to denigrate your own sense of ethics, then that is a positive quality.

The same is true with “consideration for others”. It is a positive quality, and it is very different from having attachment to reputation. Attachment to

reputation is a negative quality. Sometimes we won't act negatively, but it is not because we care about others. We actually don't care beans at all about the other people. We abandon negativity because we are very attached to our reputation. We act ethically or we are kind to other people, not because we care about them, but because we want other people to think well of us. That is a negative attitude. It may be slightly better than dumping our garbage on somebody, but it is very deceptive and the mind is quite attached to reputation. With "consideration for others", we are genuinely caring about them.

Whenever we act negatively, one of these two afflictions is involved—the "lack of self-respect" or the "inconsideration for others."

## **DULLNESS**

The next one is called dullness, or sometimes translated as "foggy-mindedness". This is a mental factor which, having caused the mind to lapse into darkness and thereby become insensitive, does not comprehend the object clearly as it is.

This is the mental factor that starts operating as soon as you sit down and relax in class. "I am so tired, why doesn't she shut up?" Or when you are sitting down to meditate and your mind starts getting thick, like lima bean soup. "Dullness" makes the body and the mind heavy; it makes it difficult to understand things; then, if it goes uncontrolled, you start snoring very soon.

This one comes in regular life. It also comes when we sit down and meditate. It is not the same as

“laxity” that happens in meditation. Laxity is a lot more subtle. Laxity is a lack of clarity of mind, a lack of intensity of the clarity of the mind. Foggy-mindedness is much grosser. It is the mind that is really thick, insensitive, not taking things in.

*[Audience:] Is there a difference between ignorance and dullness?*

Ignorance is just an unawareness of the nature of the object. Whereas dullness is much grosser, I think, than ignorance. Definitely related, but much grosser. With ignorance, you can be perfectly wide-awake and alert but you are still grasping at inherent existence, which is ignorance. In fact, you can be very excited and grasping at inherent existence. But this foggy-mindedness—there is a certain heaviness, dullness, thickness, obscuration of the mind so that things just do not go in and you’re almost nodding off.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Yes, this is very interesting. You might be completely wide-awake, but as soon as you sit down to listen to a teaching, you just cannot keep your eyes open. And this often happens when you are sitting in the front row in front of a high lama! I have seen it so many times. I have experienced it myself. You may have drunk 2 cups of coffee, you may have been wide-awake before, but you just cannot keep awake during teachings. It comes up, I think, because of very heavy negative karma. You will see it sometimes at the public teachings; people will be falling asleep,



nodding off. [Laughter.]

## AGITATION

The next secondary affliction is called agitation, sometimes translated as excitement. This is kind of the opposite of dullness. It is a mental factor which, through the force of attachment, does not allow the mind to rest solely upon a virtuous object, that scatters it here and there to many other objects that are much nicer than whatever the virtuous object is that you are trying to concentrate on. This is the “pizza mind.” [Laughter.] You are sitting there trying to meditate. You don’t have the foggy-mindedness. Your mind isn’t thick. Your mind is awake, and you are trying to watch the breath or you are trying to visualize the Buddha. But you get pizza, you get chocolate, you get your boy-friend and girl-friend, you get your pay check, you get the beach, you get some other object of attachment.

This one comes very often during the day, doesn’t it? Very often it comes when we are trying to meditate. It is not just distraction or wandering. (That is another affliction; we are going to get to that in a few minutes.) It makes you leave the virtuous object to go after an object of attachment. It happens when you are listening to teachings and you start thinking about how nice it will be to go home, have a cup of tea and go to bed. That is an object of attachment—your bed, your cup of chamomile, or your cup of hot chocolate, miso if you are being healthy [Laughter.]. Instead of listening to teachings, the mind is thinking about something else which seems much more

pleasurable. Or you are sitting and trying to meditate and the mind wanders to something more pleasurable. This is agitation or excitement.

This is why we have to spend a lot of time contemplating the disadvantages of objects of attachment and trying to see their nature. Otherwise, it will just run rampant in the mind. You could be at work and it strikes. Actually at work, you are not necessarily concentrating on a virtuous object. You may be just looking at your computer screen or whatever. Agitation takes you away from a virtuous object, as well as a neutral object like your computer screen. It is the one that makes you think about lunch time, makes you think about what you should do during the weekend.

## LAZINESS

Now the next one—nobody here has it. It is called laziness. [Laughter.] This is a mental factor which, having firmly grasped an object offering temporary happiness, either does not wish to do anything virtuous, or, though wishing to, is weak-minded. This is the mind that grabs onto something which seems infinitely more interesting than meditating, or listening to teachings, or taking the eight precepts at five o'clock in the morning, or doing Nyung Nay, or going on retreat, or whatever it is. It just doesn't want to get engaged in doing what is virtuous. Part of your mind may even say: "Well actually, I should... I do have a perfect human rebirth, I should use it." [Laughter.] But it just doesn't carry anything out.

## The three kinds of laziness

There are different kinds of laziness. There is a kind of laziness where we are just attached to hanging out, lying around and going to sleep. The mind that wants to sleep in. Here, the object offering temporary happiness is sleep. The bed. [Laughter.]

Then there is the laziness of being very busy. In Buddhism, being very busy running after objects of attachment is a form of laziness. This is because your mind is very busy following things that offer you temporary happiness. You work to get your paycheck. You go out to eat, then you go drinking, or you smoke some dope. Then you go do this, then go do that, and life is extremely busy. No time left on your calendar. That is a form of laziness, because there is a lot of time on the calendar to do anything but Dharma.

The third kind of laziness is a very interesting one. It is called discouragement or putting yourself down, feeling inadequate. Isn't that interesting? Low self-esteem, a feeling of inadequacy, is a kind of laziness. I think this is a very interesting way to look at it, because what does low self-esteem do? We sit there and we recite the mantra: "I can't do this. This is too difficult. I just don't have what it takes. I can't concentrate anyway. I am so bad. I tried it before but it doesn't work ...." The self-pity mind. We don't make any effort to do anything wholesome or virtuous because we are so busy convincing ourselves that we can't. Therefore it is a form of laziness.

I think that is quite interesting, because in psychology nowadays, there is all this talk about self-esteem. We go into it and analyze it, and all this stuff.

I think it is interesting to just look at it as a form of laziness. It gives us a whole different perspective. Then we don't need to go in and analyze our past: "My first grade teacher told me that my 'B's looked like 'D's, and I have been feeling incompetent ever since." Instead of painstakingly analyzing everything, just look and recognize that this attitude of putting myself down is just plain laziness. It is keeping me from doing something wholesome that will make me happy. If it keeps me from doing something that is going to make me happy, who needs it? It is a different way of approaching it. I think it could be interesting.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Yes. All of this bad self-image commentary that we keep telling ourselves acts as an obstacle to doing virtuous things that are the cause of happiness. If something is an obstacle to the creation of happiness in our lives, then who needs to believe it, who needs to follow it, who needs to dive in after it?!

When somebody comes to rob your house, if they knock at your door and say: "I have come here to rob your house", you say: "Who needs you!" You don't sit there and analyze where it came from. You kick the guy out. "I know what your trick is. Get out of here!" I think another way of dealing with issues of self-esteem is to recognize that they create big blocks for our own happiness, and to be very pragmatic, like we Americans always try to be. We just need to say: "Well, this doesn't serve any good purpose, so let's leave it behind. I don't need to keep

thinking like that.”

I am not saying that analyzing is bad. I think that can be quite useful. But I think it is interesting to have another approach which is, “This attitude is totally impractical!” It is completely impractical to keep telling ourselves how lousy we are.

## **NON-FAITH OR NON-CONFIDENCE**

The next secondary affliction is called non-faith or non-confidence. This mental factor causes one to have no belief in or no respect for what is worthy of confidence. It is the complete opposite of confidence or faith. Something that is worthy of confidence, that is worthy of respect, that is worthy of appreciation: when this mental factor is in our mind, we don't appreciate or acknowledge or have faith and confidence in any of those things.

This affliction refers specifically to, for example, non-confidence in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, in past and future rebirth, or in the functioning of cause and effect. It is a lack of confidence that these things even exist. Or it is a lack of appreciation for the qualities of the Buddha; a lack of appreciation for the Dharma path and its ability to lead us out of all of our confusion and pain; a lack of confidence in the Buddha, or in our Dharma teachers—that they know what they are talking about; or a lack of confidence in the path; a disbelief in cause and effect.

This is some kind of dark, heavy mind that I think we've all had a considerable amount of. At least I know in my past, this one had been very active. It blocks out anything that is worthy of confidence, or

puts it down, or criticizes it. It is the mental factor that makes you cynical and skeptical in a negative way. There is a kind of skepticism that is curiosity, which is quite good. But non-faith is the kind of skepticism that is just: “I am not going to believe anything in any way.” It is this cynicism or the unwillingness to listen to new ideas.

This mental factor makes a big block in our practice, because when we don't have any faith or confidence, we have no inspiration. What makes you want to practice is maybe you meet somebody who is practicing and they seem like such a nice person. You think: “Wow, that is incredible. Look at this person. I can become like that.” So your mind gets light-hearted, kind of light and buoyant and you want to practice.

Or you hear about the qualities of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas and you think: “Wow, that is incredible. I would like to be like that.” You appreciate that. Or you hear about cause and effect and your mind gets concerned, and you think: “Well, I can take some control and responsibility in my life if I follow cause and effect.” When you have this kind of faith or confidence, the mind has energy. It has inspiration. It wants to do something positive.

But with the lack of faith or the non-faith, the mind has no life to it. You don't believe in anything. We can see that this is so prevalent all over the society. It makes people feel that their life is meaningless and there is no sense to anything. There is nothing to trust. There is no direction to go to. Of course, when you have that attitude, you can't do anything because even if there is a whole lot of incredible things around

you that you can do, your mind is so convinced that none of that exists that you can't see it.

## UNCONSCIENTIOUSNESS

The next secondary affliction is called unconscientiousness. It is a mental factor that, when one is affected by laziness, wishes to act freely in an unrestrained manner without cultivating virtue or guarding the mind against contaminated phenomena.

In other words, you want to just do whatever you feel like doing, whatever pops into your mind. Nowadays, it is sometimes called acting spontaneously. [Laughter.] There are different kinds of spontaneity. One kind is quite positive. Another kind is quite negative. We have to be clear on this.

This mental factor of unconscientiousness is the mind that just wants to follow any impulse that comes into it. This is the mind that, when you go to a party, says: "Oh, it's too difficult to be mindful here. I am just going to go with the flow." So, when people are drinking, smoking dope, and doing this and that, you just go with it. The mind loses the capability to distinguish between constructive and destructive actions. This is the mind that just doesn't care! It just wants to act in any old way.

We have to be clear here because like I said, there is a kind of spontaneity which is quite good. When you act spontaneously from an attitude of love and compassion, that is good. When you act spontaneously from an attitude of anger, belligerence, prejudice or attachment, that is a different case altogether.

The word ‘spontaneous’ in our culture is a little bit of a sticky word. Likewise with ‘control’. There is a kind of control that is quite good and a kind of control that is very harmful. We need to discriminate between the kind of control to cultivate and the kind to abandon, and the kind of spontaneity to cultivate and the kind to abandon. There is a kind of control that is the opposite to the negative spontaneity. It says: “I am going to be mindful. I am going to be aware. I am going to take responsibility for what is going on in my life and what I am doing and how I am affecting people.” That kind of control is good.

The other kind of control happens when we get really heavy-handed with ourselves: “I got to do this!” “You sit down on that meditation cushion!” When you are talking to yourself with such a heavy-handed, authoritarian kind of self-control, that is not so good. When we are trying to get rid of the unconscientiousness, let us not replace it with the authoritarian self-control. We need to replace it instead with a sense of respect for our own ethics, a sense of compassion for ourselves, wanting ourselves to be happy and so thereby caring about what we do and how it affects others.

*[Audience:] What is the difference between unconscientiousness and lack of self-respect?*

Unconscientiousness means you are not mindful at all; you just want to do anything that pops in your mind, completely unrestrained. It is the one that makes you laugh crazy.

In the case of a lack of self-respect, an example is



not abandoning a negative action because of a lack of respect for yourself. In lack of self-respect, then, there is the opportunity right there to act negatively. Your mind is really toying with the idea, and there is no feeling of your own integrity as a practitioner or your own ethical integrity.

With lack of self-respect, you can sometimes go through a dialog with yourself and come to the wrong conclusion. Sometimes you don't even bother to dialog; you just jump to the conclusion. Whereas this mental factor of unconscientiousness is much more a kind of free-floating recklessness. It is like, when you are unconscientious, you are going to wind up facing a situation in which you can act negatively, and then your lack of self-respect is going to not hold you back from doing it.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Unconscientiousness is not even registering with you that there is alcohol at this party. It is like not even caring that there is alcohol, or not even caring that you have a real strong taste for it. It is just the mind that...whatever pops in your mind, that is what you want to do. You don't care what it is. It is like a lack of watchfulness. There is not a good English word for it.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

If you want to get rid of this one, then you need the kind of control that is more a sense of: "OK, I am going to this Christmas party with all my relatives. I

know Aunt Betsy is going to be there and she is going to harp on the way I look, but I am going to be very aware when she starts to do that and not tell her off. At every Christmas in the past, I had told her off, and I just don't feel good about it. She is probably going to do the same thing again this year, but I am not going to follow whatever ideas come in my mind when she starts doing it."

It is a wariness of the situation, caring about how you act, so that you want to control your actions. But it is not this heavy-handed: "You keep your mouth close in front of Aunt Betsy. Don't you dare talk back to her. You've got to control your mind!" Talking to yourself like that is really bullying yourself. It is a very harmful kind of control.

Helpful control is recognizing that we do have a choice, and wanting to take that choice about how we act, or even how we feel. We do have a choice as to what we feel. So often it seems like our feelings just come and we have no choice. But as we start understanding our feelings better, we can begin to understand that at a certain point, if we catch it, we actually have a choice about what we feel. We actually have a choice. For example, somebody says something nasty and for a split second, there is this choice of: "Am I going to get mad at him or am I just going to let it go, because it doesn't matter?" So, a helpful kind of self-control is one where you are on to that. You care about your own happiness.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

And we start saying all those things that we vowed as

kids we would never say. You start talking like your mother or your father, and you go: “Who is this talking?” I think a lot of our practice is becoming aware of the kind of situations in which that attitude comes up.

I think there are different ways to deal with it, perhaps to try and handle the situation before it gets to that critical point. I know one of my friends says to her daughter: “I am trying to get out of the house on time to go to work. Can you help me do it?” Then the kid thinks: “Oh, I can help mama.” There are different ways of putting it.

Sometimes it is just a matter of us calming down. I am not saying that you can do this every time, because I know with kids, it can be hard. But sometimes you can try telling the child: “Well, you have a choice of how to act. If you act this way, this is what is going to happen. If you act that way, that is what is going to happen. You have a choice of whether you are going to wear your coat to school or not; but please be aware that if you don’t wear it and you get sick, then you will have to please take the responsibility for getting sick.” Somehow helping the kids to see the choice in it.

Sometimes we may need to just admit to the kids that we lose it sometimes.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I don’t think you have to use Buddhist indoctrination to teach kids about this. It’s this thing of: “OK, here we have a situation. What are the different ways we can act?” And there might not just be two ways to act.

There might be three, or four, or ten. “Now, let’s just check it out together and see what happens if you do this and what’s likely to happen if you do that; and let’s think about something before we do it.” Teaching kids to think a little bit of the possible effects of their actions and then deciding what they want. And giving them more than two choices. In other words, the choice is not: “Do what I say,” or “Do it your own way.” The choice is: “There are lots of various activities we can do here. What are the results going to be for self and others with each of these activities?”

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I notice that often, with kids, it is very tempting to get involved in a power struggle. We get into power struggles with them, so that the issue is not so much eating the peanut butter and jelly sandwich or not eating it; the issue is who has the power in this situation. Sometimes the kids will try and turn it into a power thing. In such cases, I think it is good to completely avoid it. Don’t buy in and start making it a power struggle.

Also, from our own side, try not to make it a power struggle. In other words, the fact that you are not doing what I would like you to do, isn’t a power struggle between you and me and you are winning. You have a choice: there is this, this, this you can do. But if you do this particular action, it is going to affect me in a certain way. If you do that action, it is going to affect me in another way. Instead of just: “Who is going to win here?”

It can be so sneaky. I have taught in school before,

so I have dealt with kids or watched parents deal with their kids. It is so sneaky—the way the power struggle jumps in, so that it is no longer a simple thing; it is power. This happens not only with kids; it happens very much with people we are close to. People are ostensibly fighting over some issue, but they are really fighting over who has power. Or they are fighting over self-respect. Somehow the issue is different from what we think it is.

This is where I think breathing meditation is very helpful. When you breathe, you watch all these stuff come up in your mind. You will remember past situations. Try to isolate the mental factor that is coming up at that time, and think about it for a little while. Try and resolve the situation, not necessarily when you are doing the breathing meditation. You could do this in a different meditation.

## **FORGETFULNESS**

And then here is the one I talked about before, that you have probably forgotten. It is called forgetfulness. Forgetfulness is a mental factor which, having caused the apprehension of a virtuous object to be lost, induces memory of and distraction towards an object of affliction.

For example, you are sitting there trying to watch the breath or visualize the Buddha, and you lose the object. In addition, you are thinking about going skiing or you are getting angry at somebody else. The mind is going towards an object of affliction and it has completely forgotten about what you have sat down to meditate on.

This mental factor is the opposite of mindfulness. We always talk about mindfulness being an important mental factor that recognizes the object of meditation and keeps the mind on it in such a way that it doesn't forget. Forgetfulness, on the other hand, is the lack of mindfulness, so that the mind just forgets your meditation object and something else comes in. When you have forgetfulness, agitation or excitement is going to pop in right away and fill the void. Or sometimes laxity will pop in and fill the void and the mind will start getting very heavy.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Laxity becomes more evident when you start having some ability to concentrate. With laxity, you might even have some stability on the object. In other words, you have the object in your meditation and you might even have some clarity. The intensity or the clarity is gone, however. It is like you are sitting and you are on the breath, you have the stability, you see the breath going in and out; but your mind is not completely there, it is not bright and sparkling. Dullness comes in when the mind gets quite thick and you forget the breath because you are more into your obscuration at that point.

## **NON-INTROSPECTION**

The next secondary affliction is called non-introspection. Forgetfulness and non-introspection are the opposites of the two important qualities that we need when we meditate—mindfulness and

introspective alertness. Forgetfulness is the opposite of mindfulness, and non-introspective alertness is the opposite of introspective alertness.

Introspective alertness is the one that is like a little spy that pops up and sees if you are concentrating, sees if you are awake, checks up what is going on. Non-introspection is a mental factor that is an afflicted intelligence; it has made no analysis (or only a rough analysis) of what is going on in the mind. It is not fully alert to the conduct of your body, speech and mind. You are not on top of the situation, and this causes you to get into unconscientiousness and start being careless, indifferent and reckless.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Non-introspection is an afflicted intelligence which has made no analysis, or only a rough analysis, of what you are saying, thinking and doing. It is not fully alert to what you are saying, doing, thinking or feeling. It is not alert. For example, you drive home from some place and somebody asks: “What did you think about on the ride home?” You couldn’t tell them. Non-introspection is the mental factor that makes you unable to tell that person what you thought about in the car, because you don’t know.

You were sitting there thinking the whole time. Many thoughts and images are going on in your mind the whole time you are in the car, but you are not aware of them. The mind could be sitting there getting angry. The mind could be sitting there thinking what you are going to do when you are home. You could be day dreaming about something else, but you are not

even aware of what is going on. This is how we are a good portion of the day; for example, with mindless eating, you are not even aware that you are eating. You are just sitting and eating.

*[Audience:] What is the difference between mindfulness and introspective alertness?*

Mindfulness knows what the object of meditation is, remembers it in such a way that it doesn't forget it; and by remembering it, it prevents other objects from coming in and distracting you. Mindfulness is what puts the focus of your mind on the object of meditation. Now once you have done that, you have to check up if it is still working or if something else has snuck in.

Introspective alertness, then, is the one that checks up: "What am I concentrating on? What am I thinking about? Am I on the breath? Am I on the Buddha? Am I over in Neverland? Am I worrying about something? Am I anxious about something?" It is the one that is able to look and recognize what is going on in your mind.

Mindfulness is the thing that sticks your mind to a virtuous object. Introspective alertness is saying: "Are you stuck to the virtuous object? What is going on?"

To have sustained mindfulness, you need introspective alertness. If you don't have it, your mindfulness will start going to something else and you won't catch it until the bell rings. And then it's like: "Oh, how long was that meditation? Where was I?"  
[Laughter.]



## DISTRACTION

The last secondary affliction is called distraction or wandering. This is a mental factor which, arising from any of the three poisons and being unable to direct the mind towards a virtuous object, disperses it to a variety of other objects.

This is a mental factor which, arising from any of the three poisons—so you could either have attachment, anger or close-mindedness functioning in your mind—is unable to direct the mind towards a virtuous object. Because it is unable to do that, it disperses your mental energy to daydreaming, to distraction, to wondering, to anxiety, and worry, frustration and belligerence, and everything else.

For example, I say there are twenty secondary afflictions, and you count them up but you only have seventeen, and you wonder what happened to the other three. That is the mental factor of distraction operating. [Laughter.] The mind was thinking about something else.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Many of the afflictions have to do with meditation, but they have to do with practicing in daily life, too. Distraction is what makes your mind go all over the place when you are driving the car, and non-introspective alertness is what makes you not even remember that it went all over the place.

For example, when you are driving, you could be using this time to cultivate your mind by saying mantra or doing something else. But distraction makes

the mind go all over the place; unconscientiousness makes you not care that it is all over the place; forgetfulness kind of jumps in there and makes it easy to go all over the place; and lack of introspective alertness causes you to not even know what is going on, because you are so much in all those other places that who wants be aware of what is happening in your own mind.

There are actually much more secondary afflictions than the twenty. The Buddha said there are 84,000. It is very interesting to start watching your own mind and identify these, and how they inter-relate—how this one will lead to that one, then another one jumps in. In other words, all these attitudes are not unrelated things. It is not like belligerence comes up at five minutes past eight, and then there are no afflictions in the mind until a quarter past eight when you get a little bit of distraction.

It is not like that. For example, when you start watching, you might get some grudge-holding and vengefulness. Then that causes you to have the spite that makes you want to go tell somebody else off. Then that makes you leave your object of meditation. Then you don't have your introspective alertness to recognize that you've done that. Then you get really into planning how to harm the other person, so all faith in cause and effect is completely gone out of the window. It is like one thing follows another and they kind of inter-play and jump around, kind of dancing together. It is very interesting to start watching in the mind, how it does that.

*[Audience:] When you are with somebody who is*

*really intent on harming somebody else, how do we help them pull themselves out of it?*

It depends a lot on your relationship with that person. In some situations, if you try and say anything, it is going to make it worse. Then doing the taking and giving meditation is very good, taking their suffering on yourself, because you can't say anything to them. In other situations, you can say something to somebody, like: "Wow, it must be very painful to be carrying around that kind of resentment," or "What do you think will happen if you act like that? Do you think you will feel good afterwards?" In some situations, you can ask a question or just make a comment.

The worst thing to do is to say: "Don't do that," unless you have an incredibly straightforward relationship with somebody. Sometimes when we are very close to somebody, we can do that. But that kind of relationship does not happen very often. Sometimes, then, it is a matter of focusing on helping the person understand that if they do that, they are going to feel more miserable afterwards; or to help them understand that they are doing that basically because they are hurting inside. Sometimes if they feel listened to, they can actually acknowledge what it is they are feeling, and they lose the interest in retaliation.

Sometimes we can't do anything, so we do the taking and giving. Then say to yourself: "This is what I am like when I get very vengeful; that is exactly how I am".

*[Audience:] What are the antidotes to laziness?*

Let's go through the three kinds of laziness. What would be an antidote to the first kind of laziness, where you are attached to sleeping and just hanging out doing nothing?

*[Audience: inaudible]*

This is why you have to think about death at other times. Don't leave it until the alarm clock goes off to think about death. [Laughter.] You have to think about it at other times, so when the alarm clock goes off, you will remember the intensity of the feeling.

What else would work?

*[Audience:] Contemplating the disadvantages of cyclic existence.*

That can give you some kind of oomph.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

If you think: "Here I am in this situation where I get born, get sick, get old and die without any control. I have this life in which I can counteract it; but I am not doing anything, so I am going to experience this again and again." Then that can give you some juice. This is very much relating to a perfect human rebirth, where we have our senses intact, our body intact, etc.

What about the second kind of laziness? Busy-ness, running around and involvement in worldly activities. What is a good antidote to that one?

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Yes, remembering that you can't take any of them with you when you die. Remembering there is no end to the activities of cyclic existence.

What is the antidote for the third kind of laziness?

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Instead of sitting around feeling more and more discouraged, get up and do something for somebody else. That automatically helps. It is not a way of avoiding our own stuff, but a way of recognizing that self-pity is an affliction and we don't need to sit and feed that into our mindstream. We can do something else. When we have self-pity, we usually tell ourselves that we can't do anything. When we get up and do something for others, we get instant realization that we can do something, because we are doing it.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

You get discouraged when you think that you haven't gotten anywhere despite having put in a lot of effort into your meditation. Or you haven't gotten where you would like to get. It is quite interesting. We spend ½ hour a day meditating and 23½ hours not meditating and then we wonder why our meditation doesn't progress! [Laughter.]

What we do in our break time is very important, because if you are completely bananas in your break time—the 23½ hours, it is going to be hard to refocus your mind for that ½ hour of meditation. Whereas if

your other 23½ hours are a little bit reasonable, it is going to be easier when you sit down to meditate.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Well, can you think of a positive value to discouragement? [Audience speaks.] So you could feel discouraged because what you are doing isn't fulfilling, and that discouragement can motivate you to find something that is more worthwhile. [Audience speaks.] I think there are two things. There is the discouragement or dissatisfaction with what you are doing and then there is how you relate to that discouragement or dissatisfaction. You might feel dissatisfied with what you are doing and relate to it by getting angry at yourself. Or you might feel discouraged and that increases your laziness. Or you might feel discouraged and then recognize: "Oh, this is a problem and I can do something about it."

It is not like the dissatisfaction or the discouragement is good and it is something to be cultivated. If it is there, then the thing to do is: "OK, it is there, but how am I going to react to it? How am going to be influenced by it?"

Also, consider what you are discouraged about. If you are discouraged about samsara, that is very good. [Laughter.] But see, being discouraged because we can't make enough money is different from being discouraged about samsara. Being discouraged because you can't make enough money is just a function of attachment. That is being very much stuck in cyclic existence, because that mind is just seeing the antidote as making more money. Whereas feeling

discouraged about cyclic existence is recognizing that this situation of banging my head against the wall trying to find happiness externally is a hassle, and I have much more inner potential to use than to keep on doing that.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Sometimes it doesn't come because we don't even recognize that our mind is under the influence of an affliction. That is one of the problems, that we don't even recognize that the mind is full of garbage. The second thing is, even if we recognize it, we don't know what to do about it.

So, it is a thing of training the mind to recognize it. Once we have recognized it, we practice the different things that we can do about it. It becomes a matter of developing some skill. It is like when we familiarize ourselves with the Lamrim—we think about the teachings; then we get some familiarity; and then it becomes much easier for us to relate them to our daily life when different things happen. Whereas if we haven't spent much time thinking about the teachings, then they are not going to come up when we have a difficulty.

The more familiarity you have with the teachings, the more you think about them, the more they make sense. Because you have been contemplating on them, it is more likely that the teachings will come into mind when you go: "Ai ya ya, my mind is completely out of control, what can I think instead? How else can I look at it?"

Sometimes, you just don't have enough familiarity

or you are not even aware of what you are feeling. It is like you are all upset and topsy turvy inside but you don't know whether it is attachment or anger or belligerence or grudges. Then what you need to do is to go and sit by yourself; sit, breathe and watch all those different thoughts that are going on at the moment. Try and identify what it is that you were feeling and thinking. You notice what kind of story line you are telling yourself, so that you can at least identify what it is that is going on. Once you have done that, it becomes easier to find the antidote.

It is a thing of learning through our own experience, through trial and error. I remember one of my Dharma friends said to me she has never gotten bored since she started practicing. [Laughter.] The mind is so interesting, so you don't get bored anymore.

Let's sit quietly for a few minutes.

## **Order of Development of the Afflictions**

We are now on the topic "Order of development of the afflictions". Actually we've had all the afflictions since beginningless time. The 'order of development' is not referring to one affliction followed by another and then another. Rather, it is referring to how the afflictions tend to arise and develop in our daily experience.

How do the afflictions arise and develop? On the basis of ignorance, which is the mental dimness, the darkness, the non-comprehension in our mind, we generate the wrong view of the transitory collection



which grasps at the self as a solid, concrete person.

The following analogy is being used: there was something coiled and striped in a room and the light in the room was dim. Due to the dimness, the thing that was coiled and striped was mistaken as a snake. Not seeing clearly due to the dim light is like ignorance. Thinking that there is a snake is like the wrong view of the transitory collection. In other words, you completely misapprehend something and think that something is there when it is not.

There is a body and a mind, but we apprehend that somewhere in that body and mind, there is a solid, permanent, unchanging, independent essence that is me. That is a misapprehension which gets us into a whole lot of trouble. When we grasp at a solid 'I' and a solid 'my', then everything becomes very dualistic—there is a self and there is the 'other'. We start distinguishing very sharply between me, who is this solid personality, and everybody else, who are also solid personalities.

Because the 'I' feels so solid and real and different from everybody else, a lot of attachment to this self arises. This attachment causes us to be attached to other things too because the self wants to be happy. We need skis, we need a VCR, we need to take Chinese food, we need a new car and we need so many things. It almost feels like there is an empty hole inside of ourselves and we are trying to feed it.

Not only do we need material things, we also need praise and affirmation. We need people to tell us what to do, to say we are good, and to spread our good reputation. But no matter how much of these we get, we never really feel satisfied and fulfilled. It is like a

bottomless pit that we try to fill. It doesn't work.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

In one way you can see how the mindstream of a hungry ghost develops. The hungry ghost mentality is the same as the consumer mentality. The difference is that the hungry ghosts meet constant frustration in their attempt to get what they want. But there is definitely this continual wanting, wanting, wanting.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Yes, you can see how they flow, one after the other. Due to the ignorance of not seeing clearly, we grasp at a solid, existent self. That enhances the duality between self and others. Then we need to please this self and make it happy, so we get a lot of attachment. From the attachment comes anger and fear.

The Tibetans don't list fear but you can see very clearly in your own experience how fear comes from attachment. When there is a lot of attachment, you fear not getting what you want or losing what you have. Anger, irritation, or hatred grows out of our attachment because the more we are attached to something, the angrier we become when we don't get it or when we lose it.

Also from the attachment, comes pride—this real sense of “I am”, an over-inflation of the self.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

The mind gets hard and tough when it is angry, so the

sense of self gets harder. You know how we are when we are angry—we feel we are right: “Don’t tell me what to do!” There is a much inflated view of the self at that point. That stubbornness is definitely a form of pride.

And then after that, we get all the other afflictions. We get all the different kinds of wrong views, because when we are proud nobody can tell us anything. Our mind starts conceptualizing a myriad of afflicted views and then we get doubt.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

There are different kinds of hope. There is a positive hope and a negative hope. The negative hope, I think, is basically part of attachment, because it is a mind that is wanting: “I hope tomorrow will be sunny”. Actually what we hope has nothing to do with how tomorrow will be. But my hoping is getting my mind completely fixated in what I want, so that if it snows tomorrow, I am going to be miserable.

## **The Causes of the Afflictions**

The next point is what we call the causes of the afflictions, in other words, things that make the afflictions arise. If we can understand what makes the afflictions arise—what causes the anger to arise, what causes the attachment to arise, what causes the afflicted doubt to arise, what causes the laziness to arise—then we can try and stop some of those causes. At the least, we can be more sensitive to these

afflictions when they are functioning, so that we don't get taken in by them.

## 1. DEPENDENT BASIS

Now the first cause, the technical term for it is "dependent basis". Some of these terms may be long, but they don't mean a whole lot. This refers to the seed of the disturbing attitude. The Tibetan word is "bag chag"—you have probably heard it before. It is translated as seed or impression or imprint.

So right now, let us say, I am not angry. There is no manifest anger in my mind. In other words, anger—which is a type of consciousness and a mental factor—is not manifest in my mind right now. But we can't say that anger has been totally removed from my mind, because the potential to be angry is still there. The seed of the anger, the impression of the anger is still there, so that as soon as I meet something that does not agree with what I want it to be, the anger is going to become manifest.

The seed of the anger is not a consciousness, because I am not angry right now. There is no mental factor of anger right now. But there is the seed of anger. This seed of the anger is going to manifest as soon as Achala [the cat] bites me [laughter], or as soon as I go outside and it is freezing cold. As soon as these happen, the seed which was not a consciousness, will manifest in my mind as the mental factor of anger (which is a consciousness), and I am going to be upset.

Now this is quite different from the view that is commonly held, as I have understood it. People often

talk about the unconscious or the subconscious mind. We talk about repressed anger. It is as if this repressed anger is a solid, real thing that has a definite shape and form and it is there within you but you are blocking it out. You might not be aware of it, but it is there eating away at you. You are being angry all the time. This is a very solid view of the anger.

I think the Buddhist view is quite different. In Buddhism it says: “Wait a minute, there is no manifest anger in the mind at this point. There are the imprints of anger; there is the potential to become angry again. But it is not that you are walking around angry all day and not realizing it.

The seed of anger is just a seed of potential. It is not molecular. There is nothing made of atoms and molecules here. It is just a potential. If you cut open your brain, you wouldn’t be able to find it there.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Yes. This is the reason why it is very important to realize emptiness or selflessness. Realizing emptiness not only gets rid of the manifest anger, but also it has the power to eliminate the seed of the anger that can later give rise to angry moments. Realizing emptiness is a way of uprooting anger from the very root, from the very foundation, so that anger can never manifest again. Then, no matter who you meet and how awfully they treat you, you don’t get angry. It is totally impossible for you to get angry. Wouldn’t that be nice?

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Don't see the seed as a solid seed. You can see from this instance how we are grasping at inherent existence. The seed is just the potential. It is something that is merely labeled on that ever-changing potential that can bring forth something else.

This is something good to do: whenever you get into a heavy duty self concept—"I am an angry person" (or "I am an attached person" or "I am a confused person")—look at the anger. There are actually a few ways to deal with this. Ask: "What is anger?" And remember that anger is not one solid thing. It is just moments of mind that have a common trait which we give the label 'anger' to, that's all.

Anger is something that is merely labeled on top of those moments of similar thing. Depression is something that is merely labeled on top of moments of mind—all of which are different, all of which are changing—that have some kind of common characteristic. When we start thinking about this, we begin to understand that this whole rigid concept we have of ourselves, how we frame ourselves, is all wrong. Or we begin to see how we make ourselves suffer by our negative self-image. We make the "I" very concrete and we make the *X* in "I am *X*" very concrete. In actual fact, they are things that are merely labeled on similar moments of mind. That is all. When you think about this and something sinks in, then it is like: "Oh yeah!"

*[Audience: inaudible]*

There are different levels of anger. There is the innate anger and there is what we call 'artificial anger'.

Artificial is not the greatest word but I haven't discovered another one yet. The innate anger is what we have had since beginningless time. You don't have to learn it. The artificial anger is the anger that we learn in this lifetime. For example, we learn that we should be angry when a kid steals our ball or when somebody calls us a name.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

What we retain from previous lifetimes is the innate. The innate comes with us. The artificial may create imprints, so that in the next life, we think like that again. The artificial creates a certain karmic imprint and then in your next lifetime, you may hear something that triggers that way of thinking again. For example, let's say that somebody has the belief that there is a creator. That is a learned belief. That is an artificial type of wrong view. We didn't have that since beginningless time. We learnt that, and we created a whole pattern of thinking around that. In the next life when we are babies, we don't yet have that, we don't think that way. But all we need is for somebody to say it, and then we say: "Oh yes, that's right."

*[Audience: inaudible]*

The artificial ones can sometimes be very deeply rooted.

It is good to ask ourselves: "What is it I really believe?" Instead of having those beliefs and not being aware of them, we become more aware of what

it is we believe and then we start to check it out.

I have noticed that what we do sometimes when we listen to teachings is, we hear the teachings through the ears of a four or five-year-old child learning religion from mom and dad. I have seen this in myself and in other people. It is sometimes very difficult for us to listen to Buddhist teachings with a fresh mind. We are filtering it through all these ideas we received when we were little about reward, punishment, shame and etc. Sometimes it is hard for us to even understand the words the Buddha is saying, because we are hearing a replay of what we heard when we were four or five years old.

For example—you have probably heard me say this before—I'll go some place where there are new people and give a talk about anger. When I talk about anger, I always start talking about the disadvantages of anger. Somebody will raise their hand and say: "You are saying we are not supposed to be angry and anger is bad ...." But I have never said that. I would never say that because I don't believe that.

You see, when they hear the disadvantages of anger, the words coming out of the speaker's mouth are about the disadvantages, but the words that they are understanding through their filter, are the words that they hear when they were four or five years old from mommy and daddy: "You shouldn't be angry; you are a bad boy (or a bad girl) if you are angry."

I think we need to become much more aware of these old ways of thinking, those old ways of perceiving, so that then we can start checking up: "Well, is anger really bad? Am I a bad person if I am angry? Am I not supposed to be angry?" Supposed to,



what is “supposed to”?

*[Audience: inaudible]*

We have two big problems. One is we believe everything we think. The second one is we don't always know what we think. We are thinking things, but we don't know what we are thinking.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Yes, we realize emptiness through a very gradual way. First, we hear the teachings and get some wisdom from that. Then we think about them. If you can just stay single-pointed on the correct conceptual view of emptiness, that can be very powerful. That is not an intellectual word view of emptiness. It is an understanding of emptiness. It is still conceptual but it is at a deeper level; it is not intellectual. Then you get to a certain point where that conceptual understanding of emptiness becomes non-conceptual, and that is when you start eliminating the afflictions. First you start cutting away the artificial layers of the afflictions. Then as you familiarize yourself more and more with this mind understanding emptiness, you start cutting away even the innate levels of the afflictions.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Yes, there are different levels of conceptualization. We usually think of conceptualization as academic college blah, blah. Our understanding of emptiness

might start out like that. It takes time just to get the vocabulary right. Once you have the vocabulary, you can start looking inside and apply that vocabulary to what is going on in your experience. It is still conceptual at that time, but it is not just intellectual blah, blah, because you are taking it into your heart and looking at your experience. And that gets deeper and deeper gradually. It is not direct perception yet; there is still some concept, but it is not just intellectual jabbering either.

## **2. THE OBJECT STIMULATING THEM TO ARISE**

The second one is the object stimulating them to arise. Pizza, chocolate, cheese, etc—these are the things that make our afflictions arise. It can be a person, a place, a thing, an idea, whatever it is. When our senses contact an object, attachment, anger, pride or some other affliction can arise.

This is why they say that at the beginning of the practice for beginners it is good not to be around the things that stimulate our afflictions a lot, because we don't have a whole lot of control. It is like zap! We are off.

This is also the rationale behind some of the monastic vows—you stay away from the situations that would lead you to generate a lot of affliction. It is kind of like, if you have a problem with your weight, you don't go to an ice-cream parlor.

This is why it is good to understand which is our strongest affliction and what are the external objects that set them off so easily. We then try and stay away

from those external objects, not because those things are bad and evil, but because our mind is uncontrolled. You use that space from being away from it and having your mind slightly calmer, to do the meditation very deeply. In this way your mind becomes more stable and then whether you are near that thing or not near that thing, your mind does not go crazy.

So, it is not about escaping from the things that set you off. Our mind can get attached to anything anyway. Where are we going to go where there is no object of attachment? There is no place; no place that we can go where there are no objects of attachment. So the thing is to stay away from the object that is real disturbing for us for a time till our mind gets stronger. Then we can be near those things and it is OK.

It is like if you have a weight problem, you stay away from the ice-cream parlors. Not only that, but you actively meditate on the disadvantages of ice cream. Or you meditate on the impermanence or the unsatisfactory nature, so that your mind begins to cut through the whole projection you built up of how wonderful ice-cream is. Then when you have become stable in that, you can go to the ice-cream parlor. Your mind will not go bonkers.

This is why the Buddha emphasized the importance of simplifying our lives, to cut down on the number of things that we use for sense stimulation. If we simplify our lives, then there will be fewer things around us that will cause us to generate afflictions. This, of course, is the opposite to the American way of life. [Laughter.]

Again, we are avoiding things not because these

things are bad. It is simply because our mind is uncontrolled and we realize that if we let our mind be uncontrolled, we are going to hurt ourselves and others. If you have a mind that very easily gets attached, don't go to the shopping mall when you have nothing to do. Don't go to the shopping mall even when you have something to do! [Laughter.] Really keep out because the mind will dream up: "Oh, I need this, I need this and I need this!"

Before you even go there to shop, check: "Do I really need that? Do I really need another lamp in the house? Do I really need a chair? Do I really need another file cabinet? Do I really need another widget?" It is good to check like this, because if we don't, then as soon as the mind thinks: "Oh, I need a widget", then automatically we are in the car going to the shopping mall. And we will come out not only with a widget but with ten other things as well.

The whole idea of having a simple life is that we just use what we need, not more than that, and we have what we need, not more than that. Actually I think in America it has become quite a struggle to only have what you need and to get rid of all your other stuff. Somehow we have managed to accumulate so much stuff that when we try and live simply, it takes a whole lot of time and effort to get rid of them.

Look at you house now and look at your house after Christmas. We'll just get more and more stuff. We will use some of the stuff and we'll just put the other stuff in the closet. Our closets just get totally full. You need to move to a bigger house because you need more closets! [Laughter.] It is like a personal

museum, with all my boxes, tin cans and my toaster ovens including my 1983 model of toaster oven.

If there is a person who really sets us off, and if we can avoid being near that person, that is good. But since we can't always avoid being near that person, then we have to definitely develop ways to manage our reactions to them. One time, somebody asked His Holiness a question when he talked about patience: "I have been trying very hard to practice patience so much with this one person at work, but I am still getting angry. What do I do?"

His Holiness said, "Well, you might get another job!" [Laughter.] If the situation is really too much for you and you are just creating so much negative karma, then if you can change it, fine. But you see, this is very different from running away from things because we feel insecure.

Let's sit quietly for a few minutes.

## **Review**

### ***1. The seed of the afflictions***

Last time we started going through the causes of the afflictions. We talked about the first one being *the impression or the seed of the affliction*. This seed is not a consciousness. It is just a potency; so it is very different from the psychological view of it being a big solid thing in the subconscious. The Buddhist view is that it is just a potency and when it is activated it becomes manifest anger or manifest pride, or something like that.

It is also this seed, this impression that carries this

affliction from one lifetime to the next. When we die, our gross consciousnesses lose their power and dissolve into the subtler consciousnesses, along with these seeds. When we get into another body, the gross consciousnesses appear. The seeds or the potencies are there ready to be activated, so that we get afflictions in our next life.

From the Buddhist view, suicide is such a tragedy. When people kill themselves they think that they are stopping their suffering. They are usually tormented by their own thoughts, or by their situation or their moods, and they think that by killing themselves, it stops all of those. But from the Buddhist view, the consciousness, the afflictions and the seeds or impressions continue to the next life. Suicide does not solve anything.

## ***2. Object stimulating them to arise***

The second cause of the afflictions is the *objects that stimulate their arousal*.

Did you notice any objects between Monday and today that stimulated the arousal of your afflictions? It is good to be aware of the things that set us off and create some kind of space between them and us initially. This is done not to run away or escape from them, but just so that we have the time to do more practice. Then when we come into contact with those things later, they are not going to set us off in the same way.

I want to emphasize that this is not a way of escaping from the difficulties. Some people say to me: “Aren’t you escaping life when you become a nun?”

Oh, I wish it were that easy! [Laughter.] I tell them that really, your anger, attachment, etc, all come right into the monastery with you, and you start acting them out right there.

I was talking with one person who used to be a monk and he said he got very attached to his robes, like which robes were made out of nice cloth. I don't have that difficulty quite so much. When I was young, my mother tried to get me to wear good clothes but she didn't succeed very well. Robes are not my object of attachment although I have seen that it is for some people. But your attachment to food just goes right along with you; your attachment to reputation and how people treat you, they all come right along with you. You don't escape from anything!

### **3. DETRIMENTAL INFLUENCES: WRONG FRIENDS**

The third cause of afflictions is detrimental influences such as wrong friends, or should we say inappropriate friends. Hanging out with the wrong crowd, it's like birds of a feather flock together. Pabongka Rinpoche and the Buddha said exactly the same thing, that you become like the people you are with. When we hang around with people of bad ethics, we become like them.

It is interesting. What is the definition of a wrong friend or a bad friend or a bad influence? It is somebody who is attached to the happiness of this life. So then it makes you think: "Well, we are not having many good friends." [Laughter.]

We might have a lot of attachment and other

afflictions, but if we hang around with people who are Dharma people, that influences us in a very positive direction. At least they have the same kinds of aspirations and they can inspire us to practice.

But when we make people who are completely attached to this life our closest friends, and all they talk about is their ski trips, real estate, how to cheat the IRS, sports, politics, fashion and so on, then we start thinking like that and we start being like that. We adopt their values because we want to fit in. It comes back to the old theme of peer pressure. We thought we have outgrown that. We thought only teenagers are influenced by their peers so you don't want any of your teenage kids to hang around with the wrong crowd. But we are just as susceptible as teenagers are, to what people think of us.

You just watch how attached we are to our reputation and the great lengths we do to be accepted by other people. If the people we hang around with and the people whose opinions we value are people who have no regard for future lives or the altruistic intention, and are just intent on getting as much pleasure as they can and taking care of their own needs and wants, then we are going to become exactly like that. It is going to be difficult to practice Dharma.

I remember Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey said: "Evil friends aren't the ones who come into your house, have 'horns' on their heads and say: 'Give me everything you have!'" He said evil friends are the ones who come over when you are about to sit down and meditate and say: "Gee, there is a real good movie playing at the cinema, let's go!" Those are the people we have to be careful of.



*[Audience: inaudible]*

Well, I don't know. Sometimes those people can be very helpful. It depends on what the quality of the discussion is. If it is a discussion where they're asking questions and we realize that we don't know the answers or we don't understand what we are saying, then those people are actually quite kind because they are showing us what we need to brush up on and where we need to do our homework.

If they, with an evil intent, are deliberately trying to make you confused, then their intention is not so good. But then the question is: do we let ourselves be influenced by that?

These people can be evil friends in the sense that we value what they think of us and since they think Buddhism is a bunch of junk, we might say: "I want to be accepted by these people, I want these people to think that I am nice, smart and wonderful. So yeah, maybe I'll just start believing in what they believe and then I can go to the church socials too."

I am saying this because this is how a lot of people get converted in Singapore. The kids didn't get a very good Buddhist education from their parents. People come and say to them: "Oh, Buddhism is just a bunch of superstition! This is all silly. Why do you believe in it? Why do you bow down to and worship idols?" Because they don't understand the religion that they have been professing and they don't understand that Buddhists don't worship idols, they begin to have a lot of doubts. In addition, the churches have these wonderful socials with lots of food and dancing, etc., and so they think: "Oh, this is nice. I want to be

accepted and I want these people to like me, so I'll go."

It depends very much how we handle those situations. In cases like the above, we have to be on the lookout for attachment to reputation, because it can make us run around like Achala [the cat] chasing a piece of string. We just go in circles with it. This is why we have to be careful who we create close friendships with and what kind of influence we let ourselves have and how we let ourselves be influenced by other people.

The same goes for the selection of teachers. You want to make sure you pick teachers who have good qualities, because if your teachers have bad habits then you are going to pick up those bad habits as well. Pabongka Rinpoche was saying: "If you hang around with a teacher who scolds people a lot you become like that. If you hang around a teacher who is very miserly, you become like that."

It is good to examine our friendships and see which people influence us in a positive way—helping us to practice better, generate positive states of mind, let go of our defilements. For example, sometimes when we get angry, we may get ticked off at somebody and we think: "OK, I am going to go talk to my friend." What we have in mind is: "I am going to go talk to my friend—I am going to dump it all out, how bad Joe was to me. And my friend is going to say: 'You are right, Joe is really an idiot!'" We think a friend is somebody who is going to side with us against Joe, whom we think is an idiot. That is the way we usually think. That is the worldly way of thinking.

From the Buddhist view that is not what a friend

will do. That kind of friend who says: “Yes, you are absolutely right. You really have to be mad at him because he is wrong!” They are encouraging your anger. They are telling you it is good to be angry, that you should go and retaliate and get even. That is not a real friend, because that is somebody who is helping you to create negative karma.

Look at how we are influenced by someone we consider a friend in worldly terms. What is the benefit of that kind of friendship? Is a friend somebody who makes us feel good temporarily, right now, but in the process exacerbates our attachment and anger? Or is a friend somebody who may sometimes be a little bit more straightforward with us and says things that we don’t particularly like to hear, but in the process, makes us check up what is going on in our mind, and are there to help us when we realize that our minds have gone on the wrong track?

This is something to think about: what is a friend from a Buddhist point of view? What kind of people do we want to cultivate friendships with? What kind of friendships do we want to have? What are the qualities of those friendships?

*[Audience:] So is the idea to cut off from friends who aren't Dharma students?*

I don’t think so. I don’t think the point is to cut off from friends who aren’t Dharma students, because people can still have very good qualities without knowing anything about Dharma. It is more of watching how they influence us or how we let ourselves be influenced.

Also, in this process of evaluating our friendships, it doesn't mean that we become proud and arrogant and say: "You aren't a Buddhist. You create negative karma, so I am not going to talk to you!" [Laughter.] It is not that kind of thing because compassion for all beings is definitely the thing to be cultivated. Rather, it is more an acknowledgment of our own internal weaknesses. Because we are weak, not because the other people are bad, we have to watch who we spend time with. It is more of admitting our own weaknesses than of criticizing others. So it is not about dumping people. It is not kind of throwing your old friends in the garbage can.

With me it was different, because I moved out of the country, so I wound up making a whole new circle of friends. But still when I visited the States, I would look up my old friends and some of those friendships still exist. Some of them don't. It really depends. My college roommate lives in San Francisco. When I teach there, she comes over. Another college roommate is a Professor of religion. She is very devout in another faith, but she asked me to come and talk to her classes at the university. So, each friendship will be different and you will grow with some of them. In spite of your differences, you will continue to help each other.

#### **4. VERBAL STIMULI**

The fourth cause for the arousal of afflictions is verbal stimulus. This can refer to lectures and talks. It can also refer to books, that is, it refers to anything that has to do with words, either oral or written.

At a retreat in North Carolina, we got into a big discussion about plan. Many people say that we are all put here to learn certain lessons. So we got into a big discussion about this. From the Buddhist point of view that is not the case. Suppose you go to talks where people start talking about: “We are all put here to learn a lesson. Your job in life is to learn your lessons and figure out what mission you have in life and what role God has chosen for you or what role the cosmos has chosen for you”. That is going to generate certain thoughts that might not be so conducive for your practice.

We also got into a discussion about karma therapy. You can read about it in the New Age newspapers—you pay I don’t know how much money and they make you regress to a past life and do therapy that way. But that isn’t necessarily conducive to your practice.

Talks or TV programs that propagate White supremacy or fundamentalist ideas are also not conducive for practice.

## **The media**

As Dharma practitioners, we have to be very careful how we relate to the media in terms of TV, books, magazines, etc. We are very much influenced by them. If you want to know why it is sometimes hard to practice, check how much time you are spending with the media in your life. The media makes it hard to practice. First of all if you spend lot of time with the media then you don’t have time for practice.

But even more so, the values and things we learn

in the media often excite our anger, belligerence, clinging and miserliness. Very seldom do the media try to generate compassion in the audience. When you go to the movies or when you watch TV, watch the swing in emotions you have. When he kisses her what happens inside you? When the bad guy strikes the good guy what happens inside you? Check up and you will see that we learn so many of our values from the media and so much of the media values are distorted.

We all say this, we all know it up here: “Oh yes, the media places so much emphasis on consumerism.” But we don’t turn off the TV. We don’t say mantra in the car instead of listening to the radio. We don’t throw all the junk mail directly in the recycling bin, we kind of skim through it: “Just in case they have something on sale that I need.” [Laughter.]

You could maybe make this a project: for a week, look at how you relate to the media and how it influences you. In many ways it teaches us to buy things. I think the media is one of the chief things that make us feel dissatisfied with our bodies. Most people I know don’t feel very happy with their bodies: “Am I in the right clothes?” “My figure is not good enough.” “My muscles aren’t big enough.” Everybody feels: “I should look better.” You look at the magazines. You look at the billboards when you drive the car. You look at the TV. Those are the messages we are getting. We are comparing ourselves to other people and of course we always feel we aren’t good enough. And this eats away at us on many, many different levels.

So I think one thing we have to do to start feeling better about our own bodies is to stop watching TV, reading billboards and looking at ads in the magazines.

I think it has such a great influence on us. It creates so much attachment to the body and so much discomfort because we will never look like the people in the magazines.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I think you are right. It is a good experiment to do. Cut off relating to the media for a week, two weeks or three weeks, and see how that changes how you feel about yourself, how that changes your relationship with other people and your relationship to the practice.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Yes. It is not that the external objects are bad and negative. It is that our mind gets uncontrolled. When we get to a point where our mind does not get uncontrolled, then there is no problem with those things.

Also I think it is not good to completely isolate yourself, so that when the U.S. first dropped bombs on Baghdad and you heard somebody talk about the war, you said: “War, with who?” [Laughter.] You don’t want to become a complete space case.

I have been reading Time magazine. Having lived in other countries I find so much of Time very offensive. It is very much American patriotic “ra, ra” in a way that is downright inaccurate. It is just not accurate and yet this is what people are reading. Since they don’t have other experiences to check up with, this is what they believe in.

It is the same with how we take what the media say as true and how much it influences us and shapes our values.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

People feel really uncomfortable with silence. After you get in the car and turn on the engine, what is the next thing you do? You turn on the radio. When you come home, after you take your jacket off, what is the first thing you do? Turn on the TV. Even if you go to another room or you are cooking or doing something else, you want to have some noise in the background. We are addictive in many ways to having noise, and then we wonder why we are exhausted and overloaded! I think when we have a lot of sense stimulation, it makes us exhausted. This is why at night time we are so tired. There is just so much sense stimulation that the system can't handle.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

These are compulsive readers. We read everything, even stuff that we see as useless, like the words on the back of boxes, the junk mail, the billboards, the store advertisements, etc.

## **Books**

It is not only the media here we are talking about. We are also talking about books. What books do you read? Do we go home at night and read all the Harold Robbins novels? What do we pick up off the book



shelf to read? How much time do we spend reading trashy novels or comic books? What materials do we read? And how does that influence us?

Now again, I am not saying: “Never read a novel”, because I think it can be very useful sometimes to read novels; there are very, very good novels around. The thing is we have to be careful when we read a novel or go to a movie, to make sure that we are looking at it with Dharma eyes, because it can be an incredible teaching on karma, on the disadvantages of the afflictions. You can learn a lot by watching a movie or reading a novel from the Dharma perspective.

But the danger is to get caught up in it and get angry, attached, belligerent, or experience some other negative emotions. We often say we are doing it to relax, but is our mind really relaxing when it is caught in these emotions? So again it has to do with checking up what material we read.

Another area to be mindful of is when we have discussions with other people. What do we talk about with other people? It is interesting, because sometimes you can't control the discussion. People will bring up topics of discussion and you have to respond. But watch how you respond and watch how your mind runs for certain things.

## **Discussions**

Watch what discussions we initiate when we are sitting there waiting with people. Do we feel comfortable with the silence waiting with the people, or do we start talking about the weather, the sales at

the shopping center, the Christmas dinner or something else? What conversations do we start? For example, we are in the middle of a conversation, and we see a conversation going towards a particular area. We know whenever this particular subject comes up, our anger just increases. We can see the conversation going that way. Instead of steering it away, we kind of let it go that way so that then, for the fifteenth time, we can tell our story with all our anger. [Laughter.]

How do we respond to somebody who comes to us and just complains and complains? Do we just keep a compassionate attitude and recognize that they just need to dump their anger and get it out, so we just listen and help smooth things over? Or do we jump in and ask: “Oh, then what did they do? Oh, you’re right; this guy is so bad!”? How do we react? This is another thing to be mindful of.

There is a lot in here to think about.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

That is OK to do if we are clear in our minds why we are doing it. For example, I sit and chit-chat with someone because that is a way of letting the person know that I value contact with them. This isn’t the time for a heavy philosophical discussion. The purpose of the conversation is just to make contact, especially when you go visit your family. I don’t know about you, but I can’t walk into my parents’ house and say: “OK, mom and dad, did you know that Jeffrey Hopkins’ book, *Meditation on Emptiness* on page on 593 mentioned ....” Rather, we talk about this relative and that relative, which one is getting

married, which one is getting divorced, etc. [Laughter.]

If we are clear in our mind why we are talking to somebody about something, that is fine. When we are not clear then we just get dispersed. But again, it is not a thing of making ourselves all uptight.

## **5. HABIT**

The next cause of the afflictions is habit. What do we get habituated with? We get into the habit of sleeping late. We get in the habit of turning the radio on. We get in the habit of criticizing a particular person. We get in lots and lots of habits. We get in the habit of eating chocolates [Laughter.]. Habit is a very strong impetus for the arousal of afflictions, because we are very much creatures of habit. As soon as we form negative habits it becomes very difficult to get out of them.

There are two things to do. The first is to identify the bad habits we have. The second thing is to be careful that we don't develop new ones. Similarly, it is good to be aware of the positive habits we have and to make sure that they don't deteriorate, while at the same time developing new ones.

This factor of habit influences very much how things go from one life to the next life. Somebody who is very short tempered in this lifetime will probably be very short tempered too in future lifetimes unless they practice some antidotes in this lifetime. There is no other way to make it go away. If we are short tempered we have to practice the antidotes, otherwise it is going to be the exact same thing in the next life,

again and again.

Similarly if we cultivate good habits this lifetime—establishing a daily practice for however long a period, or trying to listen to people without responding right away—they also carry on with us to future lives and they can be instrumental in our practice then.

If you observe children, you will see that they already have definite habits and tendencies from the time they are very young. Also, different people have different habits. When people are prone to having a particular affliction and they act it out or mull it over or whatever, that habit continues. That is why it is important to apply the antidotes to these afflictions.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

That is why the Buddha emphasized the importance of guarding the senses. We take in all the information through our senses, primarily through what we see and hear, and also through what we taste, touch and smell. These things can have a strong impact on us.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

The seeds of the afflictions are there. We have all 84,000 afflictions. We have all 84,000 seeds. When we have the habit related to the affliction, then the seed can arise more easily. With the habit, it becomes much easier for the seed to be activated and becomes the manifest affliction.

When you read the scriptures, the Buddha is talking continuously about guarding the senses. Try walking down the street about five blocks without

looking in any shop windows. It sounds very simple: “Oh yes, sure, I can walk down the street and not look in the windows.” But try it and see if you can do it.

I went to Taiwan for my Bhikshuni ordination. They were very strict there. When we were in the meditation room we could not look around. We lined up outside the meditation room, we all filed in, and from the time we lined up, through the whole time we are in the room until the time we filed out at the end of the prayers, we had to keep our eyes down. We were not allowed to look around. It was so hard—I couldn’t believe it! The master would be talking and I wanted to look at him. I wanted to look at the Buddhas there. I wanted to see who is falling asleep and who is paying attention. I wanted to see who is chanting the prayers aloud and who is not.

Just to reign in the senses and not pay attention to all the sense stimuli around us is very difficult. This is true even when you are doing prayers or meditation together. It is difficult to stay completely focused on what you are doing in your little area. Sometimes there may be twenty, thirty, forty people sitting in rows doing the practice together. It is so tempting to look and see who is sitting up straight, who is paying attention, who is drinking tea and who has slouched over, etc. That is what the mind wants to do—it wants to look all around. Just to sit there, keep your eyes down and pay attention to what your own body, speech and mind is doing, is so hard!

In a retreat, the group usually decides to keep silence, but how many people actually keep silence? We may decide together as a group to keep silence

but we still hear some talking here and there. [Laughter.] It is so hard to reign in the senses. So I think it is something to work on. When you stand in the line of a supermarket don't read all the tabloid headlines. Can you do that? [Laughter.]

*[Audience: inaudible]*

We are very conditioned phenomena. That is what the Buddha talked about—we are impermanent, conditioned phenomena. That is what this whole discussion is about. We have the seed of the affliction and then we are conditioned by the verbal stimulus, the books, the media, the discussions we have with people, the objects we contact, the people around us. And then we do actions that make the seeds of our different afflictions arise. We get more habituated and familiar with them and then this cycle just keeps going like that. And we wonder why it is so difficult to keep on track!

It is so difficult to keep on track because we have been getting a whole lot of past conditioning. It is time now to de-condition ourselves or recondition ourselves. There must be an advertisement for that: "Recondition your mind for \$49.99!" [Laughter.] That is very much what we need to do, because we are conditioned, dependent phenomena. We are not isolated islands. That is why it is so important to put ourselves in a good environment, with people who stimulate the arousal of our good qualities. Then, within that environment, we try and control the mind. It is hard enough to do this, let alone in an environment where all the things that you are still

attached to or are emotionally entangled with, are there. That would be very difficult.

This is why the Buddha talked about simplifying one's life. The simpler we make our life, the less conditioned we are going to be by all those things. This will give us much more mental space to be able to choose what we want to do in our life.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

To be aware of the negative habits we have and to try and demolish them; to make sure we don't get any new negative habits; to be aware of our positive habits and try and maintain them; to try and generate new positive ones: this is the process of reconditioning ourselves.

We have some choice over the environment that will condition us, but more importantly, we have more choices over our internal responses. If we slow down, we can get more in touch with our own responses. The whole idea of thought training or thought transformation is to try and recondition our responses. For example, when we get criticized, instead of the conditioned response of: "Who do you think you are talking to me like that?", the conditioned response becomes: "Oh, let us listen to what this person has to say. It might be something that I can benefit from." You try and retrain the mind. You transform your responses.

Let's sit quietly for a couple of minutes.

## **Review**

We have been talking about the causes of afflictions  
We went through the first five causes, which are:

1. The seed of the affliction

2. Objects which cause the afflictions to arise. We will inevitably encounter such objects, but it is possible to not pay attention to them. I don't know if anybody ever does it, but it is possible to go to the store and buy only what you set out to buy.

Since Dharma is very related to daily life, as part of your practice, try doing this: before you go shopping, first ask yourself what it is that you really have to get as opposed to what you feel like getting. Then go to the store to get that, and try and leave the store without getting anything else. I think it is a very good practice. It's a kind of mind training that prevents us from letting our mind get taken away by the objects that we encounter.

Also, where do we go to shop when we need to get something? Do we go to the shopping mall to get the one thing we need, or do we go to the store around the corner where what we need is available? The whole idea of a shopping mall is to make you buy ten times more than what you need, so as soon as you go there, you've almost had it.

I do have compassion for the people who own shopping malls and I do wish them well. I don't want them to be out on the streets because of poverty. [Laughter.] But this is really something to look at—how we relate to shops and stores and everything else. How often we choose to go shopping, and what we choose to get while we are there. The types of shops



we go to. We learn a lot about ourselves by watching these things. We see how conditioned we are.

3. Detrimental influences such as friends who encourage us to do negative actions.

4. Verbal stimuli—books, lectures and in particular, the media. We talked about how on the one hand, we recognize the influence of the media on us, particularly advertising, and yet on the other hand, we don't stop ourselves from becoming engaged in it. In other words, we recognize the influence and we say: "Oh, we are so controlled by Madison Avenue," but we also stop and read the ads and the billboards and look at the junk mail. If we had a little bit of discipline, it is quite possible to not be so involved—to not get the magazines, to not read the ads if we are reading an article in a magazine, to not look at the junk mail and the catalogs. It's possible. [Laughter.] I hope people had been more mindful of the influence of the media this past week.

5. Habit. The force of habit is a major factor in making our afflictions arise. Remember when we talked about the four results of karma, one of them was 'results similar to the cause in terms of your habitual behavior'? In other words, if you get into the habit of lying, in the next life, it becomes easier to lie. If you get into the habit of telling people off in this life, in the next life, it's going to be very easy to do it.

Well, it's the same thing with the afflictions. If we get into the habit of being jealous, then we are going to be jealous a lot. If we get into the habit of being

angry, then we are going to be angry a lot. With anger, for example, you can see sometimes how the mind is so restless; it's looking for something to be angry at. The anger energy is there. We are so habituated with it that we got to find something to be angry at. And we will find something. Or, we are habituated with attachment and we find something to be attached to.

## **6. INAPPROPRIATE DECISIVE ATTENTION**

The last cause of the afflictions is called inappropriate decisive attention. That's the technical translation. Attention is one mental factor we have that is at work all the time. It is a very powerful mental factor because what happens to us depends very much on what we pay attention to.

We are paying inappropriate attention when we concentrate on objects that make our afflictions arise or have wrong thoughts about those objects. What do we pay attention to during the day? Often, we don't pay attention to the hundred good things that go right; we pay attention to the one thing that goes wrong. That's inappropriate attention. It's screened attention. We choose to pay attention to the guy who cut us off on the highway and allow it to ruin our whole day, even though twenty people may have been very nice to us that same day. Because we pay attention to the thing which is an inappropriate object, we generate a lot of afflictions.

We not only pay attention to objects like ice-cream or whatever it is, but we also pay attention to our ideas, our interpretations about the objects, and we get into a lot of storytelling.

There is another word I am going to bring in here. It is not specifically listed but it's very relevant to this topic of inappropriate attention. The Tibetan term is *nam-tog*. Lama Yeshe used to translate it as 'superstition'. A more polite translation is 'preconception' or 'presupposition'.

'Superstition' in the West means believing in something that doesn't exist and then getting all worked up about it. Lama said that that is exactly what we do, so he translated *nam tog* as superstition. You meet somebody, an ordinary person, and then your mind gets all worked up: "They are so gorgeous! They are so wonderful! They are so talented ...." He said this is complete superstition! We believe in something that doesn't exist and it affects us.

Another way of looking at it is, it is just preconception. We form many opinions and preconceptions about things. We make many interpretations about how things are and who people are. And then we constantly use our inappropriate attention to focus on those preconceptions.

We develop a prejudice, which is a kind of preconception, and then we focus on it and we mull over it again and again. The prejudice deepens and becomes very firm and hard in our mind. Even though we have never met them or talked to them before, we are convinced that they are completely awful and we are never going to talk to them!

When we have a conception, we pay attention to it; we dwell on it. And that makes the afflictions arise. We are choc-o-block full of these preconceptions. Like I was saying, one of our big problems is that we believe everything that we think. It's true! We are just

so full of opinions, ideas, advice and prejudice when we look at anybody and any situation. We pay attention to these preconceptions, believe in them, and look at things through that frame.

Yesterday a very interesting thing came up in Gen Lamrimpa's teaching that relates to this. Somebody told Genla that in the West, it is very common for people to think they have been traumatized from when they were very young, and a lot of therapy is involved in reliving and re-experiencing those early life abuses and traumas, clearing them up and working them out to release the anger or whatever emotion that was associated with them.

I was talking with Leslie this morning and she said since Genla's previous visit, everybody has been trying very much to convince him that we're so messed up because of our childhood experience.

At one conference, I heard somebody say that nowadays, we look at childhood as something we have to recover from. This is the idea in our culture. Everybody is trying to go back to their childhood and to recall this and that, what their parents said and what happened and how they felt. There is all this emphasis that in order to heal, you have to recall all these things and re-experience them.

In response to this, Genla said: "The past is the past, don't think about it. Forget it!" Of course people were sitting there very politely, but I think inside, everybody was saying: "Wait a minute, Genla! My therapist doesn't say that." [Laughter.] There was definitely a cultural difference there.

Genla was probably in his teens or early twenties when all of a sudden, he had to leave his country. He

had to leave his family behind and go to a strange country. He didn't know the language. He was a refugee and didn't have any money. He didn't know what was happening. He was cut off from everybody and everything. His mother died before he could see her again.

You talk about early traumas. Well, Genla had one. But you look at Genla today. He isn't all stuck in: "Well in 1959, this happened and that happened ...." It isn't an object of his daily thoughts. It happened. He recognized it. He didn't go into denial, but he went on with his life.

But in our culture, our *nam-tog*, our preconception is that these things are very serious and important. You don't forget them. No way! So we go back and continually relive them again and again. I don't think Genla goes back and relives 1959 very much. But we will go back and relive our 1959, sometimes on a daily basis. This preconception, together with the inappropriate attention which hooks onto it, make the afflictions arise. Also, it is boring just to think about them all the time, so we spice them up, especially when you have a therapist who is encouraging you to.

Now, I am not criticizing therapy. There's a lot of very good things that go on in therapy. But I think sometimes there's also social pressure, and what you experience in therapy is also influenced by the preconceptions of the therapist. What I am trying to say is that it is not a foolproof, infallible, sacred method. I am not saying there is nothing good about it. There are a lot of good things about it.

Similarly, I am not saying that our early childhood experiences didn't affect us. They definitely did affect

us. What I am saying is, how much they affect us depends on how much attention we put on them. The more we relive them and go into them, and the more we feel pressured to feel a lot of emotions around them, then the more we will feel the emotions, and they will become quite prominent in our mind.

Geshe Jamyang, who teaches at the center in Olympia and is also a psychologist, counsels both Asians and Westerners. I asked him about early childhood experiences, and I said: “When you counsel Asians, do you go through all these in the same way as people usually do with Westerners?” He said: “No, it’s not necessary.” He said that the Asians, especially those who have grown up as Buddhists, accept that there is suffering in the world. They accept that there is change. He deals with people who grew up in Cambodia—our childhood traumas are nothing compared to these people’s—and it’s not always necessary to go back and remember those things.

He thinks that early childhood events affect Westerners so much because Westerners are taught that these events are supposed to affect them a lot. So from the time we are young, we remember the events that happened and then when we are adults, we give them so much emphasis. Just look at the idea of the inner wounded child—everybody’s supposed to go back and remember what happened when they were an infant, when they were three and when they were six. Because of this common preconception, and because of paying a lot of attention to it and then paying a lot of attention to the things that we remember, then we make ourselves feel a certain way.

What I am getting at, is that it doesn't have to be this way. If we think that way, it becomes that way. But it doesn't have to be that way because we don't have to think that way. So it depends what our preconceptions are and what preconceptions we pay attention to.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Exactly. It also depends on how we interpret whatever happened to us in childhood. Two kids may have the same thing happen to them in childhood, but one kid may come out glowing from it and the other may come out wounded. This happens because of the way they look at the situation, and that has a lot to do with their conditioning from previous lives, their karma from previous lives, their habitual way of thinking. It's not just the situation. A lot of the things that affected us strongly when we were children did so because part of us bought into the idea of them affecting us a lot.

I am sure we can all remember instances where we explained to someone an experience we had, and they responded: "Wow, how did you ever survive that?" and yet to us it was no big deal. We made it through OK. And then there were experiences which were really small things but somehow, they remained so vibrant in our memory. So, it's not an objective reality.

Let me talk a little bit about conditioning. We are conditioned by past lives. We are also conditioned a lot in this lifetime. But different people reacted differently to their conditioning. Ever since I was young, whenever I heard people make hostile

statements about different groups of people, about people of another religion or another race, I would feel incredibly sad and repelled by that way of speaking. Yet, there will be other people whom, I am sure, would say upon hearing those words: “Yeah, this is definitely right. This is how I am going to live my life. These are the right values to have.”

So, how you react in different situations depends on your previous conditioning. You may have heard something and gotten angry, but somebody else hearing the same thing may have felt satisfied. It is not just the situation, but our previous conditioning, our karma and our present afflictions, and how we relate to the experiences, that determine what happens from there.

I think this is very important to understand. We tend to look at things as independent objective realities, but they aren't. They are things that are produced by causes. If you change one of the causes, the result is not going to be the same. It's going to be something different.

Also, things do not just have one cause. Everything is a result of many causes. You change any one of the many causes, and the result changes. So it is not like anything *has* to exist. It exists simply because there were all the causes that made it exist. It is a dependent arising. If you change one of the causes, the result may not happen; the thing will not be there.

It is the same with all of our moods, feelings, internal phenomena that happen to us—they aren't solid objective things; they arise simply because there are causes. You change the causes and those things will not be there. They are not solid stuff.



*[Audience: inaudible]*

I am not saying that Buddhism can do the same thing that therapy can do. I think Buddhism has a very different aim and goal. Therapy is good for some things and Buddhism is good for other things, and there is an overlapping area too.

Also, saying that something happens due to karma isn't a way of shining it off and pre-packaging it and shelving it. Of course, somebody can do that and say: "Oh, it's just karma," but then they might not really believe that in their heart. The thing is still going to eat away at them.

I think if somebody really thinks deeply about it and in the heart accepts something as being due to karma, it can have a very different effect. So, I don't think that saying that something is due to karma is a flippant way of dealing with that thing. It may be that it is something that doesn't jive with us, with where we are at right now.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

If we say: "I am an angry person," it makes everything so concrete and unavoidable. If we say: "I have a habit of getting angry," well, a habit is something that is just a sequence of similar events; it is a conditioned phenomenon and can be changed. So, there is a subtle difference there. We think they are getting at the same thing, but we are really telling ourselves very different things. One is: "I am this, and everything is solid and concrete and inherently existent. That's my personality. That's my character.

It cannot change.” The other is: “I am this very fluid thing due to different conditionings, and I want to diminish these and increase the others.” It is a very different way of looking at who we are.

As soon as we start looking at our feelings as these concrete things that arose as independent objective entities, then it becomes very difficult to free ourselves from them. We should look at ourselves as fluid people, as accumulations of different kinds of conditioning, instead of as concrete personalities.

There’s a Chinese saying that it is easier to change a dynasty than to change a character. If we have the preconception that we cannot change, and we then pay incorrect attention to it, the preconception can prevent us from growing. For example, we could say, “This is my character. This is my personality. What can I do about it?” When we start to recognize the preconceptions and see that they are not necessary at all, we can tell ourselves every morning: “I have the Buddha nature. I can become a Buddha,” instead of: “I am so filled with anger. I am so hung up!”

This is the thing about attention—what do we tell ourselves? Which of the many thoughts that pass through our mind do we pay attention to and repeat to ourselves? What are our mantras? “I am lousy.” “I am terrible.” “I am hopeless.” It’s just a thing of attention and habit. We have to change the habit, put the attention on something else, and then the whole world will look different. You would think the world changed but it didn’t; only the mind changed.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

From a Buddhist viewpoint, what you look for is how those habits are getting played out now. You wouldn't have to trace the cause of that habitual attitude or reaction back to childhood. It is sufficient to see what the habit is as it's playing out in our adult life. If tracing it back to childhood gives you some new information and some understanding, great. But it is not always necessary to do that. Often, you can just deal with the affliction as it's coming up right now.

Those are the causes of the afflictions. It's interesting. Every time I teach this, I understand different things about it and different things come up. The more you think about this and keep this in mind and look at things in your life in this way, the deeper your understanding will be.

## **Disadvantages of the Afflictions**

We have been going into the Four Noble Truths in more depth here in this middle scope of practice. Remember in the middle scope of the practice, the motivation of the middle level practitioner is to free him-or herself from cyclic existence and attain liberation.

In order to free ourselves from cyclic existence, we have to see its disadvantages, which are the first two noble truths—the truth of undesirable experiences and the truth of their causes. To free ourselves we have to know how to do it and what we are aiming for, and these are the last two noble truths: true cessation and true path. That whole discussion that we have just had on the different afflictions was about

the true cause—the real cause of all our undesirable experiences.

If you refer to your lamrim outline, you will see that under the heading “1. How the afflictions develop”, we have completed the first three points: recognizing the afflictions, order of development of the afflictions and the causes for the arousal of the afflictions. We are now on “d. the disadvantages of the afflictions.”

Recognize that all the different afflictions that we had been talking about actually reflect the state of our own mind. It is important to see that and to understand very clearly why it’s important to apply the antidotes to these afflictions.

## **AFFLICTIONS ARE THE CAUSES OF CONFLICTS**

When these afflictions are active in our mind, our mind gets very cloudy, very confused, and much disoriented. You can see that very clearly. When you’re angry, when you are upset, or when you are proud, the mind is confused. It’s disoriented. It’s not in tune with the situation. As a result, our relationships with other people suffer. If we look at all the times when we had problems with other people, when nations had problems with each other, when groups in society had problems, you can see it is the afflictions working. They are the chief motivators behind the different conflicts that we find between people or groups of people.

## **AFFLICTIONS RUIN OUR ETHICAL BEHAVIOR**

The afflictions ruin our ethical behavior. They motivate us to get involved in the ten destructive actions. They are the cause of our guilt. Whenever we feel guilt or remorse, or we feel psychologically immobilized, or we hate ourselves, if we trace it back, we will find that it often has to do with different things that we have said or done or thought or felt that we feel quite ashamed of. These things are usually things that have to do with the afflictions.

I asked some psychologists about this. They see the afflictions as faults too. By afflictions, they are referring mostly to anger, resentment, and things like that which are commonly experienced by their clients. But unlike the Buddhists, they don't see the afflictions as things to be removed completely from the root. They are just basically trying to get their clients to have "normal" levels of attachment and aversion. From a Buddhist viewpoint, any amount of attachment and aversion is abnormal, because to be normal is to have full capability.

The psychologists see some of the disadvantages of the afflictions, but they don't try to eliminate them completely. I don't think they understand the deep level of the disadvantages, because I asked psychologists whether they talk about ethics with their clients and they replied in the negative. The psychologists helped their clients work with their guilt, but it seems that many of them do not see so clearly the relationship between guilt and afflictions, and guilt and bad ethics. For example, one kind of

guilt is feeling guilty about things that aren't our responsibility. In such cases, the affliction involved is hatred towards us.

Another kind of guilt that we suffer from is when we beat ourselves up over a mistake we made and we don't forgive ourselves. Here I think it's helpful to see the affliction that causes us to make mistakes in our actions. If we put some energy into keeping our ethics clear, we would make fewer mistakes and we would have less guilt.

This becomes very clear when I look at how we use our speech. Speech is an incredibly powerful weapon to harm people with. We can do a lot of damage with it and then feel very bad about it afterwards: "Why in the world did I say that to them? My goodness! I can't believe that I said that. How did I make the other person feel?"

If we look back over the years at the different things that we have said to different people, we will find some of them pretty horrific. And we have been carrying this feeling of malaise inside of ourselves due to such speech. Here I think it's very important to recognize that the malaise, the uncomfortable or guilty feeling arises because of our own unethical conduct. If we got our ethics more together, then we wouldn't feel guilty about things. If we were able to discriminate what was our responsibility and what wasn't, we wouldn't feel guilty about things. If we understood purification practices, then we could free ourselves from the guilt that has been accumulating.

I think the ethical practice of any religion has a lot to do with our psychological state, our ability to avoid harming others and our ability to purify harmful

actions when we do them. It is very much related to our self-image and our psychological state. Our ethics decline when we aren't careful about our afflictions. Then it's very easy to start spiraling into judging ourselves, having guilt and all this other garbage that we heap on top of the regular garbage. We kind of invest in our garbage so that we create more [garbage], just like we invest the capital and then accumulate the interest. [Laughter.] These undesirable consequences are the functioning of various afflictions. As we come to understand this, then it gives us some energy to note these afflictions when they arise and to start to apply the antidotes, instead of just being lackadaisical.

## **AFFLICTIONS HARM US AND OTHERS**

Another disadvantage of the afflictions is that when we are under their influence, we harm ourselves and we harm others. There are times when we inflict physical or mental harm to ourselves motivated by the afflictions. When we harm other beings, it is often motivated by the afflictions.

If you study history or sociology or related subjects, you will see the role that the afflictions have played in creating human experiences. It's just incredible. It takes the afflictions of one person in a position of power to set the whole world upside down. Look at Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia. When you have pride, resentment, attachment and desire for power, and you have this inconsideration for others and the lack of self-respect, and when you have power, you get other people involved in your whole

trip and cause so much harm to others, destroying so many people's lives. You also create so much negative karma for yourself which perpetuates suffering in future lives.

## **AFFLICTIONS ARE THE CHIEF IMPEDIMENT TO OUR SPIRITUAL PROGRESS**

The afflictions are a bum deal if you think about it. [Laughter.] They really are because why is it that we aren't Buddhas right now? Shakyamuni Buddha started out exactly like us, completely full of confusion and afflictions. How come Shakyamuni is a Buddha now and we aren't? We used to all hang out on the beach together. How come he became a Buddha and we didn't? Well, we remained hanging out at the beach and he went and meditated. He gave up chocolate and we went out and bought it. [Laughter.] That's the only difference. The afflictions are the chief impediment on the path to enlightenment, so if we can gather together all of our resources and our courage to combat them, then we too can become Buddhas without too much difficulty.

If you check, there is no inherent defect in us that prevents us from becoming a Buddha. It's basically the afflictions, the karma that are the result of them and the subtle stains that they have left on our mind that prevent us from enlightenment. Besides that, there is no other reason why we are not Buddhas. So if we can get rid of these afflictions, then the whole thing starts to crumble, and then we can finally arrive at some kind of state of real security and lasting peace instead of just spinning around in our confusion.



In addition, certain afflictions impede us from creating good karma. And when we have created it, they impede it from ripening. They decrease our positive potential, thereby decreasing our happiness now and in the future. They impede the development of our wisdom and are a major block between liberation and us.

## **AFFLICTIONS DESTROY OUR SELF-CONFIDENCE**

Afflictions destroy our self-confidence, our self-respect. It's clear, isn't it, that when our mind is confused and full of junk, it's hard for us to feel confident, or to respect ourselves.

## **AFFLICTIONS ARE OUR REAL ENEMIES**

That is why in *Bodhicharyavatara* or *Guide to a Bodhisattva's Way of Life* (it's an incredible text), Shantideva, the author, talked a lot about enemies and what the real enemy is in our life. He said that usually we are so terrified of the rapist, the murderer or the assailant. We see them as our real enemy and we will do anything to protect ourselves from their very horrible influence.

Shantideva said that these people, however, only harms us this lifetime. If they kill us, they just kill us once, we give up this body and that's it. That's all the harm they do. Or if they rape you, they just do it and then it's finished. Or if they steal something, they mug you, then it's done and it's finished. There is some

harm for a limited amount of time this lifetime, and then it's over. But we regard these sentient beings as so evil and fearful and we want to destroy them.

Shantideva said that the afflictions actually cause us much more harm. Every single suffering situation we encounter in our life is due to the afflictions. The outside enemy may harm us one time, but our own afflictions make us create the karma to be confused and to be in suffering and miserable situations again and again throughout our lives, and even in future lifetimes and past lifetimes.

All the different problems that we have experienced, all the karmas that we have been through, all the horrific things that we could experience in future lives—they all come from the afflictions. When you look at the afflictions this way, you see that they are much more of an enemy and a nuisance than anything else could possibly be. They cause us much more harm than any other sentient beings.

When an external enemy or another sentient being harms us, we try to destroy that person because we see how harmful they are. They are just another sentient being and they are going to die anyway, whether or not we harm or kill them. Yet we put so much energy into killing them and stopping them.

On the other hand, our afflictions cause us much more harm and in greater intensity over a longer period of time. Yet, when they manifest, instead of kicking them out, we welcome them in: “Oh attachment, please, come on in! I feel good when I have attachment.” “Oh anger, yes, come in my friend, I get a real adrenaline buzz off of you! I feel very

powerful.” “Oh pride, come on in, you are a good buddy! I feel really good and in control of things when I am proud.” We extend such a warm welcome to all these afflictions which are the real cause of our pain. It’s most peculiar!

Therefore Shantideva said that we have the whole thing totally upside down. There is no reason to retaliate when sentient beings harm us, because they are going to die anyway and the harm they caused us isn’t so great compared to that caused by our afflictions. Our afflictions cause us much greater harm and they are not going to die. They even come with us when we die. That’s why they are the ones that we should really look at.

If we free ourselves from the afflictions which are the internal enemies, then we will have no external enemies. Why? This is because all the external enemies come from the negative karma that we created under the influence of our afflictions. If we didn’t have negative karma, nobody would try and hurt us. If we didn’t have negative karma, nobody could hurt us. If we didn’t have ignorance in our mind, then even if somebody beat us up, we wouldn’t feel any pain. The whole reason we feel pain—whether from harm inflicted by others or not, because often we feel pain even when nobody is trying to harm us—is due to our karma, our afflictions including ignorance. If we are able to free ourselves from these things, then we are totally impermeable to any kind of harm. There will be no external enemies.

When you think about it, it is quite incredible. You can see how the whole thing works psychologically. When we are hung up on something, we project it on

somebody else. Whether the person means it or not, they appear to be trying to harm us. Or, we develop difficulties, problems or issues with somebody based on what's going on inside of us. That person is just some poor being who happens to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

I think we have all had the experience where we didn't have a bad intention towards somebody else and yet that person was hurt and harmed by what we did. They had completely taken it in the wrong way. Well, we do the exact same thing, too. Although other people have no intention to hurt us, we receive pain anyway because we are so involved in projecting all our garbage on them.

That's why we say that if there is no inner enemy of the afflictions, then nobody outside could possibly hurt us, whether they intend to or whether they don't intend to. Even if they intended to, we wouldn't get so upset and bent out of shape because we didn't have attachment, anger and the other afflictions.

Instead compassion will arise in our mind in response to the harm that they are giving us.

## **Do the checking meditation**

This is something to think deeply about and to go over again and again. It's quite effective to do the analytical or checking meditation on this. Think of how terrible a murderer, an assailant, a mugger or a rapist is. Think of how fearful, evil, and awful they are, and yet how the harm they give us is nothing compared to the harm caused by our afflictions. The external enemies will suffer from their actions and

they will die one day; our afflictions don't experience any harm at all when they harm us. If we think like that, we may experience some strong feeling: "Oh this is serious business. This is not joking stuff. First of all, I have to be attentive when the afflictions arise in my mind. Second of all, I have to start applying the antidotes and stop being lackadaisical about the whole thing."

### **Why is our mind not transformed?**

This kind of meditation gives us a lot of energy and courage to work with our mind. And of course, as soon as we start doing that, then we change. As soon as we start practicing, we change. I think one of the main reasons why we don't change is because we don't really practice. When you practice, you might not become Buddha by tomorrow. But there will definitely be some change. Something happens at a level that you can feel.

If we say: "Well, I have been going to teachings and listening to all this stuff for so long but I haven't seen any change in myself," then we have to ask ourselves if we have really practiced. In other words, when we get angry, have we tried to apply the antidotes to that? And have we practiced the antidotes to anger when we weren't angry so that we could get familiar with the antidotes?

When we are attached, do we apply the antidotes? Or are we just unaware of our attachment until the situation gets really painful and then we go, "Oh, it's my attachment"? And even then, do we apply the antidotes? I think if we fine tune things a little bit

more, recognize the afflictions, practice the antidotes, apply them and do this checking meditation, then something starts to change. And when I say ‘checking meditation’, it’s nothing more than thinking about what you are hearing now, making examples in your mind, and explaining it to yourself.

### **More on how to do the checking meditation**

I think it’s really productive to spend time going over and thinking very clearly about these disadvantages of the afflictions. I just outlined them, like: it impedes our wisdom. It reduces our self-confidence. It reduces our positive potential. It makes us feel guilty. It makes our mind cloudy. It makes us harm others. It makes our ethics decrease. But when you go home, sit and think about all these points and explain to yourself how it works. How does it make my ethics go down? How does it make me lose respect for myself? Really try and understand through your own life experience how these things work. You are explaining things to yourself when you do the checking meditation. If you can explain it to yourself, then it becomes much easier to explain it to other people when they ask you questions.

One person told me that when he does a checking meditation, he pretends that he is explaining it to his mother. He will try to think about it in simple terms, explaining things in a logical and grounded way.

So you have an internal dialogue with yourself. You can think you are explaining it to your mother, or think that you are explaining it to your friends, or you are explaining it to yourself, or whatever, and then the

understanding really grows and deepens, and you get some kind of feeling in the meditation. So it's not an intellectual exercise: "Oh yeah the afflictions ...." It's not like that. Rather, you mull it over and look at your own life. Sometimes incredibly strong experiences can come from it; you experience strong feelings in your heart.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **How the Afflictions Keep Us in Cyclic Existence**

#### **How Karma is Accumulated by the Afflictions**

We shall go on to the next point about how karma is accumulated by these afflictions. There are two kinds of karma that we are talking about. One is mental karma or karma of intention. The second one are actions of body and speech derived from this mental karma and are sometimes translated as intended karma or intended actions.

Let me explain a little bit more what these mean.

#### **KARMA OF INTENTION**

The karma of intention or the mental karma refers to the mental factor of intention. (We will go more into this when we study *Lorig* or mind and mental factors.) There is a mental factor that accompanies all of our different perceptions. This mental factor is called intention. When this mental factor of intention is conjoined with compassion, it becomes a compassionate intention. If it's conjoined with anger or hatred, it becomes a hateful intention. So that intention is the mental karma. It is the thought that motivates us to do something.

Before we move our body, before we speak, there is this thought or intention that's motivating us to do



it. By thought it doesn't have to be: "I am going to move my arm," and we go like this [moves the arm]. It isn't necessarily the case that we issue commands mentally to ourselves [before we do the action physically or verbally]. But the intention is present: the intention to say something, the intention to move your body, etc.

We might be quite aware of some of these intentions and are actively thinking it: "Now I am going to say this to this person." But there are also other intentions or thoughts that are present in our mind but which we do not recognize because our minds are so distracted outwards. We were talking last time about how after waking up and before you knew it, you were in front of the refrigerator. Or you were just sitting reading a book a few minutes ago and now you are in front of the refrigerator. You didn't think you spaced out in between, but you did. There was the intention in the mind to get up, go to the refrigerator and get something, but we weren't very aware of our intention, so we missed it.

### **Why it is helpful to do the breathing meditation**

This is why the breathing meditation is very good, because by watching the breath and slowing down, we begin to become much more aware of our different intentions, the different things that come up. Sometimes you will find yourself off the meditation cushion really quick—you sit down but jump up in five minutes, and it's like: "I didn't mean to end that soon." Well, there was the intention to get off the cushion. We weren't aware of it; we just acted it out.

By setting aside some time to do the breathing meditation, you can watch the intentions come up. Sometimes they come up in a very strong way: “I *have got* to call Aunt Susan!”—an incredibly strong intention that you’re obsessed with throughout your meditation session. Or “I want to get up and have a bagel,” or “I want to go do this or that.” Many, many intentions come through the mind. When you are doing the breathing meditation, it gives you the opportunity to be much more aware of these intentions, and then you discriminate which intentions have good mental factors conjoined with them and which intentions have the afflictions conjoined with them.

We accumulate a lot of mental karma through our intentions. For example, we have the intention to tell somebody off, or we have the intention to help somebody. We have the intention to have an affair outside of our relationship, or we have the intention to be kind to somebody else. All these different intentions create mental karma. That is why this type of karma is called the karma of intention.

## **INTENDED KARMA**

The second type of karma is intended karma. In other words, first we have the intentions, then we act them out physically and verbally. These actions are intended actions or intended karma. For example, I might have the intention to tell somebody off. That’s the mental karma. When I am actually telling them off, that’s the verbal karma, which is intended karma.

## Questions and answers

*[Audience: inaudible]*

You have intention all the time, but what are the mental factors that are conjoined with that intention? This is why we were talking about the afflictions and different constructive mental factors, so that we can learn to be aware of which mental factors are accompanying our different intentions. You might be sitting there watching your breath, and then all of a sudden this thought comes up: “My employee criticized me.” You might have the intention after that of: “Well, this isn’t right. This isn’t fair, so I have to do something about it. I am going to say something to this person.” And then you look at the flavor of that intention and find that there is a lot of this restless energy of retaliation, and you go: “Whoops,” and you work with it.

Why did that thought [“My employee criticized me.”] come up in the mind to start with? Well, sometimes it’s because the person is in front of you, so it reminds you of it. Or it could be due to the different causes of the afflictions. Sometimes, you will be sitting there watching your breath and the most incredible things will come into your mind and you wonder: “How did that get in there?”

It’s interesting to see how the mind works. You sit down and then all of a sudden you recognize that you are incredibly jealous of somebody. If you are able to trace it back, it may have started because you heard the dog bark outside. That reminded you of another dog you used to know that belonged to somebody, and

that person was the one who introduced you to this other person who was the one that you were jealous of. And the mind just goes. [Laughter.]

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Or your foot may not be that uncomfortable, but once your mind latches onto the intention of: “I have got to move my foot,” then... Sometimes you can watch it completely surge up and then just disappears again.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Well, what you would do is to step back and look at the emotion itself. Or if you have an intention to act as a result of that emotion, you can look at that intention. But if you are just having the emotion, you can step back for a minute and ask: “What does it feel like to be angry?” I don’t know about you, but my mind gets all caught up in so many stories when I am angry. It’s very interesting to just step back for a minute to see what it feels like to be angry: “What does it feel like in my body? Well, there is some energy here and there is some energy there. And what does it feel like in my mind when I am angry? What is the tone of my mind? So, just feel it. Do that research on what it feels like and that itself will give us a little bit of space so that then the intention to act out of that emotion doesn’t rise so quickly.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

At that time you have the intention to apply the

antidote to your urge to retaliate, so you start questioning yourself. At that point you have a positive intention, so that's a good mental karma. Both the intention to act negatively and the intention to apply the antidote to it or the intention to abandon that negative action are mental karma or karma of intention. You can see from this instance that karma of intention can be constructive or destructive.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

See, we have primary consciousnesses and we have mental factors. Primary consciousnesses perceive the basic nature of the object. We have five primary sense consciousnesses: the visual consciousness, the auditory consciousness, the olfactory consciousness, etc, and we have a mental consciousness.

Those are primary consciousnesses and they are the general door through which information is coming in. They perceive the general nature of the object.

And then we have a whole variety of different mental factors which perform various functions to make a complete cognition possible. One mental factor is intention that directs our mind towards that object. Another is attention that puts our attention on that object. And then we have a mental factor of feeling that feels either pleasure or pain or neutral toward that object. Then we may have positive mental factors arising like the wish to abandon a negative one, or the wish to help somebody, a compassionate mental factor, or a loving mental factor, or we might have a deceitful and dishonest one. The mental factors perform all sorts of various functions that give

any particular cognition its flavor.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Some of them are like steering wheels. Some of them are reactions to things.

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

...you get reborn in the formless realm because you have developed that level of concentration before and you have attachment to that. Actually in the formless realms, you just have equanimity and they say that's even better than bliss. The mind is just stuck on equanimity. You can go all the way to what they call the concentration that's the peak of samsara, where the mind is very subtle and concentrated. But if there is no wisdom realizing emptiness, then you just stay at that level as long as you have that karma, and when you die, where you are going to be reborn next depends on which karma is going to ripen.

They say that we have been reborn as everything within samsara. Believe it or not, we have had single-pointed concentration in the past. We have been born in the form realm in the past. We have been born in the formless realm in the past. We have had the deluxe sense pleasure of the god realms, with as much food, boyfriends and everything that we could possibly want, and swimming pools, [laughter] or whatever your favorite thing is. It is wonderful there as desire realm gods until right before you die, when all the pleasure goes away and you become completely miserable.

We have also been born in hellish states of incredible suffering. We have been born as spirits. We have been born as cats, dogs, pigs, gophers and butterflies. You name it, we have been it all. When you think about this, that we have taken body after body in all these realms experiencing all the pain and bliss, and it hasn't gotten us anywhere, then that gives us some energy to say: "With my precious human life right now, let's get off this Ferris wheel, let's get liberated from this; this is really a drag. I just don't want to be involved in cyclic existence anymore, because the good things aren't worth the bad ones. It just doesn't pay off. It's sham deal."

I remember Lama Zopa Rinpoche teaching about this. We used to take the eight Mahayana precepts in the morning at Kopan. Rinpoche would give a talk to help set our motivation. That sometimes would last an hour, an hour and a half, maybe two hours, before he got around to giving precepts. [Laughter.] And I remember him going so much into all these different births from the top of samsara to the bottom of samsara, from having incredible pleasure, power and wealth to being totally miserable—just these whole changeable situations, up and down, again and again, like a bad movie that doesn't end.

I remember him really trying to get across to us that if we have gone through all these lifetime after lifetime and now we have a precious human life—we have met the Dharma, the teachings, the teacher, the time to practice—we can actually stop this whole thing. It's really powerful to think that we could actually stop this cycle. That's why our life is so precious, because you can clearly see the potential to

do something very valuable instead of staying on the merry-go-round.

This is why the wisdom realizing emptiness is so important because this is what gets us off the merry-go-round. To develop wisdom, we need to be able to concentrate our mind. To develop concentration, we need to have ethical foundation. So we come back to the three higher trainings: ethics, concentration, and wisdom.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

You are saying that if we don't remember the pain, then we don't really feel like we have experienced it all in the past, and there will not be the strong wish to get off the Ferris wheel.

Well, at the beginning when we try to have the feeling that we haven't always been who we are now, and to imagine having been different beings, it might sound kind of intellectual. You know how when we were a kid, we used to imagine we were all sorts of things. In class plays, we would pretend that we were lions and tigers and bears. When you act those things out you really get into it. You can kind of feel what it might feel like. So, in your meditation you do that too: "What would it feel like to be born as this?" You try it on and pretend to get more of a feeling of: "Well, I haven't always been who I am." And then they say when we get single-pointed concentration, then we can actually have memories or be aware of specific previous rebirths.

*[Audience: inaudible]*



Here, we need to look very much at the intention. We need to see if the intention is to cause harm to an enemy, or if the intention is to stop that person from creating more negative karma and stop other people from experiencing suffering, out of compassion. So I think a lot depends on the intention, the mental karma.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I think *tong-len* can be very effective; it can be very good. Doing *tong-len* is actively putting compassion and love into it. What you can do before you actively put the compassion and love in, is to imagine what it is like to be those other people or those other creatures, in the same way as when you were a kid you used to imagine what it would be like to be this or that. Or how we used to imagine what it would be like to be that person who looks really together. We fantasize all the time, so try and find those different aspects of ourselves in what other people are experiencing and acting. Then we can develop love for those beings, seeing that it would be wonderful if they were happy instead of experiencing all that misery and confusion, and with compassion thinking that it would be wonderful if they were to be free from the misery and confusion. And then we do the *tong-len*, the taking and the giving. Then the *tong-len* becomes very powerful, because you have a much deeper sense for what other people's experiences are.

## **The Process of Death and Rebirth**

Tonight, we're going to cover the points about the way of leaving the body in death, and taking rebirth. We will talk about this whole process of dying, going through the intermediate stage, and then connecting to the next life.

## **THE WAY DEATH OCCURS**

Basically from a Buddhist perspective, death occurs for one of three reasons:

1. We have exhausted the karmic potential to live in this life, or
2. We don't have enough merit to gain the conditions to keep living, or
3. A negative karma ripens to interfere with it.

### **1. We have exhausted the karmic potential to live in this life.**

When we're born, there's a certain karmic potential from previous lives that we have to be in this body, in this realm, for a certain amount of time, according to our karma. If we don't have a certain amount of good karma, we won't have the potential to live a long life. That's why you see some people die in the womb. Or we might have a lot of karma to be born as a human being, then on the basic level, there's the karma to live a long life. Some people die simply because they've lived out that karma—the karma has run out. It's like there's no wax left, the candle flame goes out.

### **2. We don't have enough merit to gain the**

## **conditions to keep living.**

Another thing is that to live, we need all the proper conditions to stay alive. We need food. We need medicine. We need a good environment. If we don't have enough merit to have these conditions, then we die. We might have the basic karmic condition to live until, let's say, eighty years old, but if we don't have enough merit to get food, then you see what's happening in Somalia. Or you don't have the merit to get the medicine and things of that sort.

### **3. A negative karma ripens to interfere with it.**

Let's say you might have the karma to have a long life. You might have all the right cooperative conditions and the merit that supports them, but you get into a car accident. Or you get cancer. Or something like that. This is called an untimely death. In other words, there is negative karma ripening in the middle that terminates your life.

We can't extend the first condition (the karmic potential to live in this life). It comes with us from previous lives. But the karma to get the supportive conditions can be extended. That's why there's the practice of liberating animals, or making charity to the poor. These kinds of actions allow us to accumulate positive karma, which helps us get the conditions we need to be able to stay alive thus preventing dying from the second reason.

We do purification practice to prevent untimely death from an accident. If we have a negative karma

from our previous lives, it can ripen. If we do purification, we can impede it from ripening. Or instead of it ripening and manifesting in us getting into an accident or getting AIDS, it might ripen in a different way and we get the flu, or something like that. That's why when you're doing purification practice and you get sick, it's real good. You should think, "This is all the negative karma that would have ripened in a horrendous rebirth, an untimely death or some kind of incredible suffering. Instead of experiencing those results, I now have a flu, or a boil or something. Negative karma is getting exhausted."

One nun I know was doing a retreat, and she had a huge boil on her cheek—enormous. This was in Nepal. She was walking around in Kopan [monastery] one day and she bumped into Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Rinpoche asked, "How are you?" She said, "Look, Rinpoche." He said, "Oh, that's wonderful! You're doing retreat. You're purifying your negative karma. This is perhaps eons of suffering that is coming up like this." This is why purification practice is needed. It stops premature death.

## **One reason for dying young**

The Tibetans also believe that a person may have the karma to live a long life, but sometimes, a negative karma ripens in the middle of it and they die young. The person still has a bit of good karma left to be born as a human being, and they might take rebirth. But they may end up like the babies that get aborted, or the children who died while still infants. There wasn't the karma to live a long time as a human. There was

just a little bit of good karma left over from the previous life that hadn't ripened.

## **The karma which ripens first at the time of death**

### ***1. Strong positive or negative karma***

When we die, karma starts ripening that will influence the future rebirth we take. The karma ripens while we still have some recognition and the ability to think and generate positive or negative thoughts on our own. The ripening of karma makes us feel attracted towards another rebirth in a particular realm. The karma that ripens first is either a strong positive one or a strong negative one.

Remember when we studied karma, we went over the six conditions that make a particular karma strong—the nature of the action, the strength of the motivation, who you did the action in terms of, whether you purified it or not and so on.

If an action is very strong, it is very likely to ripen at the time of death. People may lead a basically good life, but perhaps at one time in their life, they completely blew it and killed somebody, or they did an incredibly virtuous action, then this kind of karma would be the most likely one to ripen first at the time of death.

### ***2. The karma that is habitual***

If there's no karma that is particularly strong, then the karma that's repeated or habitual will ripen first. This is karma that might not be strong but which you do

every day. For example, maybe you set up your altar every morning, while you're half asleep. It's not a strong skillful action because the mind is still half-asleep, but you have the intention to make offerings and purify your mind. You do it every day and it becomes habitual. Or it could be a negative action that we do every day like for example, taking things from our workplace or lying about this and that. Whatever it is, because we do it again and again and again, it becomes very easy for that action to ripen at death. That's habitual karma.

### ***3. The karma that was created first***

If none of the karma is particularly strong or habitual, then whichever karma was created first would ripen. It's the one that's been in your mindstream the longest.

### **Why the time of death is a very important time**

The time of death is a very important time because things are all up for grabs. It's very important to be able to concentrate and live well at the time that you're dying (when the karma that influences the next rebirth is ripening). This is why we put so much emphasis on having a good environment around someone who's dying. If they can have a good environment, it becomes that much easier for positive karma to ripen. Whereas if they're in an environment that antagonizes them, upsets them or arouses their attachment, then it becomes very easy for negative karma to ripen. This is why if you're dying or if

you're with somebody who's dying, try to make the passing on peaceful and calm.

You walk into some hospital rooms, and you have three people in a room with three TV sets blaring at the same time. People may be dying to "LA Law" or "Rambo." What does that do to your mind when you're dying, to have that kind of energy around you? It excites that kind of energy within yourself. Basically, we die the way we live. When you watch that kind of stuff on TV, what does it do to you inside? You can see. If it does that to you when you're alive, when you have some "control," then at the time when you're dying and really bewildered, what is it going to do to you then?

In South-east Asia, for example, they often like to have the whole family around when somebody is dying. It's considered that you've lived a very good life if all your children and grandchildren, aunts and uncles and the whole group is there around you, crying when you die. That means you've had a very good life, because they love you so much.

From a Buddhist viewpoint, that kind of situation is one that's just going to set off your attachment and make it incredibly difficult to leave. If somebody's dying and their relatives are in there crying and crying, "How am I going to live without you? I love you so much", it invokes a person's clinging and attachment, making it very difficult for them to die peacefully. The mind is agitated, making it more likely for negative karma to arise.

Another difficult situation is if the family is fighting over your money and wanting you to sign the will. We may think when somebody's in a coma, they don't

hear things. But I've talked to people in coma. They hear things. They get input from the environment. Even if the dying isn't in a coma, if they see people going to a corner and whispering, they will know it's bad news. Their mind gets agitated. They get worried. "What are they planning? What are they saying behind my back that they can't say to my face?" Or relatives come up and say, "Who do you want to leave the family heirlooms to? Don't you want to revise the will and give them all to me?" It's incredible that so many brothers and sisters stop speaking to each other because they start fighting over inheritance.

### **Analogy of the gull**

This kind of thing agitates the dying person's mind. When we're dying, it's really important to let go. I remember Lama Yeshe used this image once. He said when a gull is on a ship in the middle of an ocean, and that bird takes off, it just takes off. It just leaves. It doesn't look back at the ship. It just leaves.

It's a similar thing. When we die, we just leave. That's it. But if you're worried about who's going to take care of your kids; or you're very angry at somebody because you've had a bad relationship with them for years and it didn't clear up; or you have a whole lot of regret for something you did and you weren't able to purify it because you were too proud to acknowledge it; or your beloved is sitting there crying, sobbing and saying, "I'll miss you so much." It's going to make it difficult to take off. It's important to have a quiet environment.



## Real-life cases

One of my students in Singapore was dying. He was young and he had cancer. He was an incredible person. Sharing his death was the greatest gift somebody had ever given me. He called his family—his sister and brother-in-law—together one day with me, another friend, and the mortician, and gave instructions on how he wanted it to be. He looked at his sister and said, “I love you, but if you’re going to be in the room crying, I don’t want you there. If you cry, you go out to the other room.” It was incredible. He was so clear. And she respected this. There was one night (which turned out to be a false alarm), we thought he was dying, but the family didn’t cry, because they knew he didn’t want them to.

It’s important to have a smooth passage, without a lot of disturbances. This is what makes it very hard to die in hospitals. Doctors and nurses are always coming by and monitoring this and poking you for that. If you know that somebody is not going to live more than a few hours longer, it’s better to just take all the tubes out, stop all the monitors, stop the resuscitation, and allow them to go naturally without so much invasive stuff, which can be damaging. Somebody’s trying to concentrate and be aware, but they’re getting poked and jabbed.

That’s why they say if you know somebody is dying, try and help them clear up their worldly things. I think in most cases, it’s good that somebody knows that they’re dying, so that they can take care of their worldly things. This way when they die, they don’t have to worry about it.

There was this other person I knew in Singapore. He was also young—twenty-four or twenty-five—and had a brain tumor. He'd had surgery on it and then it recurred. His family did not want to tell him that he was dying, so he had some kind of fantasy that he would be going on a vacation to Malaysia soon.

I went over to his family's house, because I'd been with them during the whole process. We were close. I said, "Look, we've got to tell him he's dying." But his mother and father couldn't handle it, and they said, "Oh, but the doctor said we shouldn't tell him." And so I couldn't tell him.

Right before he died—just a couple of weeks before he died—he was really out of it. By then, it was too late for him to clear things up. His mother said to me, "You were right. We should have told him."

## **Clearing up unfinished business**

It nearly broke my heart, this whole thing. It's important for someone who's dying to clear up their things and not have to worry about their kids, their money, etc. If they have disturbed relationships with people, they should contact them and meet up to try and clear things up.

Actually, the best thing to do is to clear up our mucky relationships as they're happening. I think it's real good that every night when we go to bed and every morning when we wake up, to say, "If I were to die right now, is everything clear in my mind? How did I relate to other people? Did I let the people I care for know I care for them?"

Often we're too proud to tell the people we care for, that we love them. Perhaps we're too proud to help them, or we're too resentful, and then after they die, we're stuck telling it to Steven Levine instead. I went and I heard how many people said, "Oh, they died, and I've never told them ...." How many people are like that, uncomfortable about telling how much they care for someone. Or people we've hurt whom we're too proud to apologize to.

I think it's good if we can go home and think, "If I were going to die now, what unfinished business do I have, either with people or with things? What do I need to clear up? What do I need to say to different people? I think it's important to set about doing that as much as we can, so that when death comes—because we don't know when it's going to come—we know we've done the best we can.

It doesn't mean that we can heal every difficult relationship. Some people may not want our apologies—they'll throw it right back in our face. But the important thing is that from our side, we try and do what we could to make a relationship good, or to at least take the bad feelings out of it. Even if the other person is not in the state to respond, if we die, at least we know we've done what we can.

That's why they say in the teachings to wake up every morning and say, "Well, this might be the last day that I'm alive." We should try and keep things clear in that way. Of course, relationships can get difficult. But it's important to try to be lucid and then as much as we can, when we've made mistakes, acknowledge them. It's especially important to tell the people we care about, that we do care.

## Helping the dying

*[Audience:] Despite our good intentions, I think we might end up pushing our own agenda to the dying person. How do we avoid doing that?*

That's very true. Sometimes we can, with all of our good intentions, go into a bedside situation with our agenda for what this dying person has got to do. Instead of tuning into them, we go in and say things like, "OK, do you have your will signed? Have you apologized to your mother? What do your kids think?" We go in with our agenda, pushing and pushing.

We're trying to help clarify things, but if that person has a terminal illness, it's better to help him or her clarify these earlier in the course of the illness. It wouldn't be appropriate right before they die. When they are dying, just help them to be in the present moment and generate positive thoughts. If it's somebody who's a practitioner, remind them of their spiritual teacher. Remind them of the Buddha. Lead them in taking refuge. If they do a practice of a specific deity, like Chenrezig, Manjushri or Tara, remind them of that. Say the mantra. Tell them to pray for a good rebirth. Speak to them about bodhicitta. Speak to them about emptiness and things being just karmic appearances.

So if somebody's a Buddhist, go in there, but be sensitive to the situation—don't give them a whole talk. Just give them what they need at that moment so that they can have a positive attitude when they die.

If it's somebody who's not a Buddhist, speak the language of whatever religion or faith they believe in.

You can talk about compassion in many different languages. It doesn't have to be Buddhist. You can tell them to think of Jesus, Moses or Mohammad. As long as it's something that can relax their mind, that will give them some spaciousness and compassion in their mind.

To help somebody who is dying, we have to be really comfortable with death. We have to be comfortable with pain and watching people wither away into skeletons. If we're trying to help them through our own fear and horror, it doesn't work because they can sense it. You have to be comfortable, watching people pee in their pants. You have to be at ease with all of that.

It's very important, in our mind and in the mind of the dying person, to just let go. The more we cling on to this life, the more difficult it is to leave. That's why, when we were doing the death meditation a few months ago, we talked about our body, possessions, friends and relatives—how none of them are of ultimate help at the time we die. Now, if you die and you take refuge in your body, you're terrified of losing your body. Or you're terrified of being separated from the people you love, "Who am I going to be if I'm not this person's wife or husband or mother or father? Who am I going to be? Who am I going to be if I don't have this body? Who am I going to be if I'm not President of this or owner of that?" Fear can come up, and that just makes death all the more difficult. It's important while we're alive, to let go of the attachment to these things as much as possible. If we're clinging and attached at the time of death, it will be miserable.

## **Karmic visions**

People with really bad or good karma can have visions at the time of their death. They say that butchers, because they killed a lot of animals, can have visions of being stampeded by cattle, or something like that when they're dying.

You see, when there's this really strong kind of karma, it causes what we call 'karmic visions.' Different hallucinatory things can happen to somebody who is dying. It's their internal experience; sometimes they'll speak about them, sometimes they can't.

Similarly, people with a lot of good karma can have good karmic visions. They tell the story of this one practitioner of thought training. He always did the taking and giving practice, where you take on the suffering of others and give them your happiness. When he was dying and his disciples were around, he said, "I'm praying to be reborn in the lower realms so that I can go and help those sentient beings. I really want to be born in the hells to help them. But I'm having visions that indicate I'm going to be reborn in the pure land. Please, pray that I can go to the hells and help the sentient beings."

*[Audience: inaudible]*

A bodhisattva can take deliberate rebirth in the hell realms. But you see, for someone who has that kind of compassion, what was happening to him as he was dying was the karmic vision of a pure realm.

## **Dealing with negative karmic visions**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Let's say a butcher is having a negative karmic vision. If you're that person, try and recognize that this is just an appearance in the mind. How many times when we're dreaming, do we recognize we're dreaming? "Oh, this is just an appearance in my mind. It isn't a real monster. It's not a real wonderful place. This is just a dream." Even when we're awake, when we get angry at somebody because we're seeing that person as evil, how many times are we able, at that moment, to say, "Oh, this is a karmic appearance. This is just an appearance to my mind." We need to develop the ability to relax when we have different appearances to the mind and not jump on the bandwagon.

## **Identifying the point of death**

In the teachings, there's a whole detailed process relating to what we call the 'death absorptions' and the different kinds of outer signs and inner signs that happen when one is dying. The different steps in the death process are very clearly laid out in the teachings. People first lose the ability to see and the body feels heavy. Then the ability to hear is lost, and all the moisture in the body dries up. The ability to smell is then lost, and the heat goes away from the body. Then the ability to taste things and touch things is lost, and the breath stops. But from the Buddhist viewpoint, the breath stopping is not the final moment of death.

There was this time when I was with his Holiness in India at a conference. The scientists were trying to say what is death, but they didn't really know what death is. They talked about the death of the brain, the lungs and the heart, because the breath has stopped. But these three things don't happen at the same time. They talk about the death of an organ, but they don't know when the death of a person is. Actually, they don't know what the person is.

From the Buddhist viewpoint, we have different levels of consciousness. First our very gross levels of consciousness absorb. They gradually cease to function as our body weakens. The power of the elements is also weakening and dissolving. As all these are happening, we're able to access a subtler and subtler state of mind. Therefore, even after the breath has stopped, you can have an extremely subtle state of mind still existing in the body, so the person technically isn't dead yet. The breath has stopped. The brain has stopped. The heart has stopped. But the person still has a subtle consciousness at this point.

### **After death, leaving the body untouched**

That's why from the Buddhist viewpoint, it's best if you can leave the body alone for three days, because most ordinary beings' consciousness leaves the body within three days. If you can't do it for three days, because the body's in a hospital for example, then at least do it for as long as possible.

When Lama Yeshe passed away in a hospital in Los Angeles, they arranged with the doctors to move his bed into a private room after his breath had



stopped. However, the doctors would only let him stay there for eight hours. [Zopa] Rinpoche was there doing pujas, and so were the students. Lama was meditating even though his breath and everything else had stopped. I guess Lama knew he had eight hours because right before the eight hours were up, there were signs that he had left the body. It's good to leave the body untouched for as long as possible, because the subtle consciousness is still in it. If you touch the body you can disturb it and jar it; it can be very intrusive.

Where the body is first touched can influence how the consciousness departs. If you have to touch a body, touch the crown. There're special Tibetan pills made with herbal substances and blessed things that you can grind up and mix with honey or yogurt. You put that on somebody's crown when they're dying and it helps their consciousness to leave through that.

Remember the young man I had just told you about, who called his family around when he was dying? We had planned for him to die at home. But at the very end, he got frightened. I wasn't around and the family took him to the hospital. If I were around, I would have really avoided that. Anyway, we wound up at the hospital. Before he died, he had given all his things away, but right before he died, the last thing he did was to call his sister over and say, "Please make sure that you give all my things away." His last thought was being charitable to others.

It was clear he was dying, because his breath was changing. I always carry one of these pills with me in my bag, so I had one with me. We didn't have any honey. We didn't have any yogurt. My friend had a

Snickers bar in her purse, so we ground the pill up, we put it in the Snickers bar and we put it on top of his head.

And then when he died, I stayed around and I did lots of mantras. I kept the doctor away for as long as I possibly could, which wasn't very long. Every time he came back, I'd say, "No. No. Go away." And then finally, I had to give in. You do what's best. But if you can, leave the body without touching it. And if you have to touch, touch the crown and tell the person, "Go to the pure land." Or when they're dying, encourage them to take rebirth in a pure land or in a precious human rebirth.

*[Audience:] How do we know if the consciousness has left the body?*

The sign that the consciousness has left the body is you get a white or red substance coming either from the nose or from the genitals. And if the body starts to decay, then at that time, usually the consciousness has left. Not everybody stays up to three days. Some people leave really quickly. Some stay a long time. And great meditators stay even longer and meditate in the clear light for quite a while.

## **THE WAY BARDO IS REACHED AFTER DEATH**

But what usually happens is, as we're dying, the mind starts to crave this life. We start to crave this body, because very often, what happens is there's this fear of disappearing. This fear of "I'm going to disappear.

I'm going to cease to exist." There comes a very strong craving for this body, because the body is what gives us an identity. We won't cease to exist if we have a body. We crave this life and the craving increases. When we realize we can't have this body, then the mind grasps for another body. You have the craving for this life and the grasping for the next life which activates the whole karmic process. That makes the karma good and ripe, like a really ripe watermelon. Or the blossom of the flower right before it opens. That propels the karma to ripen.

The mind dissolves and we go from the gross level of mind to the subtle to the extremely subtle mind. When the extremely subtle mind leaves the body, even though it isn't craving or grasping, it's still propelled by the force of energy from the previous life's craving and grasping for another body. When the mind leaves the body, it takes a bardo body and becomes slightly grosser (but it's still a subtle mind, not as gross as our regular mind). Bardo means intermediate stage, the period of time between one gross body and another.

Some people say that when we first go into the bardo, we're still attached to this life and we even resemble this life's body. Other Tibetan Buddhists say, "No. As soon as you go in the bardo, you have your body of your next life." If you have the body of this life, you might not realize you're dead and what's actually happened to you. The bardo being may come around and go back to their house, or go back to where they were. But bardo beings can't communicate with people. They try to, and they get really frustrated, because nobody listens. They have

clairvoyance and they can read the people's minds. Sometimes what they see is not so nice and they get really horrified by it. Which is why after somebody dies, it's important to keep a good attitude.

In Singapore, they have this big thing about spirits. There's a lot of confusion between spirits and bardo beings. A spirit is a particular rebirth, but a bardo being, because it's in the middle, doesn't have a rebirth. It's in the middle of things. But everybody is terrified that when their friends and relatives die and are in the bardo state, they're going to come back and hang around and bother them. I find this an incredible thing because when the person's alive, you love them so much, but as soon as they die, you're terrified. It's an interesting thing psychologically, that as soon as they die, you're very afraid of them.

I remember a particular wake where this young woman offered to go out and get dinner for her aunt, whose husband had passed away. As she was going from the front of the house to the back of the house, she tripped over a bucket. When she had bought dinner and came back, her aunt was all excited, "My husband came back! I heard him! He rattled a bucket." And she was saying, "No, auntie. I tripped over it." "No! No! No! He came back! I know he came back!" The fact is, bardo beings may come back and hang around because they don't realize they're dead. That's why, if we do prayers and practices for them and they see that, then that gives them a lot of pleasure. Or if we request other people—different lamas or monks and nuns, or any kind of practitioner—to do practices for them, and then they come and they see that other people are doing practices, then

that can make their mind happy. If the dying person sees that the family is getting along harmoniously, this can make their mind happy even though they are in the intermediate state.

## Questions and answers

*[Audience:] Do bardo beings have afflictions?*

Oh yes. The bardo beings have incredible afflictions. As long as the mind is under the influence of attachment, anger and ignorance, it will come under the influence of afflictions. It doesn't matter whether it's this life, the next life or the intermediate stage.

In fact in many ways, the bardo being is really tortured. They have clairvoyant powers. They can read different people's minds, and they may not like what they see, so their mind reacts in anger or some kind of afflicted way to what they see in other people's minds. They can have an incredible number of visions and different appearances that can be very frightening, which brings up their anger, their attachment.

It can be an incredibly confusing time for them because they don't know who they are or where they are. All they have to do is think of something and they can be there. They can go through walls. They can go through mountains. They can go under the earth. All they have to do is think of something and whammo, they're there!

They say that bardo beings can go anywhere except into a consecrated object and into their future birth site. Let's say there's some bardo being who has

the karma to be your child. Well, they can't enter your womb just because they think of it. They have to wait. When the conditions are ripe, then they can enter the womb. The future birthplace and holy objects are blocked, but anywhere else, they just zap around which can be tremendously confusing to them.

## **Dedicating positive potential**

They say that the bardo stage, the longest it can last is forty-nine days. I don't know why not another week, but they say usually just seven weeks. And after each week, if the conditions haven't come together for that being to take rebirth, then they go through what's called a mini-death in the bardo, where they lose that particular bardo body and take rebirth in another bardo body. That one lasts another week, and if they haven't found a place to be reborn, that one dies, and they pick another bardo body. That's why when somebody dies, each week, for seven weeks, we do prayers. Often they're done every single day. But if you can't do it every day, then do it every week. On the day when somebody might be changing their bardo body, you can really affect them with your prayers, dedication and everything.

When somebody dies, they are really confused. Their karma to be reborn as a tortoise [for example] ripens, and so they have that kind of bardo body. But if at the end of the week, the whole family and friends do prayers, pujas, make charity and offerings, they create merit. They can then dedicate the positive potential towards the bardo being, and that sets up a good ambience around the bardo being, makes the

bardo being's mind happy, so that the bardo being's own good karma can ripen. Then at the time of the mini-death, maybe what will ripen instead will be the karma to be reborn as a human being instead of the karma to be reborn as a tortoise. The tortoise karma goes back into the mindstream and the human being karma becomes a more prominent one at that time. That's the reason these different positive actions are done each week.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Sometimes we can get very fixated, "I want to die like this." But it may not happen the way we want, because the people around us may freak out and not do what we had wished for. In such a case, like you said, just have compassion. We can't always get what we want, so we need to have some kind of flexibility in it all.

## **Use of life-support machines**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I asked one of my teachers not long ago about hooking up to life-support machines. He felt that if you know that there's no hope, then you don't need to hook somebody up to a machine. You can just let them die naturally. But if they're on the machine, then he thought it was better not to pull the plug.

But it was interesting. I was reading Sogyal Rinpoche's book where he asked his teachers the same question. His teachers gave a slightly different

answer and said if the person wants the plug pulled—not that they’re wishing to die, but because they’re just not wishing to suffer—then it’s not a suicide. He said it could put the healer in a difficult position, but if the healer has the wish to help, then it didn’t seem like there would be negative karma created. That was Sogyal Rinpoche’s teacher’s view.

People have asked His Holiness about this. You have to listen very carefully when His Holiness gives answers. His Holiness usually replies to this one, “If you know somebody can recover, you put them on a life-support machine in the hope that there’ll be a recovery. If there’s no hope of recovery and it’s a lot of expense to the family and it causes great emotional turmoil, then it seems to be a different case.” People go away saying, “Oh, His Holiness says we can pull the plug.” But His Holiness didn’t exactly say that. I’ve never heard His Holiness say it is OK to do that. I haven’t heard him say to keep the person on the machine either. He’d say that it’s a different case. Each situation needs to be looked at individually. And so there we are again, on “It depends.” It depends on all the different circumstances that are going on in that situation. The wish of the person is also very important. If they wish one thing and you’re doing another thing out of your own agenda, it can really disturb their death process.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I think that hope exists in all the cultures, but I don’t think all cultures have the technology to go to the extreme that we do here [in the U.S.]. In India, I’m



sure the family still hopes their loved one will recover, but very often, they can't even get to the hospital. They accept what happens. It's not a question of somebody staying on the machine for seven years. Most people in the world don't have access to that kind of paraphernalia.

*[Audience:] How was the bardo experience documented?*

They say that beings with clairvoyance in meditation can look and see the experience of the bardo beings. Or maybe meditators can remember being in the bardo, if they're really powerful meditators.

*[Audience:] Will you still remember Dharma teachings after death?*

I think you retain your Dharma teachings in the next rebirth. The imprint is there. That's what may enable you to meet the Dharma when you are young. Things do continue. It may not continue on a conscious level, but you'll see tendencies in children.

I've talked to people who tell me they were already interested in Buddhism when they were little. They would walk past one of these antique shops and see a Buddha statue, and as a kid, they would just look and be fascinated by it. Or when they were in grammar school, they might study about Asia and start getting very interested in Buddhism. They would start reading about it, even when they were ten or eleven.

This kind of imprint from previous lives creates an

interest and feeling of affinity in this lifetime, even though they may not remember anything consciously.

I've talked to many people who have come to Dharma teachings and say, "I feel like I know this already." It's like they knew this already at some level. There's some kind of imprint from previous lives, again not a direct memory. It could be a different situation with beings who have clear minds, like one of Lama Yeshe's gurus. He's in his early twenties now. When I first went to Kopan [monastery], he was a child, eight or nine years old. He'd sleep at night—you know how kids talk in a dream—and he would recite texts, not texts he had memorized this lifetime. Isn't that incredible? When the mind is asleep, because it's at a subtler level, that kind of imprint can manifest.

*[Audience:] What about organ donation? Will it affect the bardo process?*

Again, it depends on each person's individual situation. I asked one of my teachers about this and he said, for some people, it might be quite disruptive to be cut up and thrown around for an organ transplant when their body is going through this slow dissolution process. For some people, it could be quite disruptive to the natural process of dying and the karma that's going to ripen. But for other people, their sense of compassion in wanting to give charity with their body would make it so that even if that happened, they wouldn't care, because they want somebody else to have their organs. They really want to give their bodies. It's an individual thing.

*[Audience:] At the point of dying, does the act of craving this body and grasping for another one create a karmic seed?*

When you have the craving, you're not creating the seed of karma at that time. The craving is making previous karma ripen. When you're dying and you're craving this body and then grasping for another one, that activates some of the karma we've created before.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I received a letter from somebody recently and the letter disturbed me. At a certain point I said, "This is just a karmic vision." I don't really know what was going on in the other person's mind. I could try reading it this way or I could also read it another way. I could read it three, four, five or six ways. I don't really know. It's my own karmic vision that is choosing one of the negative ways to interpret it, and then running around in circles about it.

## **THE WAY CONNECTION IS MADE TO THE NEXT LIFE**

You remain in the bardo for a maximum of seven weeks. Each week you might go through a mini-death. For example, Terry dies on Monday before noon. Every Sunday, for seven weeks, we should do special prayers like the Chenrezig practice, or make offerings, or do some other virtuous activity, and dedicate the positive potential generated to him. If he hasn't taken

his next rebirth, this is a crucial time because he will leave that bardo body and take another, and at that point the karma can be changed. When we do prayers and virtuous activities and dedicate the positive potential generated to him, it creates a very good energy field so that his own good karma can ripen.

At the end of the seven weeks, we usually do one big activity because they say that by that time, the person would have to take rebirth.

In general, if somebody has a lot of negative karma which is ripening for their next rebirth, the bardo is very short. If someone is to be reborn as a formless realm god—the very high level gods who have attained an incredible state of concentration and mental absorption—they don't have to go through the bardo, because they don't take another grosser body in their next life.

### **A confusing time**

The bardo is generally a rather confusing time. Bardo beings have a subtler body and only have to think of some place and automatically they go there. There are a few exceptions though. A bardo being cannot go into a holy statue or stupa. They also cannot go into a womb if the circumstances haven't come together for them to be reborn as a human. Other than these exceptions, they can go any place that they think about.

Bardo beings usually take a body similar to that of a young child in their next life. For example, if somebody is going to be born as a human, the bardo body will look like a child of six to eight years old in

the next life. Even if bardo beings have the karma to be reborn deaf or blind, in the bardo state, they will still have all the senses intact. The karma to be deaf or blind only ripens when they are reborn and take a grosser body.

The bardo is quite a confusing time. The mind is under the influence of ignorance, anger and attachment. It is very difficult to control the mind. You don't know where you are and what's going on around you. Different texts describe it differently: some texts mention that when a person dies and is in the bardo state, they don't identify with their past body; they only identify with their bardo body. Other texts say that when a person dies and is in the bardo state, they initially do not realize that they are dead and still identify with the last body. They try talking to their relatives, but their relatives don't respond, so they get very confused, angry and upset. Later at a certain point, they realize that they're dead.

There are certain Tibetan rituals where you invoke the consciousness of the person in the bardo and give them a lot of instructions on how to transfer their mind to a pure land or to take a precious human life. Some lamas do these kinds of practices once the person is in the bardo.

### **Attachment keeps samsara going**

If somebody has the karma to be reborn as a human being, and they have the karma to be reborn the child of specific parents, then when those parents are making love—this is very interesting because it seems Freudian—if they have the karma to be reborn as a

woman, they're going to be attracted to the male and go there as if it were some place beautiful. If they have the karma to be reborn as a male, then they're attracted to the mother and go there. And when they get there, thinking it's all great and wonderful, they feel disillusioned. Here they leave the bardo body and take rebirth inside the sperm and egg.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Well, it is the same thing you do when you fall in love with some guy. [Laughter.] When you are attached to pizza, it's something beautiful to you, so you run for it.

They often say that although ignorance is the root of samsara, it is attachment that keeps samsara continuing. When we're dying, it's our attachment, our craving for this body and our grasping for a next body that makes the karma ripen. When we're in the bardo, it's the attachment to a place that looks beautiful that draws us to the next rebirth. Even when you're going to be reborn in the hells, right before you're reborn into one, you will be attracted to it. You're dying, it is freezing cold, and you crave for warmth—that sets the impetus for karma to be reborn in the hot hellish realms to ripen. Similarly, if you crave for something cold when you die because it is very hot, then that kind of craving sets the stage for that karma to ripen.

Also, once you're in the bardo, the mind is attracted by a certain rebirth, so the bardo being runs towards that place to take rebirth. They say, for example, that if somebody was a butcher in a previous

life, then in their bardo, they might see sheep and they might run towards the sheep thinking, “Oh, this is great! I’m going to go kill them,” and then they take rebirth as a sheep. This is how attachment (craving, yearning, wanting, clinging) keeps this whole cycle of confusion going on and on.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I wouldn’t call it a choice. Ordinary people like us are just propelled to our next rebirth. Just look at how we live now. We actually have a lot of choice, but in another way we don’t have much choice, because we’re just propelled by our likes and dislikes, our attachment and aversion. I think especially in the bardo, the mind runs for what looks nice and runs away from what doesn’t.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

The bardo being can see many, many things, but it will only run to take rebirth in the one it’s attracted to. Even if we’re to be born into a really awful rebirth, at that moment when we’re running towards it, it looks great. To put it into psychological terms, this is like somebody who constantly gets into dysfunctional relationships. When you get into it, it looks great. You make the same mistakes again and again. Similarly for the bardo being. It looks great, you run for it, and then you jump into this gross body that gets born, gets old, gets sick and dies. You’re stuck with this body which does this whole suffering trip on you, but at the moment when you were in the bardo running for it, it

looked like Disneyland, even if it were a rebirth as a hungry ghost or some other rebirth of great suffering. This points out how clinging attachment just pushes us along.

### **Choosing our rebirths?**

These days, many people have the idea that we choose our rebirths to learn lessons. It is as if you're sitting on a cloud contemplating, "Which mummy and daddy do I want? What lesson do I want to learn?" That's really glamorous, but that doesn't correspond to the teachings. And if you look at our mind, it doesn't really correspond to what we are now either. Do we pick situations because we want to learn in them? Do we learn from most of the situations we experienced? [Laughter.] How much do we really choose the things that are offered, and how much are we propelled by the force of our repetitive habits?

*[Audience:] Could you talk a little bit more about the mini-deaths?*

It's like if you have a karma ripening, let's say, to be reborn as a human being, then your bardo body will be similar to a human body. (But bardo bodies are subtle, they aren't gross like our body now.) I'm not sure exactly what it is, if it's karmic energy or what energy, but somehow that doesn't go beyond seven days. If you haven't been able to be reborn into a gross body within these seven days, then at the end of the seven days, you dissolve back into the clear light. When you come out of the clear light, you take



another bardo body.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I think that's the way things are. I don't think anybody designed this system specially. [Laughter.]

## **Death and rebirth**

The following description might help you to understand how this works. When a person dies, their gross consciousnesses dissolve into a subtle consciousness which then dissolves into an extremely subtle consciousness, which is the clear light. This extremely subtle consciousness has a very subtle energy with it. When this union of very subtle energy and very subtle consciousness leaves the body of the deceased, the extremely subtle consciousness becomes the perpetuating or substantial cause that transforms into the consciousness in the bardo, except it's slightly grosser than it is in the clear light stage. The extremely subtle wind or energy that accompanies the extremely subtle consciousness becomes the substantial or perpetuating cause that generates the body of the intermediate stage, except it's also grosser.

And then let's say the person is going to be reborn as a human being. The bardo body and mind are subtle, but they're not extremely subtle. They again, first dissolve into the subtlest mind and the subtlest wind or energy, and this subtlest mind and energy then joins with the sperm and egg. Once they join with the sperm and egg, they start becoming grosser and you

get subtle minds and then you get gross minds.

You can see a little bit how rebirth works. It's not a soul, a self or any permanent essential thing that's *us* that goes from one life to the next. The subtle mind is changing every moment in the bardo. The subtle energy is also changing every moment. They continue from one moment to the next. You get a feeling of how we go from one life to the next, and yet there's no solid personality that does that.

*[Audience:] Is there reproduction in the hell realm?*

Rebirth in the hell realms happens spontaneously, so you don't need a mother and father. That's why you don't need to wait so long in the intermediate stage, because you don't need to wait for them to make love. If you have the karma to be born there, you just manifest that body [fingers snapping] right there.

*[Audience:] What about rebirth as an animal?*

I think it's a similar thing. The bardo being sees a father and mother dog or cat and it happens the way I described before. This is why I think we have to be so careful, because you hear people say, "Oh, wouldn't it be nice to be a cat and sleep all day." You've to be real careful what you think, because in one way you do get what you want. And if you have this wish of being a cat, if that comes on strong at the time when you're dying, then that thought propels you in the bardo to seek a cat body.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Yes, it's like making an aspiration. This is why at the beginning of every meditation or teaching session, we say that we aspire to become Buddhas for the benefit of others. We are planting an aspiration. The stronger you make it, the more it comes automatically in your mind. If somebody is wishing all the time to be an animal because they think it's so great—you don't have to pay taxes [Laughter.]—the imprint becomes very strong and that draws the mind towards that rebirth. When we take rebirth as something, it's not necessarily due to just one karma. It can be multiple karmas ripening, or even if it's just one karma ripening, there're all sorts of cooperative conditions. There can be the scene around you, your own thought and mood, etc. that help that karma ripen, drawing you towards a certain body.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

When we do prayers and virtuous activities, the deceased do not experience this karma. We ourselves experience the karma we create by doing the prayers and activities. But it creates a good energy field around (the consciousness of the deceased), so that their (the deceased) own good karma can ripen.

When we do prayers and virtuous things, the bardo being knows that these things are going on, they feel delighted and it helps their minds turn towards the Dharma which then helps their own good karma to ripen.

**Excellent time for practice**

One important thing to mention is that the time of death is an excellent time to practice. Death is a very powerful transition moment with lots of karma ripening. If your mind is in a good state when you die, you can direct it towards a good rebirth so that in your next life, you have the opportunity to continue to practice. For example, if a person's main practice is thought training, then when they're dying, they're going to give away all their possessions, practice the taking and giving meditation, meditate on emptiness and make prayers to never be separated from the Mahayana teachings and teachers as well as to have conducive conditions for practice. This helps the good karma ripen allowing them to have a good rebirth. They can then continue to practice in the next rebirth.

If somebody is practicing Vajrayana, then this is a really incredible time. In the highest class of tantra, there is a meditation practice you do every day that is analogous to death, bardo and rebirth. In the meditation, you imagine going through all the different dissolution stages of death, going into the clear light, meditating on the clear light, and then re-emerging as a Buddha instead of as an ordinary being. At the time of dying, you will be able to practice it there and then. If somebody is well-trained, they can have incredible results and achieve very profound realizations at that time. This is because during the death process, you're going into that extremely subtle mind which is very good for meditating on emptiness. Somebody who's very well-trained in emptiness and the recognition of all the stages that precede going into the clear light will be able to do this meditation at the time of dying and instead of taking a rebirth, they

emerge as a Buddha, with a Buddha's body.

This is why our teachers give us commitments when they give us initiations. This is the value of taking commitments. By doing the practice every day, when it comes time to die, we'll be able to practice it there and then.

For deep practitioners, when they die, they're so excited because .... [Laughter.] I saw one monk in Dharamsala die. Physically, he was hemorrhaging inside and this unbelievable stuff was coming out of him, but he was definitely meditating. Two people were taking care of him and they put him in the same posture as that of the Buddha when the Buddha passed away. I'm sure he was doing his regular meditation practice at that time, and some of his other friends were also doing the same practice as what he was doing.

*[Audience:] This tantric meditation on the stages of death seems to be something very high practitioners do. Why don't we learn it earlier since it is so crucial in helping us get a good rebirth?*

Because the mind has to be prepared for it. To get the teaching on doing this meditation, it requires an empowerment into the highest class of tantra, which means taking bodhisattva vows and tantric vows. Very often, the teacher, like I said, gives you a daily commitment to do the practice to make sure you do it. But our mind is such that when we hear a lama coming to town, the first thing we ask is, "Is there a commitment? What is the commitment?" We don't want to take the commitment, because then we feel

burdened by having to do the practice every day. Or we take bodhisattva vows or tantric vows and afterwards we go, “What did I do? I don’t want all these vows. This is a super-burden!”

You see, when we are only concerned with our life now, we don’t want to do all these practices. This is why it’s so important to remember death, because when you remember death, then you’ll come up with a question like what you have just asked, which is “I want to learn how to do this, because I know I’m going to die.” And when you really have that wish and you want to learn how to do it, the commitments and the vows aren’t a burden anymore. It’s something you really want to do. You see the benefit.

But in the meantime, before we could take the empowerment to do those practices, what we can do is to train very well in ‘the five forces at the time of death’. This is taught under the thought training teachings. Here, you train your mind well in relative bodhicitta—the altruistic intention to become a Buddha for the benefit of others, and the absolute or ultimate bodhicitta—the wisdom realizing emptiness. These we can do now, since we’ve had teachings on them.

*[Audience:] We see that tantric practice is an advanced practice, yet it seems that it is easily available to the general public. Why is this?*

This is one question that I have too. I talked with the attendant of one of my teachers, and he thought that for people who are going to engage in Dharma practice on a long term basis, the teacher won’t give

them tantric initiation too soon. Since this person is going to practice long-term, the teacher will lead them gradually, allowing them to progress in this lifetime.

But in the West (and I think also in the East), to people who aren't going to practice in a committed way, the teacher often gives tantric initiations with the idea that then at least the person has some contact with the tantra. A seed has been planted in their mind. Even if they don't keep their vows, at least there's some connection with it so that they can meet the tantra again in future lives. Hopefully, at that time they'll be better prepared and can actually practice it. This is probably why they give the initiations openly and publicly. It hasn't always been this way in the past. I personally have some reservations about this way.

### **The extremely subtle consciousness**

When we are alive, we have the six consciousnesses—the five sense consciousnesses and the mental consciousness, which is thinking. These are the gross consciousnesses. As we're dying and our body is losing the ability to support the mind, these gross consciousnesses absorb into the subtle consciousness. A person stops being able to see, hear and relate to their external world. Even after the breath stops, the dissolution process goes on until you get to the extremely subtle consciousness. This is the clear light of death. This is the most subtle state of mind, the purest state of mind untainted by ignorance. It has the impression of ignorance on top of it, but it itself is untainted and pure. This extremely subtle state of

mind is what enables us to become a Buddha, leaving the gross body at death.

As soon as the extremely subtle mind leaves the gross body, it becomes slightly more gross. In other words, it becomes subtle instead of extremely subtle, and that's the bardo being, the intermediate stage being.

And then let's say, for example, the person is going to be reborn as a human being. The bardo body and mind are subtle, but they're not extremely subtle. Again, they first dissolve into the extremely subtle mind and the extremely subtle wind (or energy), and this subtlest mind and energy then join with the sperm and egg. Once they join with the sperm and egg, which is the moment of conception, they become subtle again. As the fetus develops in the womb and the baby becomes able to contact different sense objects, the gross consciousnesses develop.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

The extremely subtle mind is not manifest the whole time, although it's there all the time. Like right now, our extremely subtle mind is here, but it's not manifest. It's not functioning because the gross levels of mind are overwhelming it and we're so distracted, running around to all the other objects.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **The Twelve Links of Dependent Arising**

#### **Overview of ‘The Wheel of Life’**

We’re going to move into the twelve links, because the twelve links is a teaching that goes into much more detail about how the death and rebirth process happens. I’ve prepared the drawing that describes the Wheel of Life and a brief outline of the twelve links for you to use as a basis when we’re talking.

This drawing is called the Wheel of Life, and it often appears on the doors to the prayer rooms in the Tibetan monastery. This drawing is really explaining samsara or cyclic existence—death, rebirth, death, rebirth, and all the confusion in the middle. If you see that before going into the prayer room, it gives you some energy to concentrate when you’re doing the prayers.

This big demon-like figure that we see here is the Lord of Death, Yama. Yama’s four limbs and fangs hold a wheel, which represents samsara, the five aggregates of body and mind, this thing of taking one rebirth after the next. The four limbs are birth, sickness, old age and death. So it shows we’re really caught in this cyclic existence. The outermost rim is a pictorial representation of the twelve links, and I’ll get into explaining all of those next time.

The next rim in, you’ll see it’s divided into six

sections. Those are the six realms. And then the ring inside of that, you have some beings going down and some beings coming up. This shows that some beings are going to lower realms and some beings are being reborn in upper realms. In the very center, you have a pig, and in its mouth, it's holding a chicken and a snake. The pig represents ignorance, and what's coming from it is attachment and anger—attachment being the bird or the chicken, and anger being the snake.

So in a pictorial way, what we're seeing here is that, encircled by the Lord of Death and the four tragedies of birth, old age, sickness and death, we go through this system of the twelve links, taking one rebirth after another in the six realms, sometimes going up, sometimes going down, depending upon ignorance, anger and attachment.

In the upper left corner is the pure land, and I believe the figure is Amitabha Buddha. This is showing that it's possible to be reborn in a pure land, whereby we're out of cyclic existence and we have all the good conditions around us to be able to practice. In the upper right hand corner, you have a picture of the Buddha pointing: he's pointing the way to practice, pointing the way out of cyclic existence.

## Questions and answers

*[Audience:] The Lord of Death looks very malevolent. Is he symbolic?*

Yes. I think that's symbolizing that death isn't our favorite thing. It's interesting—the Tibetans talk about

a lot of these things in a very literal way as well as in a very symbolic way. I personally prefer the more symbolic interpretation, because to me it seems like really, our life is always overshadowed by death in the sense that we don't have the choice to live forever. Being held within that and being constantly reminded of our own mortality—that, to me, is what Yama, the Lord of Death, represents.

*[Audience:] What about the Tibetan skull beads? I've seen some people taking these beads from their rosaries to wear as ornaments, such as earrings.*

That's reminding us of mortality and impermanence, transience and death. Your rosary or prayer beads can just be made of regular, rounded beads. But some people have prayer beads where each bead is carved into a skull. They're used for doing your practice. I wouldn't take any of them to make earrings out of if they were meant for spiritual practice. Personally I wouldn't.

## **Remembering death**

The skull beads again remind us that what's so critical is to be aware of death while we're alive, because if we're aware of death while we're alive, then death won't be a frightening thing. Why? Because we'll have made our life very meaningful. When we remember death, it helps us distinguish what's valuable from what's not valuable in our life, what's important and what's not important. If we live our life with that kind of awareness, then when we die, we

have no regrets about wasting our time or doing negative actions or things like that.

Whereas when we don't remember transience, when we don't remember our mortality, then we make big deals out of very small incidents, and we create incredible negative karma, because we latch on to some small thing in our life and think it is a national disaster and create so much negative karma. The awareness of death really helps the mind to discriminate what's important from what's not important, and that automatically makes the life more peaceful, and it makes our Dharma practice more effective. The more effective our Dharma practice is when we're alive, the easier the transition becomes when we face death.

I was telling you before when we went into a lot of detail on death, that for the good practitioners, death is like going on a picnic. Look at Terry (a DFF member). There was something that was so incredible about the way Terry died. He got all the different aspects of his life cleaned up and cleared up, and he wasn't afraid to die. I've never seen somebody die quite like he did with this feeling of real fulfillment about his life. He said to me a couple of days before he went into coma that he just felt so happy to have met the Dharma and to have had the opportunity to practice. It has really helped him, and he felt that that has made his life very full. So he didn't mind dying, and he had spent time clearing things up with the people he needed to clear things up with, so I think when he died, he didn't seem to have a lot of distress and regrets.

This is the importance of remembering death,

because if we can live each day like that, each day goes by without regrets. We live each day and we have clean-clear relationships with people, whereas when we don't do that, then you have to go to Steven Levine and tell him in front of a whole big assembly hall how much you regret not telling your mother this or that before she died. If they had Steven Levine workshops in the bardo, everybody would be there going, "I didn't tell my children this." "Oh, I was so mean to my husband." "As an employer, I was really a bully." If we remember death, we're going to clear all those things up on a day-to-day basis instead of carrying them around with us.

*[Audience:] Are these images the same in all diagrams of the Wheel of Life?*

No, sometimes the images are slightly different, like instead of a monkey and a tree, you have a monkey and a house. There're different presentations. But the twelve links are always the same.

## **Introduction to the Twelve Links**

*[Note: First part of teaching not recorded, but a more in-depth discussion of the first three links are available in the next section.]*

### **4. Name and form**

Name and form is represented by the boat, oarsperson and passengers. The boat is the body. The passengers

and the oarsperson are the different mental aggregates. We're going across the sea of samsara in the currents of birth, aging, sickness and death. When we're born into a new body, it is represented by this new boat. This is the vehicle that will take us from this life to the next life. It's also the vehicle through which we experience all the happiness and unsatisfactory experiences of this life.

## **5. Six sources**

The fifth link is called the six sources. These are the six faculties or sources that produce cognition. Five of them are sense faculties: the eye sense faculty produces sight; the ear sense faculty produces hearing, the nose sense faculty produces smelling; the tongue sense faculty produces tasting, the tactile or body sense faculty produces touching. These five are subtle faculties located within the grosser organ. For instance, the taste faculty is not the gross tongue, but the part of the tongue that enables us to connect with the taste. It is something subtle inside the taste buds, not the gross tongue. They are called "sources" because they are the source of consciousness. Each one is the dominant condition which causes the five sense consciousnesses—visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile—to arise.

The sixth source or faculty—the mental faculty—produces mental consciousness. Included in the mental faculty are all six consciousnesses: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental. For example, in dependence upon a visual consciousness perceiving blue, we can later think about blue. That

visual consciousness is the dominant condition producing the mental conceptual consciousness that thinks about or visualizes blue.

In the context of one set of twelve links, the six sources refer to specific moments of development, i.e. when those six sources are attained. Tactile and mental sources are the first to appear just after conception in the womb. The being that has taken rebirth in the fertilized egg can feel touch. His or her mental consciousness is also active, though certainly not as sophisticated as it is later. As the fetus grows and the grosser organs develop, the other four subtle sense faculties come into being.

The six sources are symbolized by an empty house. Not a lot goes on in an empty house. But when residents move in, there are lots of activities. Similarly, as the six sources “move” into the body, we contact objects and perception begins.

## **6. Contact**

The sixth link is a couple embracing. This is contact. In order to have perception, we need the coming together of the object, the sense faculty and the consciousness. To see the color purple, I have to have the color purple, the eye faculty, and the visual consciousness, which is the thing that perceives it. Contact is when these three come together, producing cognition or perception. When you don't have contact, you won't have perception. For example, right now we're not having contact with our car. Our eye consciousness is not seeing the car. Because the object, the faculty and the consciousness haven't

joined, there's no perception of that. Contact is when those things come together, and that's symbolized by the couple embracing. This then creates perception.

Do you see this kind of evolutionary process we're going through? From ignorance (first link) that's creating karma, karma is placed on the consciousness, that consciousness takes rebirth in the womb, followed by the development of name and form and the six sense organs, which aren't yet functioning fully. When they start to function, we have contact, and the contact produces feeling.

## 7. Feeling

Feeling is the seventh link, and that's represented by the arrow in the eye. This is where we get really hung up. We get hung up on feeling and craving (the next link).

As soon as we have contact, it generates feeling. We have pleasant feelings, we have unpleasant feelings, we have neutral feelings. You can see how the contact is dependent arising; it is dependent on the object, the faculty and the consciousness. The feeling—pleasant, unpleasant or neutral—is also dependent: it is dependent on the contact. It's interesting, because when we have certain pleasant or unpleasant feelings, we feel like they're so solid, so real, so there. It is useful at that time to remember they only exist because there's contact with the object. If there's no contact, there will be no feeling. So it's not like these feelings are so solid and rigid. They exist because the cause for them exists. If there's no cause, there's no result.



So we have the feeling. There's nothing wrong in the feelings themselves. There is nothing wrong with feeling pleasure. That's what we all want, isn't it? There is nothing wrong with feeling displeasure, even though we don't want it. It is the same with neutral feelings. There is nothing wrong with these feelings.

When we get hung up, it is because of how we react to our feelings. And remember 'feeling' here doesn't mean emotional feeling. It means pleasant, unpleasant and neutral feeling. This is a slightly different usage of the word "feeling" than how we use it in liberal America.

## **Difference between "feeling" and "emotion"**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

We get tangled up because there's no word for "emotion" in Tibetan or Sanskrit, and our English word "feeling" is very vague. Our English word "feeling" can mean something like "I feel hot", or "I feel pleasant", or "I feel angry". It has many usages. Here the word "feeling" is referring just to the pleasant, unpleasant or neutral feelings. "Emotion" is more your reaction towards those feelings. When there is a pleasant feeling, I get all excited. I get delighted. I want more of it and I dream about it. That's emotion. When there is an unpleasant feeling, the emotion that can arise from it is I feel discouraged, or I feel disappointed, or I experience aversion or hatred.

When you're doing the mindfulness or breathing meditation, it is interesting to try and notice the

difference between the feeling and your reaction to the feeling. You might be sitting there watching the breath, and then your knee starts to hurt, so temporarily, you might put your attention on the pain in the knee. See if there's a difference between the sensation of the pain in your knee and your feeling of, "I've got to move my leg, I can't stand this!" Because what happens sometimes is, we get them all mixed up. There's the pain in the knee, but do you see how sometimes we build up this whole story about this pain? It's like, "I've got to move. I can't stand this. Why are they making me sit here?!" There's the physical sensation, and there is the whole emotion regarding it. They are two different things.

It is the same thing when you have a nice pleasant sensation. When you eat your food slowly and you experience some pleasant sensation, watch how the mind says right away, "I want more. I want more." And we start planning how to get more when we haven't even finished swallowing the first bite. But there's a difference between the pleasant sensation on our tongue, and the mind that then jumps in and says, "Oh, this is so great. This is the best I've ever had and I want more. I have to have more." So you can watch that and see where we get really hung up, which is when we don't leave the feelings alone but instantly jump in and give them juice.

When we respond to these pleasant and unpleasant feelings, we're getting into the next link—craving. We crave to be with the pleasant feelings, and we crave to be free of the unpleasant ones.

## **8. Craving**

Craving is a particular kind of attachment. Like attachment, craving involves wanting to be with pleasant things. But craving also includes the craving to be free of unpleasant feelings and the craving for neutral feelings to not subside and become unpleasant ones.

Craving is shown by somebody drinking. They're drinking alcohol. Isn't an alcoholic's mentality the best description of craving? We aren't all alcoholics, but the mind functions in a very similar way regarding other objects. We're praise-aholics, or money-aholics, or image-aholics. We want more. We want better. Craving is this addictive behavior and it's really the nature of dissatisfaction. When you drink a lot, or when you overeat, or when you over-listen to your music, or when you over-drive around the city because you're bored, or when you're a shop-aholic, it's the nature of dissatisfaction, isn't it? It seems like if we fulfill our craving, we'll be happy, but we're never so. That craving itself is such a painful emotion, because it's so dissatisfied, so restless. And you can feel it in your physical energy. You can feel this restless energy in your body sometimes.

## **9. Grasping**

Grasping is the next link. Grasping is when you're going for the next thing. Craving arises at the time of death, when we crave this (present) body. We don't want to separate from this body, so we crave it. And when we realize we have to leave this body, then what do we do? We grasp for another one. That's why it is represented by the picture of a person picking fruit off

the tree, reaching for another rebirth—as if we don't have enough problems already! We reach for another body to jump into, so that we can again get born, get sick, get old, and die.

People have this idea of, “We take rebirth to learn a lesson.” But I don't see a lot of people learning lessons. This is the whole reason why Dharma practice is so important. The moment we reach out for another body, this is the alcoholic taking another drink, this is the dysfunctional person going back into the relationship. This is just doing it again because it's familiar, because it's safe, because it seems like it's going to make us happy. Changing it is really scary. This is our universal sentient being phenomenon. It's not just us personally. We're all in the same boat here. Which is why when we come to see this, we really appreciate the Buddha's teachings. Look at our own behavior—we crave for this body, we jump into another one, we get born and sick and old and then die, and the process repeats. We look at our own behavior, and then there's the Buddha who comes along and teaches us the path to enlightenment and how to stop this recurring cycle. It's like this light in a dark tunnel, or the sun rising in the horizon. It's like, “Wow, I never knew that there was any possible way out of it.” We really feel at that time the kindness of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

## **10. Becoming**

The tenth link is called becoming, or sometimes it's called existence. I like to call it “becoming”. It's symbolized by a pregnant woman. What that means is

at that time when we crave for this (present) body at death and we grasp for the next body, the karma to jump into the next life is fully ripened. The karma is fully ripe, like a pregnant woman about to give birth. It's when you would leave this body and you would take the intermediate stage body that's similar to your next. And then the one of birth, the eleventh link, is when you get a gross body again.

## **11. Birth**

The eleventh link is birth. It's symbolized by a woman actually giving birth, but what it actually means here is conception. So the symbol here doesn't match the meaning exactly.

## **12. Aging and death**

The twelfth link, aging and death, refers to the period from the time of conception onwards. It is symbolized by a hunched-up old person and a corpse that is getting carried away. Aging and death do not happen to a person just once, say, at eighty-five. From the moment after conception, we're aging and heading towards death.

So these are the twelve links. This is just a brief introduction to the twelve links. We're going to go through them again more in-depth and really see how they work together.

## **Purpose of studying the twelve links**

The whole purpose of studying the twelve links is to

give us a real feeling of, “I want to be happy and I deserve to be happy, but I’m not going about it the right way. There’s another way to do this. I really want to free myself from all of my dysfunctional attitudes and behavior.” In other words, in psychological terms, “I want to stop being in denial, and make a determination to free myself from all my addictions and all my dysfunctional things.” Here, ‘addiction’ and ‘dysfunction’ refer to our attachment to cyclic existence. It is a much broader thing than in psychology. Much broader. But the basic principle is the same.

### **Recognizing ignorance, afflictions and karma as the root of our problems**

Lama Zopa Rinpoche mentioned something during one teaching, and it was so powerful that I typed it up. He said, “Our whole problem is that we took this body and mind which are in the nature of pervading compounded suffering.” Remember when we study the three kinds of suffering or unsatisfactory experiences, the pervading compounded suffering was having a body and mind that are under the influence of ignorance, afflictions and karma?

“What caused us to be born with such aggregates?” This is the question. Why are we in a body that gets old and sick and die? Why do we have a mind that is so confused and dissatisfied? This is the basic question in our life. Why is this happening? If you say it’s happening because there’s an external creator, then as Lama Zopa said, you need to get rid of the external creator and get a new one because that

one is the cause of all your problems. But it's not due to an external creator. There's nobody else that put us here. How did we get here? It's our own ignorance and afflictions, and the karma we create under their influence.

So this is making us look at, "Why are we here?" And when I have problems, "Why am I having this problem?" We usually say, "I have this problem because this person is doing this and that." But that isn't the principal reason. I'm having this headache right now because I'm in cyclic existence, because I'm under the influence of afflictions and karma. By my afflictions and karma, I got born into this life with this body and these minds with all these karma ripening.

### **Taking responsibility for our own situation**

This means taking responsibility for our own situation, which is not the same as blaming ourselves. We don't blame ourselves. It's not that we're bad people because we're in samsara. It's not that we're sinners and we deserve to suffer, or any of that kind of stuff, but it's just when I'm not mindful, when I don't take care of myself, when I don't explore what's reality and what isn't, I continually get myself into messes. In some ways this is very empowering because if we get ourselves into the messes, we're also the ones who can get ourselves out of them. All we have to do is stop creating the causes. It's not a question of perpetuating some external being so that they bestow grace or they move the puppet strings differently. It's a thing of generating our own wisdom and

compassion, bringing those to the forefront, and then freeing ourselves. Buddhas and bodhisattvas help, of course. They influence us. They guide us, but we're the ones responsible. This is very similar to modern psychological theory, isn't it? Be responsible for your own jams instead of pointing it off on someone else.

At the same time as we're doing this, we have to have a lot of compassion for ourselves. Compassion is the wish for others to be free of suffering. We also have to have that same wish for ourselves. It's not, "Oh, I'm in samsara because look what a creep I am, and I deserve this." It's, "No. I'm a sentient being. I have the clear light nature of the mind. I can be happy. I can become a Buddha. But I need to treat myself better." So practicing Dharma is a way of treating yourself better.

After Rinpoche posed the question, "What caused us to be born with such aggregates?" he went on to ask, "Did we have a choice in previous lives?" We didn't have a choice. Some people have this idea, "You're in the intermediate stage and you choose your next rebirth to learn lessons." No. We didn't have a choice. If we had a choice, we wouldn't choose to suffer, would we? We wouldn't. So it was clear, we didn't have a choice.

Why didn't we have a choice? Because we're completely on automatic. We're completely overrun by our afflictions. So Rinpoche said, "Did we have a choice in previous lives? Did we have control so that we could be born without suffering? No. The fact that we took this body, which is in the nature of suffering, shows that we didn't have a choice. We've been under the control of afflictions and karma since



beginningless time.” We have let the afflictions and karma take over. We’ve flowed with the current but we’ve flowed with the wrong current. We didn’t flow with the current of our wisdom-compassion mind. We flowed with the current of our afflictions and contaminated karma mind, and just went along with it, so we didn’t have a choice.

“Having the burden of cyclic existence that is these aggregates, the self has to experience suffering.” Once we have a body and a mind under the influence of the afflictions and karma, we’re going to have unsatisfactory experiences.

“The rope which ties the thorns of the five aggregates to our back is afflictions and karma.” That means the source of all the problems is the afflictions and karma. We get rid of the source, and the whole tangle falls apart. Has no energy. Doesn’t exist on its own. You see, everything is dependent arising. It’s not like cyclic existence exists as an external thing out there, solid, that has to be like that. It’s only that way because it arose depending on causes. We have the power to stop those causes, and do something different.

## **Two sets of cause and effect**

To go back to the drawing, remember I said there were two sets of cause and effect?

The Lord of Death and the Wheel of Life here form one set of cause and effect, with the chicken, the snake and the rooster being the causes, and the other things around it being the effects.

Then you have up here, in the top right corner, the

Buddha pointing towards the moon. The moon is nirvana. Nirvana is the cessation of all the unsatisfactory experiences and their causes in such a way that they can no longer occur again. It's the removal, the final absence, the cessation of those things, their non-arising. The Buddha is pointing us to that. So the Buddha's gesture is like the path to enlightenment. It's not that the Buddha is the cause of nirvana. The Buddha is a cooperative condition of our nirvana. He indicates the path to us, he points out to us what to practice and what to abandon in order to be liberated. When we follow the path, we get the result, which is nirvana. That's another set of cause and effect.

### **What is cyclic existence or samsara?**

I want to define cyclic existence. We tend to say, "Oh yes. This is samsara. We're all in samsara." And we tend to think the external environment is samsara—"America is samsara"—don't we? We say, "Samsara is too much!", meaning my job's too much, everything around me is too much, I've got to get out of samsara—where's the airplane? But samsara actually is not the environment we live in.

Samsara is our body and mind under the influence of afflictions and karma. Our body and mind that make us continually circle within the six realms. Samsara can refer to the present body and mind, or it can refer to our process of circling in the six realms, taking one body and mind after another body and mind—body and mind of a god, body and mind of a hell being, body and mind of a human, body and mind

of a hungry ghost. That's samsara. That's cyclic existence.

When we say we want to generate the determination to be free of samsara, it's not that we have to move out of Seattle. It's we have to free ourselves from the body and mind that are under the influence of afflictions and karma. That's a very important point to understand. The environment does influence us, but it's not the environment that's the root problem. Of course we have to choose our environment well so that we can practice well, but we have to remember that the basic problem is being under the control of the afflictions and karma which cause us to take a body and mind and have unsatisfactory experiences, over and over again.

We like to think, "If only things were a little bit different, then I could practice." "I can't practice well because I have a job." Or "I can't practice well because the cat bites me when I'm meditating." Or "I can't practice well because I can't get time off to go to a retreat." Or "I can't practice well because the neighbor's radio is blaring." We always think if only I were somewhere else doing something else, then I can practice better. "My present situation is just so filled with obstacles that it's difficult to practice." What we forget is that samsara is one big obstacle. If we had no obstacles, we wouldn't be in samsara. That's the whole point.

If we're in samsara, of course we're going to have obstacles. Of course. Wherever we go, whatever we do, we're going to have some obstacles. It's true that in some places or with some goings-on, we're going to have more obstacles than others. That's why you try

and create a good environment around yourself, try and live in a peaceful place, have a job with a right livelihood. Don't get involved in too many clubs and hobbies and social activities. Meditate in a quiet place instead of on a highway. Put yourself in a good environment, but don't think that a good environment is the thing that is going to do it. Wherever you go, you're going to have obstacles.

This came real clear to me once. A few months after I was ordained, I went from India back to Nepal. About a dozen of us went up to Lawudo which is a place in the Himalayas, where Lama Zopa's previous life meditated for twenty years. In his previous life Lama Zopa was called Lawudo Lama and he meditated in this cave for twenty years. So the energy in this cave is really strong. I remember we went in there and we were doing a retreat in Lama Zopa's cave, with Lama Zopa in there doing the retreat with us, but my mind couldn't concentrate on anything. It just came so clear to me that it's not the environment, because there I was in that incredible environment, but my mind was totally bananas.

### **Thought training teachings help us transform obstacles into the path**

It's not the environment. Fixing the external world isn't going to be the only thing that's going to make things better, because samsara is one big obstacle. That is why there is this whole set of teachings called the thought training teachings. The thought training teachings revolve around how to turn bad circumstances into the path. As long as we are in

samsara, we're going to have bad circumstances. So the thing is, is there a way that we can take these things, and transmute them into the path? Or every time we come up against a hindrance, are we just going to get blocked by it and get frustrated?

The “Wheel of Sharp Weapons”, the “Eight Verses of Thought Transformation”, “Seven-Point Training of the Mind”, “Advice to a Spiritual Friend”, Lama Zopa’s book “Transforming Problems”—these are all teachings revolving around transforming bad circumstances. Until we’re Buddha, we’re going to have bad circumstances. When somebody is enlightened, they have totally eliminated all the afflictions and the karma, all the undesirable experiences, and they have developed all their good qualities. If that person is living here, they will see this as a pure land. They go in the middle of the city, they see a pure land. They go to Somalia, they see a pure land.

The high-level bodhisattvas, out of compassion, voluntarily choose rebirth in a certain place to benefit others. Somebody like His Holiness looks like an ordinary human being. But if we could crawl inside His Holiness’ mind, which we can’t yet, I’m sure we will see that his experience is vastly different from ours. Once we become Buddhas, we’ll understand what his experience is. Even two people in the same room can have very different experiences. Have you ever had something happen where you left a place feeling very good and the companion you were with said, “Oh, wasn’t that awful?” Same situation, same place, but different experiences.

## **Our state of mind determines what we experience**

The state of mind is a real big determiner of our experiences. If your mind is overwhelmed by afflictions and karma, you could be here and this appears like a hell realm to you. When people flipped out or went completely psychotic, they are perceiving hell realm due to their karma though they are in the same environment as us. So it's not the place. You can be here. This can be a pure land. Interesting to think about that, isn't it?

For example, we have a glass of water here. If you're born as a hungry ghost, when you look at this glass of water, you see pus and blood. That's how it looks. That's the karmic vision. A human being sees water. A celestial being, a god, because of their incredible karma, when they see it, they see very blissful nectar. So it's karmic appearance. We think it's water, and that it's one solid thing. Actually, what it is depends on who's perceiving it.

Next time I'll go through the twelve links again, going more in-depth. There is a lot to discuss here. Any questions?

## **Questions and answers**

*[Audience:] How do we get out of cyclic existence?*

The way to get out of this whole cycle is to cut the ignorance. If we generate the wisdom realizing emptiness, then there's no first link. If you don't have the first link, you won't have the second one, you won't have the third one, and so on.

The path to do so is called the three higher trainings: ethics, concentration and wisdom. That is why there is so much emphasis on these three higher trainings.

Wisdom is the actual thing that cuts the ignorance, the wisdom realizing emptiness.

But to have that wisdom, you need to have the ability to keep your mind firm and steady on what you're meditating on. So you need concentration. If you just have wisdom but you can't concentrate on it, nothing sticks.

In order to generate the concentration and the wisdom, you need to keep good ethical conduct. If you don't keep good ethical conduct, your mind has more anger and attachment, and you have more distractions when you're meditating. Also you will have more negative karma, so you have more external problems too.

If we keep good ethics, we remove the very gross defilements. If we generate concentration, we remove a more subtle level of defilements. And if we generate wisdom, we cut the root of all the defilements altogether. So wisdom is the actual liberating factor. That's why we keep emphasizing compassion and wisdom, the two chief things on the path. Without the wisdom, you might be very compassionate, but you don't know where you're going.

*[Audience:] How does one cultivate the wisdom?*

It comes through hearing teachings, thinking about them and meditating on them. So again you have this three-step process. Wisdom is not a lightning bolt. You

have to hear the teachings so that you know how to cultivate the wisdom—what it is you’re trying to be wise about, what the object of the meditation is when you’re meditating. Then you need to think about those teachings to make sure you understand them properly. And then you need to meditate on them and integrate them into your mind. It is a three-step practice. It takes time.

### **Strengthening our refuge in the Triple Gem**

When you think about this, you can really see the kindness of the Buddha, because the Buddha is the one who gave the teachings, who showed the whole way for us to free ourselves. If the Buddha didn’t show the teachings, we couldn’t hear them and contemplate and meditate on them. When you think about this, that makes your refuge much deeper, because you can see how the Buddha is a guide to free us from the disadvantages of cyclic existence.

We often take the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha very much for granted. There is a Buddha and there’re teachings and there’re realized beings. We think “Of course!”. But no, there’re places in this universe where the beings don’t have the karma for the Buddha to appear, so they can’t learn the teachings. We are quite fortunate that we are in a place where the Buddha has appeared, the Buddha has given the teachings, the lineage of these teachings exists, and we have the opportunity to practice. It’s due very much to the kindness of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.



## **Interrelatedness of topics in the Lamrim**

Do you see how, when I'm explaining things, that all the meditations are interrelated, even though we've been going on the Lamrim step by step? We talked about cyclic existence here, but I was also relating it to perfect human rebirth, to refuge, and to generating compassion. The more you understand this, the more compassion you can have for others. Even though we're doing the Lamrim step by step, all these different meditations really inter-relate; the more you understand the later ones, the more they relate back to the earlier ones, and the more the earlier ones relate to the later ones.

Let's sit for a few minutes to contemplate this.

## **Purpose of Studying the Twelve Links**

We have been talking about the twelve links of dependent arising that describe how we take rebirth, live, die, get reborn, again and again in cyclic existence. The purpose of this teaching is to put us in touch with our own experience, to help us look at our lives in a very different way than we've ever done before, to see that what we're experiencing now is part of a cycle of many, many life-times.

Explicitly, it's taught to help us generate a sense of disgust and boredom for being in a dysfunctional situation. It's taught so that we overcome our denial and recognize that we're capable of a higher level of happiness; that the happiness that's found within cyclic existence is fraught with all sorts of difficulties and problems. What's the use of hankering after it

when it just becomes a disaster eventually?

So this teaching is really helping us to generate a very strong wish to free ourselves from cyclic existence, or the determination to be free. Sometimes it's translated as 'renunciation', which I don't like, because it gives you the feeling of, "I'm renouncing the world and moving to the cave!" This isn't what it means. What you're doing is you're determining to free yourself. You realize you have the capability to experience a higher, more lasting level of happiness than the present happiness. You're determining to be free from all the confusion of this life and future lives, and to attain liberation.

And then by extension, when we look at other beings, we see them as also caught in similar cycles of existence, and that's when compassion arises for them, wanting them to be free and to attain liberation. It's a much deeper meaning of compassion. It's not just about all the people who don't have food and clothes. It's also looking at this basic situation of getting born, getting sick, getting old and dying. It doesn't matter how rich you are, you're still in that situation and it's not fun for anybody.

When we have problems in our life and everything seems so overwhelming, it is very helpful to stop for a minute and think about the twelve links. When we start thinking about the state of being under the influence of anger, attachment and ignorance and being pushed again and again to take rebirth after rebirth, we realize what's bothering us at work isn't so important. In fact, we should actually expect conflicts like that because we are in cyclic existence.

What is truly important is to free ourselves from

cyclic existence. This puts daily problems in a different perspective. They don't overwhelm us now. We see that in comparison to the whole situation, those problems aren't so big. It gives us impetus to practice good ethical conduct, concentration and wisdom to free ourselves from the whole situation.

When I was living in France, there was a person living at the center whom I had so much problems with. Obviously I was right and she was wrong but she just didn't get it and was driving me totally crazy! [Laughter.] One time Lama Zopa Rinpoche visited the center and taught the twelve links. He started teaching about how sentient beings get born, get old, get sick and die. I looked at that person whom I was so upset with, and all of a sudden I recognized, "Wow, she is a sentient being who's getting born, getting sick, getting old and dying. She is under the influence of afflictions and karma, this completely out-of-control process." I couldn't be angry with her anymore! Look at the situation she's in. Look at the situation I'm in. What's there to be angry with her about? Reflecting like this is very useful, very applicable for daily life problems.

## **The Twelve Links**

### **1. IGNORANCE**

The first of the twelve links is ignorance. This is the source of the whole cycle of death and rebirth. This is the chief cause of cyclic existence.

**Definition:** Ignorance is the wrong view of the

perishing aggregates which newly motivates its (i.e. that set of 12 links) second branch, formative action.

I know it sounds like gobbledygook. Do you remember we were studying the mental factors and there was the mental factor of the wrong view of the perishing aggregates? This mental factor looks at the aggregates of the body and mind or the relatively existent self, and says, “Ah! There’s a real solid inherent person there! There’s a real *me*. Something is really there, to be defended, to be protected, self-existent, independent and inherent.”

That is the wrong view of the perishing aggregates. It’s called ‘perishing aggregates’ because it’s referring to the collection of body and mind, the five aggregates. It’s the ‘wrong view of the perishing aggregates’ because it doesn’t see them accurately, and it makes an inherently existent self on top of the collection. Whenever you get very angry or very jealous, or when you want something desperately, stop and check how the ‘I’ feels to you, how the self exists. That strong feeling of *I*-ness or *me*-ness is the wrong view of the perishing aggregates.

Due to our ignorance, we believe in an inherently existent person. That makes us act out of anger or attachment or jealousy or pride, or some other affliction. It can also make us act out of faith and compassion. Since we are seeing everything as solidly existent, it creates the second link which is formative action or karma.

## **Two types of ignorance**

What we have just talked about is the ignorance of the twelve links. Now we're moving from the ignorance of the twelve links to ignorance in general. There are two types of ignorance in general:

1. Ignorance of the ultimate truth or ultimate reality. This refers to the wrong view of the perishing aggregates.
2. Ignorance regarding karma or actions and their effects. This refers either to not believing that our actions bring results or disregarding it [that our actions bring results]. We just disregard it and don't live our life according to it.

Due to the ignorance that grasps at an inherently existent self, we create good, bad, or neutral karma. For example, if I make an offering on the altar, I may be thinking, "There's a real me. There's a solid Buddha. There's a solid apple. Everything is solid." But I still have an attitude of generosity. I want to make offerings and I want it to benefit others. It's a virtuous attitude although I'm making everything concrete. Therefore I'll still be creating positive karma.

When we have the ignorance that doesn't understand karma and its effects, then with that, we tend to create negative karma, because we're not living our life with a regard for cause and effect. That could either be an overt misconception like, "It's fine to lie and cheat as long as I don't get caught. Nothing wrong with it. Nothing unethical about it. It's only unethical if I get caught." Thinking that I can do anything I want and it's not going to have any kind of

ramifications in future lives or at any other time.

Or, we disregard cause and effect, not paying much attention to it, “Well, I know it’s negative karma, but it doesn’t matter. It’s just a small thing.” We do that all the time, don’t we?

This is why developing the wisdom that realizes emptiness is so important, because only this wisdom can cut the ignorance from the root. If we cut the ignorance from the root, then all the other complications don’t arise.

To relate this back to the very subtle mind that we were talking about previously. The clear light mind is pure in nature, and the ignorance is like the clouds in the sky. The clouds and the sky aren’t the same things. We can remove the ignorance and still have the clear light nature of the mind. The clear light nature of the mind is what becomes a Buddha. When we’re in touch with this, it gives us a solid basis for self-confidence. We recognize that in spite of the ignorance and everything else that is going on, there is this clear light nature of the mind that’s present. It can be revealed and made manifest and purified.

Lama Yeshe said, “Imperfect superstition brings forth all the wrong fantasy view, and is the obstacle to discovering perfect wisdom. Ignorance makes transmigrating beings afflicted because it obscures seeing the right view.”

‘Imperfect superstition’ is the term Lama used for ignorance. He also called our anger, attachment, belligerence, spite and other afflictions ‘superstition’. We Westerners went trotting up to Kopan in Nepal and we think we’re not superstitious, and then Lama said, “You bet!” That’s because superstition is when

you believe something exists that doesn't exist. Since we believe that there's a solid, concrete person even though such a person does not exist, we are hallucinating or being superstitious. When we believe that there's a solidly existent person who is completely evil, who's our real enemy, that's superstition.

This superstition—the wrong fantasy view of ignorance, attachment and other afflictions—is an obstacle to discovering perfect wisdom. That ignorance makes transmigrating beings (beings who go through the series of twelve links, getting born, getting old, getting sick and dying) afflicted, because it obscures their seeing the right view, the reality, how things are. So Lama was talking about the disadvantage of ignorance.

Now you can see why ignorance is symbolized by a blind person in the drawing of the Wheel of Life. When we're ignorant, when we're blind, we don't understand things. We don't understand who we are. We don't understand how we exist. We don't understand how phenomena exist. We completely misinterpret things and hallucinate all the time.

## **2. KARMA OR FORMATIVE ACTION**

The ignorance of one specific moment generates a specific formative action or a specific karma. Let's say I get angry at somebody and start talking behind their back. The ignorance is there at that moment, and on the basis of that, I get angry and have the intention to say nasty things about someone. That intention pushes me to speak words that cause disharmony, and

that act of speech becomes the karmic formation.

So now we have the first two links of one particular set of twelve links. The reason I say “one particular set of twelve links” is because we begin many sets of twelve links in our life. Each set begins with an instance of ignorance that produces a karma or formative action. The karmic imprint of that action is put on the consciousness (link 3 of that set of 12 links) and produce a certain rebirth. At the same time as we’re creating the first two and a half links of many new sets of 12 links (ignorance, formative action, and causal consciousness), we are living out the resultant links of another set, which was begun with ignorance, formative action and causal consciousness in a previous life.

**Definition:** Formative action (karma) is the afflicted thought (intention) which is newly formed by its first branch, ignorance.

Formative action includes the ten destructive actions and the positive actions that we do under the influence of ignorance.

You do the action, and once the action ceases, it leaves an impression on the mindstream. Impression, impression of karma, karmic seed, tendency or potency—these are different translations of the Tibetan word “bag chag”. The action has ceased, but its “energy” hasn’t disappeared completely. There’s still some “residual energy” of the action and this connects the action to our future experience. In philosophical terms, it is said that the disintegratedness of the action is produced when the



action itself ends, and this disintegratedness or the “having ceased-ness” of the action connects the action with its result.

We often negate the potency of what we do. We think, “What I did this morning is over. It’s not going to have any other result besides the immediate result we had this morning.” But we can see that this isn’t very good thinking. Even if you don’t believe in karma, if you think a little wider, the result of what we did this morning could influence many, many things even in this lifetime. It can also leave many impressions on the mindstream that can influence what we experience in future lifetimes. Instead of seeing everything we do as isolated little blips in our life, we begin to look at what we’re doing from a much larger perspective. This is how everything inter-relates. We’re creating our future right now.

## **Different types of karma**

There’re different kinds of karma.

***Fortunate (wholesome, positive, constructive) karma and unfortunate (unwholesome, non-virtuous, destructive) karma***

Fortunate karma is a karma that always brings a happy result—a happy rebirth, rebirth in the upper realms (as a human being, god or demi-god).

Unfortunate karma brings rebirth in lower realms. Remember that things are designated ‘virtuous’ or ‘non-virtuous’ according to the result they bring. In other words, Buddha didn’t say, “This is virtuous and

this is non-virtuous because I said so.” Rather the causal action is labeled constructive or destructive in dependence upon the result it produces. When the result is an unfortunate rebirth, the cause of it is called “non-virtuous”, or “unwholesome”. When you have a happy rebirth, we call the cause of it “virtuous,” “positive” or “constructive”. The Buddha didn’t invent any of this. He just described them.

### ***Immovable karma and movable karma***

Immovable karma is the karma we create which causes rebirth in certain god realms in which the beings have very strong meditative concentration. These include the form realm concentrations and the formless realm concentrations. We’ve all been born there innumerable times in previous lives, if you can believe it. We’ve all had samadhi before, many times.

When a human being has strong samadhi without wisdom, his or her mind is still under the influence of afflictions and karma. When he dies, he’s reborn in a god realm corresponding exactly to that level of samadhi that he attained. In other words, that karma produces rebirth in that specific form or formless realm, not in any other. This is why it is called ‘immovable’.

Movable or fluctuating karma is karma other than immovable karma. For example, somebody created the karma to be reborn as a dog. When they’re in the bardo or the intermediate stage, let’s say all the conditions didn’t come together for this person to be reborn as a dog. He was reborn as a horse instead. This is movable karma. Instead of a rebirth as a dog, it

can ‘move’ and become a rebirth as a horse.

It’s also movable in the sense that we can experience it in this life. When we get sick (e.g. headache) or experience some problem as a result of doing purification practice, they say that this is often very heavy negative karma that would have resulted in a very horrible rebirth, manifesting instead in this lifetime as that sickness or problem. So you purify it and it’s ‘moved’. Instead of it being this negative karma to be reborn in an incredible, horrible situation for five billion eons, you get a stomachache or you get the flu, or something like that.

When unpleasant things happen in your life—you get fired from your job, or you get sick, or whatever—if you remember to think, “Ah, this could be because of my Dharma practice purifying my negative karma. This could be a very horrible negative karma ripening that would have brought intense suffering for a very long time. It’s ripening now in this relatively minor thing, compared to what it could be.” This prevents us from feeling completely sorry for ourselves. It gives us meaning to whatever difficulty we’re experiencing at that particular time. This way of thinking is very useful if you apply it in the situations.

I sent Terry, one member of our group who recently died from AIDS, a text Lama Zopa was teaching about. It says that when you’re sick, try and see your sickness as a result of negative actions you’ve done in the past. The negative actions would have resulted in incredible sufferings, but we’re fortunate that it ripens in this lifetime as this sickness. As awful as AIDS or cancer is, it’s much better than five billion eons in the lower realm. If you can see

your disease in that perspective, then it gives a sense and a meaning to your experience of a disease. Instead of just freaking out, “How can this happen to me?” you understand. The mind has some kind of peace.

Just to diverge a little. I have been going to a pastoral counseling workshop where I’m the only Buddhist. One of the leaders is Jewish and the rest are all Christians. What has come up a lot was when people are sick, they get angry at God. It’s interesting for me to listen to them, because it points out so clearly to me why I’m a Buddhist. It seems like many people feel, “I’ve been a good person and I go to church. And now I have cancer! Why did God do this to me? Why does this happen to me?” These people get very angry at God, and they lose faith. It creates incredible turmoil and suffering in their mind. On top of the physical disease, they have the spiritual malaise of being angry at God and then feeling guilty about it. It’s very painful for them.

Buddhism totally avoids all of that. From the Buddhist point of view, when awful things happen, we’d say, “It’s a result of my own past actions. It doesn’t mean I’m a bad, horrible person. It doesn’t mean I deserve to suffer. But it is a result of my actions, so I take responsibility for that. If I’ve been a Dharma practitioner and I’ve been trying to purify and trying to create good karma, this could very well be a fortunate circumstance. Instead of this karma ripening in horrible, incredibly lengthy suffering, it’s ripening now as this disease. I’m purifying the karma and getting rid of it.” Your mind can then be peaceful with that and you only have the physical pain to deal

with, free of all the mental and spiritual pain that can make the illness so awful.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

When a karma ripens, how our mind thinks determines whether we are simply experiencing the result of karma or whether we are purifying the karma.

Let's say you get the flu. If you become angry because of it and are rude to the people who are caring for you, you're not purifying any karma. You're just experiencing the result of some negative actions done in the past. But if you think, "This is the result of my own negative actions, done under the influence of self-centeredness. I gladly experience this suffering. This karma could have ripened in an unfortunate rebirth so actually I'm fortunate that it only ripened as the flu," or if you think, "May I take on the suffering of everyone who has the flu," then your discomfort from being ill becomes purification. By transforming how we react to being sick, we will be able to stop our present mental suffering and prevent anger, discouragement, and wrong views from arising. In that way, we also protect the mind from creating more negative karma in response to this suffering.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

This is my interpretation, I suggest you check with somebody who knows more. The purification could come partly from your purification practice, which

makes a very strong negative karma ripen in a relatively minor way, and partly from your way of viewing it. This is my understanding. Like I said, I could be wrong. But that's what makes sense to me.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

If you didn't transform it, you'd probably start getting very angry and discouraged. All that habitual karma to be angry, to speak bad to other people, to grumble, and all that, would start influencing our behavior. Our afflictions would then jump in and we will go completely bananas! But if you apply thought transformation, then all these don't come up.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

This is the taking and giving practice.

First you see it as a result of your own karma and accept it. What purifies it even more, and which creates a lot of positive potential, is if you then say, "May this suffice for the suffering of all others."

Then you do the meditation where you imagine taking on the suffering of others, using it to destroy the ignorance and self-cherishing and then giving others our body, possessions and positive potential. If you add that meditation, you purify a lot more negative karma and create an incredible amount of good karma. In this way, your being sick becomes the best way to create good karma, not because being sick is good but because of the way your mind is.

This is why thought training is so important. We can't control when we're going to get sick. It is going

to happen some time or another. But if we can practice this, then it becomes an incredible protection for our mind whenever we get sick, transforming what would otherwise be an obstacle into our practice of the path.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I think it takes some feeling of wanting to purify yourself, for the karma to be purified. In other words, it's brought on by your own wish to purify. Every time we experience unpleasant things, it isn't necessarily purification. It's only purification if we had wanted to purify. If an unpleasant experience happens to a Christian who had wanted to purify, then it could be purification of karma. But not every illness we experience was from a karma that would have manifested as intense suffering in horrible rebirths. The illness could just be from the karma to get sick.

There was one student who interviewed several Buddhist nuns and several Christian nuns and sent me a copy of the interview. It was lovely because some of the Christian nuns were saying very similar things, that when unfortunate things happen, instead of freaking out, you put it in the context of your religious practice. I think the truly spiritual Christians or Muslims or Jews or Hindus or whoever it is, will have a way to transform negative circumstances. But I think most people have difficulty with that.

Westerners are really hung up on the mechanistic view of karma. Instead of checking the meaning of karma and the motivation, and checking their own minds, they want to know how to manipulate and get

around it and pull the strings. So Westerners tend to look at it as a legal system.

When Gen Lamrimpa was teaching about karma, it was interesting that he went into all the details, and many people were wondering, “Why did he tell us all that? It just sounds like a legal system.” I think we didn’t get the point that Genla was making. He’s saying that for us to reflect on how we act and how we think. What’s the difference between a very heavy negative karma and a very light negative karma? How do we discern the difference in our own mind so that we can at least abandon the heavy one if we can’t abandon the lighter one? It’s all taught in the spirit of practice, for examining our own mind, not for seeing it as a legal system.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

The practice of *powa* is possible because karma is ‘movable’. *Powa* is the transference of consciousness. Some people practice it themselves, ejecting their consciousness to a pure land. Sometimes a very good practitioner could do the transference of consciousness for another person who has died. The deceased may have the karma ripening to be reborn in a certain realm, but due to the *powa* done by the practitioner and the other karma that the deceased had created previously, the deceased’s consciousness can be transferred instead to a pure land.

In the pure land, the whole atmosphere is revolving around Dharma practice. All the conditions are very conducive for you to pursue your spiritual practice. You don’t have lots of other things to do. There isn’t



lots of noise. You don't have car insurance to worry about. There is nothing to distract you. Even the wind blowing through the trees becomes a Dharma teaching. It is very easy to practice there. There are various pure lands. Amitabha's pure land is one of them. In the Chinese Buddhist tradition especially, they do a lot of pure land practice, praying to be reborn in Amitabha's pure land.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

No, pure land is not horrifying. What you're referring to is the desire realm. When you're born as a desire realm god, you lead a super-fantastic life. But seven days before you die, you start to decay and that causes much suffering. You get reborn in the god realms because of good karma, but that's still within cyclic existence. When the karma runs out, you get born somewhere else. That's why we're always going up and down from one rebirth to the next. Whereas once you take rebirth in a pure land, you don't get reborn in any of the other realms. And because everything around you is so conducive for practice, you can become a Buddha.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

The very high masters could just go to a pure land and stay there, but what we're saying is, "We need you here." By making that kind of prayers, we're creating the karma to be able to have them come here and manifest so that they can teach us. Buddhas manifest in relationship to our karma.

*[Audience:] What about their karma?*

When you're a Buddha, you are free from the influence of contaminated karma. Lower level bodhisattvas still have ignorance and are reborn under the influence of the 12 links. But higher level bodhisattvas—those who have realized emptiness directly—aren't reborn within the 12 links. They appear in our world due to compassion.

We ordinary beings need Buddhas and bodhisattvas in our world, so their manifesting depends on our karma. Having a precious human life like ours is so fortunate because the Buddha has manifested and taught, the lineage exists, and we still have teachings and teachers all around us. This isn't an accident. It isn't always this way. All these exist because we created the karma for them to happen.

If sentient beings don't have the karma, then the Buddha doesn't manifest. The Buddhas manifest according to the sentient beings' level of mind. You remember that story about Asanga who was meditating to get a view of Maitreya but he couldn't see him? Then he saw a dog infested with worms and because he had so much compassion, he wanted to take the worms out. He did it with his tongue so it wouldn't kill the worms. Then he puts them on a piece of his own flesh that he cut off from his thigh. By doing that, it purified so much of his negative karma that it wasn't a worm-infested dog appearing to him anymore, but Maitreya Buddha. Asanga got all excited and wanted to share Maitreya with everybody else, so he put Maitreya on his back and ran through the village. But the people in the village didn't see

anything on Asanga's back. Only one old lady who had a little bit of good karma saw a dog. This shows that things happen in relationship to our karma.

*[Audience:] What's the moral of the story?*

The moral of the story is: create good karma and abandon negative karma, and that things are not inherently existent.

Formative action or karma makes transmigrating beings afflicted because it plants polluted imprints on their consciousness. When we act out of ignorance, we create karma that is polluted (or afflicted or contaminated). When it gets planted on our consciousness, it leaves a karmic seed that will then lead to a rebirth in some realm in cyclic existence.

### 3. CONSCIOUSNESS

Where are these karmic seeds planted on? They're planted on the third link, the consciousness.

**Definition:** Consciousness is the afflicted consciousness which is just joined to the rebirth by being under the control of afflictions and karma.

There are two kinds of consciousness: causal consciousness and resultant consciousness.

The causal consciousness is not the consciousness that takes rebirth. The causal consciousness is the moment of consciousness upon which the karmic seed was implanted. If I'm ignorant and I get angry at somebody and slander them, those are the first two

links of ignorance and karma. The imprint (or seed or potency) of my action of slandering was put on the next moment of consciousness (while I'm still in my current life). This is the causal consciousness.

Resultant consciousness is that stream of consciousness (mindstream, consciousness, mind—they're all basically the same) that takes rebirth. This is the one that the definition is referring to.

You can see that causal consciousness doesn't fit the definition of the third link of consciousness, because it's not the one that takes rebirth. But generally speaking, under consciousness, both the causal consciousness and the resultant consciousness are implied.

Sometimes, we talk about the six types of consciousnesses: the five sense consciousnesses (visual, auditory, gustatory, etc) and the mental consciousness.

Consciousness makes transmigrating beings afflicted, because it leads them to the next rebirth. Consciousness bears the karmic seeds which ripen later and consciousness takes rebirth in another realm. All the problems in that rebirth start from the moment of conception.

*[Audience:] Do we each have our own mindstream?*

We each have our own mindstream. But “mindstream” is just a label designated in dependence upon all the different moments of mind that are changing.

### **Causal consciousness and resultant consciousness**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Causal and resultant consciousnesses are connected in that they are on the same continuum. But they happen at two different points in time. They are also different because consciousness isn't the same at any two moments.

*[Audience:] What's the difference between mindstream and consciousness?*

Mindstream and consciousness are used in different ways in different situations. Sometimes I use 'consciousness' to mean mindstream. Sometimes I use it to mean consciousnesses like the visual consciousness, auditory consciousness, which would be a part of the mindstream (since all six consciousnesses make up the mindstream). Or I could use 'consciousness' sometimes to refer to the primary mind (the visual consciousness, auditory consciousness, etc) but not the mental factors that aid in the perception. So I use the word 'consciousness' in different ways at different times.

The term "mindstream" emphasizes that the mind or consciousness is a continuum.

Let's sit quietly for a few moments.

### **Review of first three links**

We have been in the middle of talking about the twelve links. We stopped after the third one. I will recap roughly the first three and then we will go on.

**1. Ignorance** We talked about ignorance in the twelve links being specifically the attitude that does not understand who we are, how we exist, or how phenomena exist. That ignorance grasps at the self and at other phenomena as having a solid, permanent, rigid essence that exists from its own side. Due to that ignorance, we generate the afflictions of attachment, anger, pride and jealousy and we act [out of these afflictions].

**2. Action or Karma** The action is the second link and is all the mental intentions, mental actions, as well as the physical and verbal actions that we do. Although these actions cease, they leave imprints on our consciousness.

The karma that we are talking about in this second link is throwing karma. Remember when we talked about karma, we talked about throwing karma and completing karma? Throwing karma are the ones that throw us into a specific rebirth and determine what realm we are born into. Completing karma are the karmas that fill in the design. It is as if throwing karma creates the outline of the body and completing karma fills in where you are born, what happens to you in that life and different things like that.

**3. Consciousness** The third link of consciousness has two parts: the causal consciousness and the resultant consciousness. The karma (second link) is planted on the causal consciousness. Our actions plant karmic seeds on the consciousness all the time, so the beginnings of many different sets of twelve links already exist because under the influence of

ignorance, actions or karma were created and seeds of these actions “placed” upon the causal consciousness. The resultant consciousness is the consciousness at the moment of rebirth. For example, with a good motivation someone is generous. That action or karma places a seed upon her mindstream. That is the moment of the causal consciousness. Later, when that karma ripens and the consciousness is being reborn in the next life, that is the moment of the resultant consciousness.

So that is the review. This is difficult material, even though it is our own experience. That is what is so weird about it; we have done this so many times that we should be sick of it by now. We live this and yet it is real hard to understand.

#### **4. NAME AND FORM**

The name and form is the fourth link. Remember what ‘name and form’ mean? They mean mind and body. ‘Name’ is the mind and ‘form’ is the body.

**Definition:** Name and form is the mind (name) and body (form) which exists in the nature of the afflicted maturation result of karma, during the time after the dependently arising link of consciousness has occurred and before the dependently arising link of the six sources has come about.

‘Afflicted’ means under the influence of afflictions and karma. ‘Maturation result of karma’ is sometimes

called ‘ripening aspect’ and refers to the maturation result, the body and mind that we are born into.

Remember when we studied karma, we mentioned that each action had four results? The first one was the maturation result or the ripening result. This is the realm that you are born into. It is afflicted because the rebirth is coming about due to the influence of afflictions and karma. The resultant consciousness was the moment of conception. Name and form is the next moment right after that, but we have not activated the next link of the six sources yet. So name and form is that little interval, like in the case of a human rebirth, when we are in the womb right after we have taken conception, but we have not developed all of our different capacities to perceive objects.

Right after we took conception, when we were little babies in our mom’s womb, we definitely had mental consciousness and we had tactile consciousness. We could feel things. For instance, if your mother goes jogging you can feel it. There are those kinds of sensations. But we are still little babies and the eyes are not working yet, so we cannot see. We cannot smell or taste stuff. So name and form is that little slot in there right after conception.

## 5. SIX SOURCES

The six sources also happen in the womb. Here the six sources mean the six sense doors.

**Definition:** Six sources are the six organs that exist in the nature of the afflicted maturation result (i.e. the five aggregates) during the time after the



dependently arising link of name and form has occurred and before the dependently arising link of the contact has come about.

This is the time when all the senses are developing in the womb. As the eye organ, ear organ, the olfactory and gustatory organs are developing in the womb, we slowly begin to be able to use them either in the womb, or right after we are born. These are the doors because they enable us to contact the external world. These six doors are made up of the five sense doors and the one mental door, which includes all the sense consciousnesses, since these sense consciousnesses act to stimulate the mental consciousness. We think about the things that we see, hear, etcetera.

## 6. CONTACT

After the six sources or faculties have developed, contact with external objects occurs.

**Definition:** Contact is the afflicted mental factor which contacts the quality of its object (pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral) through its own capability due to the convening of the three—the object, source and consciousness—and which exists during the time after the dependently arising link of six sources has occurred and before the dependently arising link of feeling has come about.

Contact is the arising of the sense consciousness through the object being perceived via the faculty. When I look at the flowers and see the color red,

contact is what brings together the red of the flower, the visual faculty and the visual consciousness to produce the perception of red. We do not see anything unless there is an object, a faculty, and a consciousness. Without these three, perception cannot occur.

If you close your eyes, the eye faculty is not working so no visual consciousness arises. If there is no object there, then even if you have the consciousness and your eyes are open, you perceive nothing. In the case of a dead body, the faculty and the object are present, but there is no perception because there is no consciousness. Contact happens when you have those three (an object, a faculty and a consciousness) coming together.

*[Audience:] What about if you see something in your imagination or visualize something?*

That is the mental consciousness and the faculty in that case would be the different consciousnesses that saw or heard things before that are similar to what you imagine. For example, I see a painting of Chenrezig. That visual consciousness is the faculty producing the mental consciousness that visualizes Chenrezig later, when I sit down to meditate.

The dominant condition for the visual consciousness perceiving the painting is the eye faculty. When you close your eyes to visualize Chenrezig, your eye faculty isn't operative. Thus the dominant condition for the mental consciousness imagining Chenrezig is the previous visual consciousness that saw the painting.

*[Audience:] The definitions all start with “the afflicted”, is there any concept that is not afflicted?*

When we are not under the control of afflictions and karma, then it is not afflicted. In our state it is as if everything is afflicted. When you think about it, this is pretty heavy stuff. As long as my mind is misperceiving things and giving them extra-added flavor thinking that they are inherently existent, then everything that I am involved in is afflicted in that sense and we are not perceiving things as they are. We are perceiving them through our own filter.

## 7. FEELING

**Definition:** Feeling is the afflicted mental factor that experiences the object—suffering, happiness, or indifference—through its own capability by depending on its cause, the dependently arising link of contact.

Feeling is what arises after contact. Contact experiences the quality of the object. Feeling is what experiences a happy, painful, or neutral feeling as a result of the contact. Feeling does not arise if there is no contact that precedes it, and contact does not arise if there is no sense faculty before it.

So if we have sense organs, then we have contact that produces all our consciousnesses. When we have consciousnesses, we automatically get feelings. We see red and the mind gets a pleasurable feeling, or we hear nails going down a chalkboard and we get an unpleasant feeling, or we think of our little toe right

now and have a neutral feeling.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

A lot of our karma ripens in feeling because whenever we have unhappy feelings, it is a result of our own negative karma. Whenever we have happy feelings, it is a result of our own positive karma. Feeling arises because there is contact with the object. Exactly how we experience that contact is afflicted, in the sense that it is influenced by our past karma. We are not experiencing things freshly, but are definitely experiencing them through the influence of our past karma.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

When you are doing the breathing meditation and something comes up and you label it ‘thinking’, or ‘hearing’, or whatever, this labeling is a mental consciousness, a thought consciousness. But while you are doing that you can also observe the pleasant or unpleasant feelings in your body. You do not need to label these and have a little voice in your head that says, “This is pleasant. This is unpleasant.” You kind of know it through your own experience.

The advantage of doing that (labeling) when you are meditating is that you make your own experience clear to yourself. When we are not aware of our own experience and we are on automatic, craving quickly follows feeling. Whereas when you are meditating and you have a pleasant feeling, if you notice ‘pleasant feeling’ then you do not necessarily generate craving

after it. You just recognize a pleasant feeling for what it is without the mind jumping in and saying, “But it is so wonderful, I really have to have more.”

When you are doing the breathing meditation, labeling helps give you some space between the feeling and the craving. Because usually when we have a pleasant feeling, what happens? Right away we crave it. We want more and better. This is the story of our life, is it not?

## 8. CRAVING

From the feeling that can be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, we then get the next thing which is craving.

**Definition:** Craving is the mental factor that by depending on the dependently arising link of feeling, does not wish to separate from its object.

### Craving for sense pleasure

There are different kinds of craving and it is interesting to look at them. One is the craving for sense pleasure. We have had a pleasant feeling (the preceding link) and now we crave for the pleasure. We have a list of everything we want from hot-fudge sundaes to nice soft beds and hot showers. The mind is very involved in the craving of pleasurable objects and not wanting to be separated from them.

### Craving of fear

The second kind of craving is the craving of fear. The

craving of fear is the craving to be free from the unpleasant things. This is the mind that, when you have had a really difficult day, says, “That is it! It is all over! I am getting out of here; nobody bugs me anymore!” We are saying, “I’ve had enough! I can’t stand this anymore. I crave to be separate from it.” We want to be released. We want to be free from the unpleasant feeling.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I think fear in the sense of when we’re afraid of something, we have a lot of aversion for it, and we want to be away from the thing we’re afraid of. So the craving of fear is the craving to be free from the unpleasant things.

We are using ‘fear’ in a very loose, general way, not in our standard Western way of thinking about ‘fear’. Fear is real interesting when you start to meditate on it. When you meditate on what fear really is, you come to see fear as related to attachment and also very much related to aversion.

## **Craving of life**

The third kind of craving is the craving of life. This is the one that happens at death-time. This is the one where a lot of fear comes. People think things like, “Oh-oh, I am dying. I am separating from my body and my mind and my whole ego-structure and this whole identity I built up for myself. What am I going to be?” Panic sets in. They crave for life. They grasp on to this feeling of ‘I’ because there is a real big fear

that the ‘I’ is going to completely disappear. We are so convinced that the body and mind are one solid, inherent thing that is ‘me’, but now it is all changing; we are separating from them.

Have you ever woken up in the morning and not been quite sure who you are? Have you ever had that experience? You wake up and not only are you not sure where you are, but you are not sure who you are. Have you ever watched how very quickly an identity comes and you can almost feel it kind of go “wump!” and instantly you know very well who you are. I think what is happening is that we cannot bear the thought of not knowing who we are. We have to have some kind of identity to hold on to. “This is me, I am this sex, I am this nationality and of this race. I have this kind of personality. I like this and I do not like that. People have to treat me this certain way because this is who I am and this is my body.” This is the drama of our lives. We are so incredibly attached to this ‘I’ that is the central figure in our melodrama.

So this third kind of craving arises at death. That is why when people are dying, they may get real frightened and grab on to their body and to the bed. They are really agitated and nervous.

## 9. GRASPING

Then from craving, what we get is grasping. Both craving and grasping are forms of attachment.

**Definition:** Grasping is attachment which is the strong increase of craving.

When you have gotten craving down really well, you have graduated to grasping [Laughter.]. Here, we are just clinging on. This happens very strongly at death. It happens at other times in our life like craving does, but especially strongly at death. Whereas craving is very often associated with the present body—we crave it and we do not want to be separated from it, grasping is grasping at the next body. It is grasping at the appearances that appear to the mind and by grasping at them, it makes the karma ripen and propels us towards the next particular body.

For example, let us say somebody has the karma to be born in one of the life forms of incredible suffering. At death time they might be strongly grasping onto this body. They do not want to separate from it. But they realize that they have to separate from it and then they have an appearance in their mind of a very hot place. At that moment, this hot place seems wonderful. In their mind, it just seems so wonderful so they grasp for it. And then whammo! They take rebirth in the hot hells because the mind is grasping at that.

Remember I mentioned before, how the twelve links are analogous to a dysfunctional relationship? Here you can see that. When you are in a dysfunctional relationship you have an appearance of something that, if you had some wisdom, you would realize was awful. But it is appearing to you as wonderful and you run towards it. Is that not what happens in dysfunctional relationships?

Or to somebody who has a chemical dependency problem, the appearance of the booze or the dope is wonderful and they run toward it and grasp at it. Then



what happens? It is complete misery afterwards. This is also what is happening especially at death time. When different appearances come in the mind, we might not be thinking real clear and the mind runs towards these various things. It grasps at them and that grasping becomes a form of grasping at what the next life is going to be.

### **Four kinds of grasping**

In general, there are four kinds of grasping. Not all these four kinds ripen at the time of death. This is just a general description of grasping.

#### **Grasping to sense pleasure**

One kind of grasping is when we are grasping to sense pleasures, to desirable things. This is like craving.

#### **Grasping to the view**

The second kind of grasping is called grasping to the view. This is where we are very attached to wrong views. We are very attached to these wrong opinions we have and might say, “There is no such thing as cause and effect. Karma is a bunch of junk, do not tell me about karma and rebirth, these just do not exist and I am completely convinced of this.” That is an example of grasping at the view where the mind is super-attached to its own wrong opinion. We are like that, are we not?

When we are talking about attachment to the view, we are talking about important philosophical views

like thinking God created the universe. From the Buddhist viewpoint this is a wrong philosophical view. But if you are completely entrenched in that view—God created the universe and there is no other way it came about—that would be attachment to a view. We get real, real attached to our wrong views. Sometimes we feel very threatened by anybody challenging our views and challenging our philosophy. We can even get attached to right views and feel threatened when people challenge them. We can be real attached to our own opinion; “If I think it, it is right.”

The attachment to those wrong views can be real damaging. If we think that God created the earth, then it is going to be real hard for us to practice the path to enlightenment, because instead of seeing ourselves as responsible, we might be likely to see God as responsible. I am not saying that Christians cannot create good karma and cannot become enlightened. Do not get me wrong on this. There is as much variety in Christians and what they believe, as in Buddhists... maybe even more. I am saying that if we have this really strong wrong view, this kind of wrong view does not give us the opportunity to free ourselves.

### **An example of wrong view**

Let us say there is a particular person who has a strong wrong view and says, “My happiness is completely dependent on God; I do not need to do anything except please God.” So they give God some presents (offerings). Some people look at the Buddha in the same way. “I give Buddha some presents and the Buddha should give me some happiness.” Or if

they do not believe in cause and effect they might think, “Oh it does not matter what I do. I can do what I want as long as when I lie, it does not hurt anyone. Then it is not going to have any effect on my mind. When I use really cruel words, if nobody else is around, it is not going to affect my mind.” Not believing in cause and effect is a wrong view.

### **Grasping to the self**

Another kind of grasping is grasping to the self. This is also called grasping to the doctrine. This is a really strong pride or grasping at a true existence of a person, or at a true existence of phenomena. It is thinking, “Things are solid. There is ‘*me*’ inside this body. I am fully convinced there is a ‘*me*’. There is my body and there is my mind and everything is real solid.”

### **Grasping to wrong ethics and conduct**

The fourth kind of grasping is grasping to wrong ethics and conduct. This is thinking that things that do not have the capacity to produce liberation do produce liberation. So here you get all the funny paths that people teach.

### **Examples of wrong ethics**

Buddhists are always very quick to point out this one story that they love to tell. It is about some ascetic in India who had some kind of clairvoyance. But his clairvoyance was limited; it was not perfect

clairvoyance like the Buddha's; it was limited clairvoyance. He saw that in his previous life he had been a dog and since he is a human being in this life, he drew the mistaken conclusion that acting like a dog creates the cause to be reborn human. Since he wanted to be reborn again as a human in the future life, he started acting like a dog.

This is why you have to be very careful of people who say they have clairvoyant powers. People can have limited clairvoyance and it does not give you the complete story. Acting like a dog is not a cause to become a human being, even though that person may have been a dog in the rebirth before they became a human being. It is different causes that create a human rebirth. So that mistaken belief causes wrong conduct.

More examples of wrong ethics and wrong conduct is thinking that if you walk across hot coals or bathe yourself in holy water, you are going to purify your negative karma. Or if you are Jim Jones' follower, thinking that if you follow him perfectly and take poison, you are going to attain liberation. Even grasping to ascetic practices, grasping and thinking, "If I fast long enough, I am going to purify myself," is wrong ethics.

All you need to do is pick up a new age magazine and you will see lots of these different kinds of things—attachment to the view, attachment to the doctrine, attachment to wrong ethics and practices. Do you remember when we were studying about the afflictions and we were talking about the root afflictions? Do you remember we covered these things? These are coming up again here.

## Craving and grasping at death

When craving and grasping arise at death time, they act as the water and fertilizer to make the karmic seed ripen. Let us say that during life I had great faith in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and I made an offering on the altar and prayed to become enlightened and prayed for a good rebirth. I still had ignorance at that time because I was still grasping at my self, the apple offering and the Buddha as inherently existent. But I created karma and it was virtuous karma because it was the karma of generosity.

That karma, that imprint, was put on my consciousness. At the time of my death, craving and grasping arise—craving for this body, grasping for the next—but I manage to think of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha as I am dying. I think of this because I have lots of Dharma friends around me who were not letting me forget; they are all chanting or giving me instructions or showing me pictures of the Buddha, or something like that. Craving and grasping arise and I am still grasping very much at this ‘I’, but my mind is in a positive state. Maybe I have a nice vision coming and my craving and grasping wind up nourishing this seed in the mindstream of having made the offering to the Buddha in the past. So that karmic seed is now nourished by the craving and grasping and is ready to take the next rebirth. This is the tenth link of becoming.

*[Audience:] Does everybody die with craving and grasping?*

In general, when we develop the wisdom directly realizing emptiness, we will not crave and grasp at the time of death. Then no karma gets activated for another rebirth. For this reason, one point where we can cut the twelve links is at the time of death, by craving and grasping having ceased. Aryas of the hearer and solitary realizer vehicles have some slight craving and grasping that cause virtuous karma to ripen. They direct their minds so a good rebirth occurs, continue to practice, and attain liberation. Arya bodhisattvas may have some subtle craving and grasping, but due to their realizations they are no longer born enmeshed in samsara, although they are not yet completely free from it either. Their consciousnesses may be reborn in a pure land for aryas or, out of compassion, they may create many manifestations in samsaric realms to benefit sentient beings.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Grasping arises from the craving, so at death time if you are able to focus on emptiness, you will cut the craving and the grasping. At death time we may not be able to focus on emptiness, but we may be able to lessen our craving and make it less strong. We may be able to make the mind more relaxed, which gives the opportunity at least for some positive karma to ripen.

## 10. BECOMING

**Definition:** Becoming (existence) is the factor existing in the nature of the maturation aggregates

(the body and mind of the future life) bound by afflictions, which is the potentiality of karma made stronger by its craving and grasping.

This is when the karmic seed is just ready to ripen, right before you go into your next life.

### **An example of becoming**

Let us say there is somebody who was into killing wild life on the planet and did not care at all about their action. They have the ignorance and the karma of doing the killing, and that seed is planted on the mindstream. At death time they have craving and grasping and due to the environment they are dying in, or due to the way they are thinking, this karma of having killed all this wildlife on the planet without caring two beans, ripens.

An example of how they are influenced by the environment is, for example, dying to 'L.A. Law' on the television in the hospital. How often in the hospitals, people die listening to 'L.A. Law' on the television! 'L.A. Law' is on with all these violence, and this makes the person dying think violent thoughts. When we watch these things, that is how we begin to think, is it not? We need to be real careful what we watch on TV.

So to go back to the example, the person is dying while watching the violence on TV, and they start thinking violently and generate craving and grasping. Then the karma of having killed all the wildlife ripens. They might have some appearance of all these animals and it appears really nice so they grasp at it,

and whammo, they are reborn as a calf and put into a veal cage.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

I would not like to use the word ‘deserve’ regarding rebirth. Let us say someone creates one set of twelve links because he gets angry and he speaks harshly. But he also helps an old lady carry some packages, so he creates some good karma. Then five minutes later, he is telling somebody off again and another five minutes later, he is making an offering on the altar. After another five minutes he is saying the Four Immeasurables and then later he is lying to somebody [Laughter.]. This is kind of the way it is, is it not? So he has created the first two and a half links (ignorance, karma and causal consciousness) of many different sets of twelve links. They are all resting on his mindstream.

Let’s say he is flying to India and the plane gets hijacked. The hijackers torture him and his mind is completely bananas and berserk. The craving and grasping at that time activates the karma, let us say, from a time when he lied to somebody with a manipulative motivation. That karma gets activated and his consciousness takes rebirth in a dog’s body. His consciousness still carries the first two and a half links of the twelve links from actions he did while he was a human being.

Then when the dog is dying, a Dharma practitioner is present and gives him a nectar pill, recites mantra, reads Dharma out loud, and instructs the dog to take a human rebirth. As a result, the dog is calm and has a



positive frame of mind. The craving and grasping at that time activate the karma from when he helped the old lady carry the packages. The consciousness is reborn as a human again. Becoming is when that karma is just ready to produce the next rebirth.

## 11. REBIRTH

**Definition:** Rebirth is the aggregates existing in the nature of the maturation aggregates bound by afflictions and joined to a new life in cyclic existence under the control of afflictions and karma.

Rebirth is the body and mind at the time of conception.

## 12. AGING AND DEATH

From rebirth, you get the next link, which is aging and death.

**Definition:** Aging is the body which decays by being under the control of afflictions and karma; death is the cessation of a similar type of mental and physical aggregates; that is, the mind separating from the body under the control of afflictions and karma.

Birth is when you are conceived in the womb. Right after that, you have aging and death. That is an interesting way to think of life because when we think

of children we do not usually think of them as aging, do we? We think of them as growing. But in actual fact, from the time that we were conceived in our mom's womb, we have been dying the whole time. We are in the process of aging and it leads to death.

This is going on during our whole life, but we do not see it. We always think that aging and death are things that happen to other people, or if they are going to happen to me, they are going to happen a way long time from now. But in actual fact, from the very moment after conception, we have been in the process of heading towards death.

So the whole impetus in this process is that it is all under the influence of afflictions and karma. In other words, we are all on automatic, so to speak. Whenever our minds are under the influence of afflictions and the karma, we are running, running, running, thinking we are finding happiness, thinking what we are doing is fantastic and yet in actual fact, our minds are just completely on automatic and under the influence of the afflictions and karma. We are not really free at all. We make a big deal about being free in America. We think we have so much freedom, but we do not have freedom from our own anger, we do not have freedom from our own attachment, jealousy, pride, laziness or wrong views. We are not really free at all.

## **Questions and answers**

*[Audience: inaudible]*

At least the first few links are happening with great

rapidity. Each day with the ignorance, the karma and the causal consciousness we are starting many new sets of twelve links. But while I am alive today, I am just experiencing the one link in one set of twelve links, the aging.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

It is not like we are only experiencing one set of twelve links at a time. We have many, many sets that can overlap and link. For example, in this lifetime I am experiencing the rebirth, aging and death of one set of twelve links from karma that I did fifteen million eons ago. At the same time, I am creating the ignorance, karma and causal consciousness of many new sets of twelve links. It is kind of mind-blowing, but when I go through this next time, you will see a little bit clearer how they fit together. That is one of the reasons they are called links, because things are linked together and interrelated.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

The body is always changing. If we look at the body in this lifetime, we are looking at the link of aging and death. Our body, from the time after conception until we die, is one link of aging and death of one set of twelve links. But within that, the body is changing moment to moment to moment. What is aging? Aging is that which existed in one moment, but does not exist in the next moment. So like you said, everything is re-generating and changing, changing, changing.

## The wisdom of emptiness

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Only the wisdom realizing emptiness cuts the continuity of the afflictions. In other words, we can have greater or lesser moments of afflictions throughout our lifetime because we have moments where we are much clearer and other moments when our mind is really bananas. Sometimes during moments when our mind is bananas we might think that we are really clear, but actually we are not clear. Have you ever had a time when you thought you were being real clear and then two days later you look back and thought, ‘Boy, was I messed up!’

So we can have moments of greater or lesser clarity on a relative level, but still, all that is often done within the grasping at inherent existence. We are still thinking, “I am a real thing and what I am experiencing is real, solid and here.” The ignorance is grasping at something that is non-existent as existent and is making everything very solid in our minds. The wisdom realizing emptiness is the thing that cuts the ignorance. It is seeing that all these solid concrete things our ignorance is grasping at as existing do not in fact exist as solid and concrete. That is what cuts the continuity of the afflictions. That is what the wisdom does.

To develop wisdom, we start by hearing teachings so that we can learn from other people what does exist and what does not exist. Then we have to contemplate it, think about it, reflect on it, and see if it makes sense. We try to understand what inherent

existence is so that we can know what it is we are negating. Then we have to meditate and make that part of our own experience. Understanding emptiness is not a thing of just sitting and clearing your mind of all thoughts.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

You might have great concentration and you might have removed all the discursive thoughts, but you still have this very innate sense of ‘me’ and there is probably a lot of grasping at the bliss of the concentration. We get tricked by the bliss.

### **Importance of meditating on the twelve links**

This is really important stuff to meditate on because it gives us a way of understanding what our experience is and it helps us break down our notion of self. We need to do this because we have a very strong notion of self. We think, “This is me. This is who I am. These are important things in my life. This is the way things are.” When you start meditating on the twelve links your sense of self changes because you begin to realize, “I am only in this body and in this mind because the causes for it have been created. If the causes had not been created, there would not be this body and this mind and this identity that is happening right now. This identity that I have right now is not going to last forever. When I die and leave this body and mind different karmas are going to ripen and I will wind up in a different place.”

So if you really reflect on this, it helps you loosen

up the grasping at self and the grasping specifically at ‘who I am right now.’ It also helps you have a really different attitude toward what you consider problems. The things that we usually get so bound up with as problems pale very much in comparison to this whole problem of being under the influence of the afflictions and karma. So when we really know that that is the real problem, then all the little headaches we experience today do not bug us so much anymore.

If you spend time thinking about this it gives you a whole different way of looking at your life and feeling about things. This is not just intellectual stuff. It is real interesting to think about this as, “Here I am experiencing the aging and death in one set of twelve links. I have experienced the birth of this twelve links because I had craving and grasping at the end of my last lifetime. I had created karma that ripened at the end of my last lifetime and that is how I got here.”

We are karmic creations. Sounds like a new line of clothes, Karmic Creations [Laughter.]. But that is really what we are. It is not like we are solid personalities that are real; we are just manifestations of karma. It is a matter of “Come, come—Go, go” as Lama Yeshe used to say.

Let us just sit quietly for a few minutes.

## **Relating the Twelve Links to the Four Noble Truths**

The teaching on the twelve links can all be put into the Four Noble Truths.

The twelve links are:

1. Ignorance
2. Karmic formation (conditioned factors)
3. Consciousness
  - a. Causal consciousness
  - b. Resultant consciousness
4. Name and Form
5. Six sources
6. Contact
7. Feeling
8. Craving
9. Grasping
10. Becoming
11. Birth
12. Aging and Death

The **first Noble Truth** is true sufferings, which are what we want to be free of, the samsaric existence that we want to be free of. Relating this to the twelve links, true sufferings are the **projected effects** and the **actualized effects**. They are Links 3b through 7, and Links 11 and 12. These comprise our samsaric life, the nature of which is suffering.

Remember suffering here doesn't mean just the 'ouch!' kind of suffering. It means undesirable experiences, being under the influence of afflictions and karma. It sounds like technical language—true sufferings—but if we look, it's just basically our experience. The body that gets old and sick and dies; our senses which activate contact, which activates feelings.

Attached to happy feelings and hostile to unpleasant ones, in our ignorance we act to get rid of what seems to be the source of pain and to get what

seems to be the source of pleasure. These actions are karma, and since most of these are done with ignorance, anger, and attachment, they put negative karmic imprints on our mindstream. These ripen in more unhappy circumstances in the future. This is why it's called cyclic existence—we just keep going around in circles. This all arises from our body and mind, which are in the nature of suffering or unsatisfactoriness.

The **second Noble Truth**, the true causes of suffering, are Links 1, 2, 8, 9 and 10. These are the ones that cause all of the undesirable experiences.

**Ignorance** (Link 1) causes suffering because it doesn't perceive reality and as a result, we generate afflictions and create karma.

**Karmic formations** (Link 2) cause suffering because karma is what ripens at the time of death and propels us towards another unsatisfactory rebirth in cyclic existence.

**Craving and grasping** (Links 8 and 9) cause suffering because they are what help the karmic potency ripen, especially the karma that ripens and throws us into the next rebirth. They are causes because they help ripen the karma that is contaminated by ignorance.

Link 10, **becoming**, also causes suffering, because it is the karmic imprint when it is about to ripen and is ready to bring forth the next rebirth.

When we are in cyclic existence, we are under the influence of afflictions and karma and experience undesirable effects because of those. Among these links that are true causes of suffering, three of them



are afflictions and two of them are actions, or karma. Ignorance, craving, and grasping are afflictions and karmic formations and becoming are actions or karma.

Ignorance is the root of all the other afflictions, such as attachment, hostility, resentment, jealousy, arrogance. By not perceiving reality, it acts as the basis for all the other negative emotions and afflictions to arise. Craving and grasping are afflictions because they are a type of attachment. When attachment arises very strongly, especially at death, our mind is propelled right back into another body.

Two of the causes are actions or karmas. Link 2, karmic formation, is any action that has the power to cause another rebirth. This is where the ten destructive actions (that we have gone through previously) fit in. When we do any of those ten with all factors complete—object, intention, action, and completion of the action—that karma has the power to bring another rebirth in cyclic existence.

Link 10, becoming, is also a type of karma, because it is that same karmic potency when it's about to bring its result. So Link 2 is the action that leaves the potency or the seed on the mindstream. The potency stays there for some time, until the craving and grasping that can ripen it arise. Link 10 is this potency at the time of death, when it has been nourished with “water” and “fertilizer” and is ready to propel rebirth in another body.

So of the twelve links, three are afflictions and two are karma, and together they are the true cause of suffering. The remaining seven links are true

sufferings, because they are the results of afflictions and the karma. They are the undesirable circumstances that we experience, and as such, they are the first of the Four Noble Truths.

I'm hoping that you are seeing how all these things fit together in different ways and the different ways of looking at the same thing. Think about how the Four Noble Truths relate to the twelve links. Think about your life: Which parts of it are true sufferings? Which are true causes of suffering?

Remember that the whole reason for learning all of these is because it's actually describing our experience and it's taught so that we can generate a strong wish to get out of this unsatisfactory cycle of existence. Instead of re-enacting the twelve links again and again, which is what we've been merrily passing our time doing since beginningless time, if we have a strong determination to be free from them and attain liberation, then we we'll actually become interested in creating the causes for the lasting happiness of liberation and enlightenment. Lasting happiness comes from true cessation and true path, the **last two Noble Truths**.

## **The Order of the Twelve Links**

### **HOW A SET OF TWELVE LINKS OCCURS OVER TWO LIFETIMES**

Now, we're going to look at how one set of twelve links occurs over two lifetimes and over three lifetimes.

Remember that we have begun many sets of twelve links. When we talk about beginning one set of twelve links, we are talking about one specific moment of ignorance that causes a specific action that plants the karmic potency on the causal consciousness at a particular time. For example, let's say I got angry at a family member this morning and spoke harshly to them. Under the influence of ignorance (link 1), I spoke in a mean way (link 2), and that left a karmic seed on my consciousness (link 3). This is the beginning of a new set of twelve links. We are talking about very specific instances here. Therefore we have begun many sets of twelve links. Some have already been completed and we've experienced the rebirths they've caused in the past. Other sets are only partially completed, with ignorance, karmic formations, and causal consciousness created. Unless we purify the karma, or unless we attain liberation, these sets will bring our future rebirths.

If we look at one set of twelve links, they can occur over two lives or over three lives.

The way in which they occur over two lives, is: Let's say in this lifetime, due to our ignorance, we hold a grudge against somebody and retaliate for harm they caused us in the past. This creates karma which leaves an imprint on the causal consciousness. These are the **projecting causes** (Links 1, 2 and 3a).

These occurred in a particular situation, for example, we retaliated when a playmate made fun of us when we were ten years old.

Then, at the time of death, we generate craving for our present body and grasping for the next life. These, combined with other circumstance—what's

happening around us at death-time and what thoughts and feelings are in our mind at that time—make that one particular karma (of retaliating when we were ten years old) ripen. (By the way, it can also be a good karma ripening, it doesn't always have to be a bad karma.) This ripening is Link 10—becoming. Craving, grasping and becoming are the **actualizing causes** (Links 8, 9 and 10).

The projecting causes and actualizing causes all happen in this lifetime.

Ignorance, karmic formations, and causal consciousness, as well as craving, grasping and becoming occur during this lifetime. As a result of them, rebirth into another body occurs. In that rebirth, the seven remaining links will be experienced: resultant consciousness, name and form, six sources, contact, and feelings (Links 3b through 7). They are mostly referring to the first instances of these things happening. Therefore in the case of a human rebirth, they are mostly happening in the womb.

Links 3b through 7 occur at the same time as Links 11 (birth) and 12 (aging and death). 'Birth, aging and death' is an abbreviated way of speaking of all of these links. Birth (Link 11) is roughly corresponding to resultant consciousness (Link 3b), the consciousness that takes rebirth in the new body. But I have also heard that it corresponds to name and form. I have heard it both ways. All the other links—six sources, contact and feelings—occur while one is aging.

Or we can put it this way. Links 4, 5, 6 and 7 (name and form, six sources, contact and feelings) occur during the time of Link 12 (aging and death),

because from the moment after we are conceived, we are automatically aging and in the process of heading towards death. Even though we are in the womb, the sense sources are forming and contact and feeling arise.

Links 3b through 7 are the **projected effects**, while Links 11 and 12 are the **actualized effects**.

In that way, one set of twelve links occurs over two lives. All the causal ones occur in one life, and all the resultant links (effects) in the very next lifetime.

## **HOW A SET OF TWELVE LINKS OCCURS OVER THREE LIFETIMES**

There is another way in which one set of twelve links can happen. It happens over three lifetimes.

Let's say, fifty million eons ago, there was a person called Joe Schmo in the Land of Ish Kabibble (Life A). Joe Schmo made an offering to the Buddha, but his mind was ignorant. He was still grasping at everything as truly existent. At the time when he made the offering to the Buddha, he prayed for a good rebirth in the next lifetime. That action of making offering to the Buddha left an imprint on the causal consciousness.

At the time of his death, Joe Schmo was very attached to his house. The attachment rose strongly and he didn't want to die and be away from his house. As a result, he was reborn as a mouse in the house. The rebirth as a mouse was a result of another set of twelve links. It was not a result of the set of twelve links that was created from making offering to the Buddha. In this latter set of twelve links, there are

only Links 1, 2 and 3(a) so far, and these were created fifty million eons ago. Since then, the continuity of mind which was Joe Schmo was born as a mouse and then as so many other different rebirths in those fifty million eons.

Then this lifetime, the continuity of that mindstream again takes rebirth as a human being (Life B) named Sarah. At the time of Sarah's death, her Dharma friends remind her to take refuge, think kind thoughts, and meditate on love and compassion. She does that and has a very positive frame of mind when she dies. Even though she has craving and grasping, the positive frame of mind enables the karmic potency that was created from making offering to the Buddha fifty million eons ago to ripen.

In the lifetime as a human being (Life B), the links of craving, grasping and becoming are present, and in the very next lifetime (Life C), all the other links, which are the resultant links of that particular set of twelve links begun fifty million eons ago, ripen.

In this way, this set of twelve links happen over three lifetimes. Life A, which occurred fifty million eons ago, had ignorance, karmic formations and causal consciousness (Links 1, 2 and 3a). Life B which is now, has craving, grasping and becoming (Links 8, 9 and 10). Life C has to be the life right after Life B, and it has the resultant links (Links 3b through 7, and Links 11 and 12).

Between Life A and Life B, fifty million eons may pass. Or Life B can be the very next life after Life A. In other words, between Life A and Life B, there can be any amount of time. It doesn't matter.

But between Life B and Life C, because there was

craving, grasping and becoming in Life B, the results of that set of twelve links are experienced in the very next lifetime. There is no gap between Life B and Life C.

## **MANY SETS OF TWELVE LINKS CREATED**

So you see, we have many sets of twelve links going on at the same time. Joe Schmo started many sets of Links 1, 2 and 3(a) in previous lives. At the time of his death, he had craving, grasping and becoming from one of these sets and was reborn as a mouse where he experienced the remaining links. That mouse also begun more sets with Links 1, 2 and 3(a). At the end of that life as a mouse, craving, grasping and becoming from another of the sets of twelve links he had started arose, and they propelled the resultant links that were experienced in the very next rebirth. While experiencing these resultant links, that being again initiated more sets of twelve links. And the process goes on and on.

This is samsara, isn't it? This is confusion. [Laughter.] This is the mind in a state of confusion. Although we want to be happy, we get tangled up and do many different actions—some positive and some negative—under the influence of ignorance, and thus we get reborn again and again. This is because we don't understand the path to enlightenment, because we don't understand who we are—or rather, who we aren't—and because we can't differentiate between positive and negative actions.

This is why the determination to be free is so important, because the determination to be free says,

“I’m sick of this. I’ve had it! This has gone on long enough. I’m putting my foot down! Enough is enough. This has got to stop!” All the language that you usually use when you are really mad at something, this is where you can use it. [Laughter.] “This can’t go on. I’m setting up realistic boundaries. I’m getting out of this dysfunctional situation. I’m going to do something!” We make a genuine determination to seek real happiness instead of wanting just to distract ourselves all the time. When we seek genuine happiness, we know we have to create the causes for this. Thus we turn to the Dharma, and learn, think about, and meditate on it.

In some Dharma books, the determination to be free is translated as ‘renunciation’. I don’t think ‘renunciation’ is a very good translation, because in English, ‘renunciation’ makes you think of going off and living in a cave, doesn’t it? “I’m renouncing the world. I’m going to go live in a cave and eat nettles.”

We think that is what renunciation is. That is not renunciation. Renunciation doesn’t mean going to live in a cave. You can go live in a cave and eat nettles but still be incredibly attached to a lot of things. You can be attached to your nettles. [Laughter.] You can dream about pizza and Chinese food and everything else while you are meditating. You can also be incredibly attached to your reputation, thinking, “I hope all those people back in Seattle know how ascetic I am and what a great and glorious meditator I am sitting out here eating nettles. They probably all respect me a lot. How great I am!”

Renunciation does not refer to where you live and what you eat. That is why I don’t like the term



‘renunciation’. I think it brings forth some misconceptions. I prefer to translate the Tibetan term, which is ‘nge-jung’, to mean the determination to be free, because when you have made that determination to be free in your heart, then it doesn’t matter whether you are here or in a cave, because your mind is single-pointedly seeking liberation and you have a clear direction in life, a clear meaning and purpose to your life. You are not wishy-washy.

I have been taking a pastoral care course. In today’s session, we talked about what are the things that are likely to be your concerns if you have a terminal diagnosis. We brainstormed this and made a big list. Here, it became very clear to me what the advantages are of meditating on death. In my meditation, I’d thought of all these concerns many times, so thinking and talking about them didn’t frighten me. Lama Zopa has been pounding awareness of impermanence and death into me for quite some time and so has His Holiness and all my other teachers. Even though I don’t have a deep understanding of impermanence and death, at least, superficially, I’ve thought about it.

However, some people in the room looked very worried during the discussion. One of the questions that came up in the session was, “What is the meaning of my life?” People are likely to think about this when they are terminally ill. This could be a very traumatic question when one is terminal and lacks a spiritual path. The person may think, “I’ve lived my whole life. What’s the meaning of it? What have I done?

When I die, what’s going to happen to me? What’s the meaning of being alive?” It is a real concern of

people when they are dying.

If we have meditated and have been able to develop the determination to be free, we have a very clear purpose in our life, a very clear meaning for our life. The meaning of our life is to get ourselves out of cyclic existence. We have been able to spend our life working towards that meaning, working towards that purpose. When we get a diagnosis of a terminal illness, we don't freak out because we know we have a purpose in life and we have been living that purpose up until now. We know we'll keep living that purpose for however long we have to live. We'll also make prayers to have another precious human life in order to continue progressing towards liberation and enlightenment in our future lives.

When there is a very clear purpose and meaning to things, life is easier and so is dying.

*[Audience:] You mentioned that renunciation is not where we live and what we eat. What, then, are we renouncing?*

What you are giving up or renouncing is being born repeatedly in cyclic existence under the influence of ignorance, anger and attachment. We are renouncing true sufferings and true causes. We usually think that renunciation means giving up money, possessions, relationships, and these things. The money and the relationships are not the problem. It's our ignorant attitude towards them that has to be given up. We are making a very clear decision in our life not to follow ignorance, anger and attachment. This kind of clear decision is included in the determination to be free.

We want to be free from cyclic existence and the afflictions and karma that cause it.

I'm explaining this because when you read Dharma books and come across the term 'renunciation', try and look beyond your first impression of the word.

## **THE TWELVE LINKS IN FORWARD ORDER**

We are going to talk about the twelve links in forward order. Here we look at why they are called links of dependent arising. How do they arise? How do they come into existence? By depending on other things. In other words, the links don't happen by accident. They don't happen without cause. They don't happen because of God. They happen because when there is ignorance, there will be formative action or karma. When there is formative action (karmic formations), there will be consciousness. When there is consciousness, there will be name and form, and so on.

Because of one, the next arises. And because of this later one, there is the next. When you meditate on the twelve links in this forward order, you are studying the evolution of cyclic existence, how it comes into existence. You come to understand why ignorance is the root of cyclic existence. You also come to understand how, if we cut ignorance, we can cut off all of the complicated results that come from it. Meditating in this way is called meditating on the forward order, because you see the development, the evolution of cyclic existence. It is also called **meditating on the afflicted side** because this sequence is afflicted by the afflictions and karma.

When you are meditating, don't just sit there and think, "La-la-la, because there is ignorance, there is karma. Because there is karma, there is ...." Don't just say the words, but make examples. "Today, I got very ticked off at somebody and I told them off. Well, what was going on? First of all, there was a lot of ignorance. I was grasping at an inherently existent *me*, an inherently existent person and an inherently existent thing that they did that was inherently awful. There was definitely ignorance in there. Everything seems very solid and concrete. Because of the ignorance, which is the first link, I got angry. I acted upon that anger and told that person off. That is the second link. My consciousness received a new 'present'. It got this new seed planted on it. That's Link 3(a), the causal consciousness."

Then you think, "What happens if, at the end of my life, craving, grasping and becoming from that same set of twelve links arise? Let's say I just live this life not doing much Dharma practice. I don't train my mind in any way. When I arrive at the time of death, I'm scared and don't want to die. I'm not ready to die. I'm craving this body. I'm craving my ego-identity." We can relate to that. "And then I grasp at another body or another ego-identity because I'm so afraid I will stop existing when I die. I don't want to cease to exist, so I've got to have another body that will make me solid again." This ripens that karmic potency. It's going to be there, fresh and ready, the link of becoming. And then I'm going to wind up in another body and the other seven links will follow after that. What kind of a body am I going to wind up in as a result of this action of telling somebody off today?

Not a fortunate one.”

Meditate on the twelve links in this way and see how one link comes from the previous one. “I will take rebirth. Then I’m going to have name and form. The body and mind will start to develop in the womb. The sense organs will develop, and there will be contact with objects in my environment again. That will generate more feeling and anger and attachment, jealousy and pride will arise. Somebody may say something obnoxious to me that offends me, and I’ll get angry again and ....” You begin to see why it’s called cyclic existence. [Laughter.]

Do your meditation in this way. Think of it in terms of your own personal experience, not abstract ideals somewhere in the sky. “This is what is happening right now with me.” That gives you a much more personal feeling of, “Wait a minute. I have a precious human life. I want to make this useful. How can I make it useful? By making a determination to free myself from cyclic existence and attain liberation. That is an important objective in my life.”

## **Compassion for ourselves**

This determination to free ourselves is compassion for ourselves. You don’t hear that term very much in the teachings. We usually think of compassion for others. But the determination to be free is compassion for ourselves, because compassion is wanting somebody to be free of suffering and its causes. When we have the determination to be free, we have compassion for ourselves because we want ourselves to be free from all undesirable experiences and their causes. In the

*lamrim* or ‘Gradual Path to Enlightenment’, compassion for ourselves is in the form of the determination to be free. It precedes compassion for others and the altruistic intention that wants to free others.

Before we can have the altruism for others, wanting them to be free of cyclic existence, we first have to want ourselves to be free. We must first have compassion for ourselves. This is very important to remember, because sometimes we get into this thing of, “I’m supposed to completely forget about myself to be a great bodhisattva.” But we can’t forget about ourselves. We have to take care of ourselves, but in a wise way, not in a foolish, self-indulgent way. The foolish way of taking care of ourselves actually harms us.

Meditate on the twelve links in the forward order to see the evolution of cyclic existence. The forward order also shows us the way to attain liberation. In other words, when I realize emptiness directly, ignorance will cease. When ignorance ceases, there will be no more creation of karma that brings rebirth in cyclic existence. When these karmic formations cease, there will be no more causal consciousnesses. When there is no more causal consciousnesses, there will be no more name and form. Then there will be no more six sources. And then there will be no more contact. And there will be no more feeling. And there will be no more craving. And there will be no more grasping.

You go through like this and see just how all twelve links vanish. You feel, “Fantastic! No more cyclic existence. No more confusion. No more taking one

rebirth after another in a whirlwind of confusion. It all depends on just ceasing the ignorance.” That gives us clarity about how to cease cyclic existence.

When you meditate on the twelve links in this way, seeing how ceasing one link ceases the next, it is called **meditating on the purified side, or the non-developing order**. You are stopping one link to stop the next and so on.

## **THE TWELVE LINKS IN REVERSE ORDER**

If we meditate on them in the reverse order, then we start with the last of the twelve links and go backwards. Death exists because there is aging. Aging exists because there is birth. Birth exists because there is becoming. Becoming exists because there is grasping. Grasping exists because there is craving. Craving exists because there is feeling. Feeling exists because there is contact. And you go backwards.

Start at the end, and work all the way back to the front. Death is definitely something that we don't enjoy very much. We start, “Death is a given in life. How does it come about?” This thing that upsets so many people, how does it come about? We start out considering death and meditate backwards. We see how death came about because of aging, and aging because of birth, and birth because of becoming, and we trace it backwards.

You could even start with the death of this lifetime. It hasn't happened yet, but you could think, “I'm going to experience death. I don't know when; the time is indefinite. How did this situation of having to die arise? Where did it come from? It came from

aging. Aging came because I was born.” This is reality. It sounds simple. But really think about it: “I die because I was born.”

Another thing that came up today in the pastoral course on issues faced by people with a terminal illness, was “Why me? Why am I dying?” For Buddhists, the answer is very clear. Actually, for everybody, the answer shouldn’t be a mystery. We die because we’re born. It’s very clear. Isn’t it? [Laughter.]

I was telling you last week how this issue of getting angry at God comes up so much for Christians. “Why am I dying? Why is God doing this to me?” They have a lot confusion and anger. In Buddhism, the answer is we die because we are born. Why were we born? Because the karmic potency for that birth was ready to ripen. That seed was ready to pop into a sprout. How did the seed get so full? Because there was craving and grasping that watered it. And because there was a consciousness that it was set on. Because there was ignorance that created it. You start looking backwards. You trace it right back to ignorance, to the first of the twelve links.

Meditating in the reverse order means you start with the twelfth link and go backwards to see how the sequence of twelve links develops. This is also called **meditating on the afflicted side**, because you’re seeing the evolution of cyclic existence.

Another way of looking at the twelve links in the reverse order is to say that if death has been ceased, it is because aging has been ceased. Aging has been ceased because birth has been ceased. Birth has been ceased because becoming has been ceased. Becoming



has been ceased because grasping has been ceased. You trace it back that way, then you get a real sense of how if you want to cease death, it can come about by ceasing all the eleven links that came before it, the prime thing being ignorance.

## **PURPOSE OF LOOKING AT THE TWELVE LINKS FROM DIFFERENT ANGLES**

All these different ways of meditating on the twelve links help very much to bring you a comprehensive understanding, although they are talking about the same thing. That is why I am spending time talking about how to look at the twelve links in terms of the Four Noble Truths, in terms of the afflictions, in terms of causes and effects, in terms of going forward and being created, in terms of going forward and not being created, in terms of looking at the last link and how that evolves from the beginning, and how not having the last link depends on not getting the preceding ones.

Look at it in all these different ways, making it a very personal thing and thinking about this very lifetime. Use your body and mind this lifetime as an example of the resultant links and see where they came from. Or, think about the karmas that you have created this lifetime and the different moments of ignorance and afflictions, and then meditate forward and think of what they will produce in the future. Think about how to cease them by meditating in the reverse order. Don't make it intellectual. Make it very personal because then you will get some experience from the meditation. It will have a transformative

effect on your mind and make you want to practice more.

We often face the problem of not having energy to do practice. We have so many other things that we have to do, “I’ve got to read this newspaper. It’s much more important.” So we do all these other things, and then we feel guilty because we don’t practice. We are afraid to tell anybody else about it. We pretend that we practiced and we put on airs. We get real tangled up.

Why is it that we don’t practice? It is basically because we don’t have much motivation to practice. When we are motivated to do something, we will do them. When you want chocolate ice-cream, you go to the supermarket. It’s very clear. When there’s the motivation, you go. [Laughter.] When there is somebody you are very attracted to, whom you want a relationship with, you have plenty of energy to do it. When there is the motivation, we definitely act.

Here, we’re meditating on the twelve links or the Four Noble Truths to give us that motivation to practice. It is useless to just sit there and tell ourselves, “I should practice. I ought to practice. I’m going to feel so embarrassed if I don’t practice.” That will not really get us to practice. Those thoughts make us feel guilty and uncomfortable with ourselves. But if we sit down and think deeply about the twelve links, we will want to practice. When we have a more accurate view of the kind of situation we are in and how sticky it is, then automatically, we will want to practice.

*[Audience:] In the case of a chocolate cake, we*

*already know what it tastes like. In the case of liberation, we don't know what it tastes like. So it's hard to generate a strong motivation. [Laughter.]*

Well, you may never have been to Tahiti, but you hear stories about how wonderful it is—nice beaches, good food. You have never been there, but you can certainly relate to the descriptions. Likewise, when we hear about liberation and it being an incredible, blissful, peaceful state, where you finally have freedom, where you finally have choice, where finally, you have some lasting and stable bliss and happiness, we can get some feeling of what that might be like even though we have never experienced it.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

Right. When you see just what a mess cyclic existence is, then something has got to be better. [Laughter.]

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **The Path to Liberation**

We have finished talking about the Twelve Links and the Four Noble Truths, so that we can generate a very strong determination to be free from cyclic existence and all of its undesirable experiences. So if you look on the outline, we're moving on to another major point. Up until here, we've been thinking about the causes of suffering and how they keep us in samsara. And now, we're moving on to "Becoming convinced of the nature of the path to liberation". Here we're concentrating more on the latter two Noble Truths—true cessation and true path.

True cessation is the elimination of true sufferings and true causes, in other words, elimination of having to take rebirth again and again in a contaminated body and mind under the influence of afflictions and karma. Cessation is the stoppage of that, the lack of that, the absence of that, the extinguishment of all that hassle.

The fourth Noble Truth, the true path, is the way to get there. It covers the things we need to develop in our mind in order to transform our mind into the true cessation.

### **Distinction between Liberation and Enlightenment**

Before I go into that, let me just talk a little bit about the difference between liberation and enlightenment

and what we have to remove to attain each one of them. This information sounds technical but if you remember it, it will remove a lot of confusion later when these terms and concepts come up when you hear teachings from His Holiness or other lamas.

There are two levels of obscurations. One is called the afflicted obscurations. The second is called the cognitive obscurations. We have both of them.

The first level, the afflicted obscurations, are:

1. All the afflictions—the ignorance, attachment and anger, and the six roots and twenty auxiliary afflictions that we went over previously, and
2. All the contaminated karma that makes us take rebirth in cyclic existence.

Those two together are the afflicted obscurations. On the basis of the determination to free ourselves from cyclic existence, we realize emptiness. And then through repeated meditation on emptiness, we remove that level of obscurations: the afflicted obscurations. We become what is called an arhat, or a ‘foe destroyer’. It’s called ‘foe destroyer’ because this kind of being has destroyed the foe of all the suffering or undesirable experiences and their causes.

In terms of the three levels of being, we’re onto the middle level now. The first level was to get a good rebirth, and prepare for that. The motivation for the second level was to attain liberation. When you’ve removed all the undesirable experiences and their causes and become an arhat, then you stay in nirvana. Nirvana is this completely blissful state where you’re

meditating on reality all the time, and all the berserkness in your mind has been eliminated because you've realized how things exist. You've eliminated all those afflictions, all that contaminated karma that makes you take rebirth within the twelve links. That's liberation or arhatship. That's removing the first level of obscurations, the afflicted obscurations.

The second level of obscurations are the cognitive obscurations, and these are the residual stains of the afflicted obscurations. It's like the afflicted obscurations are the onions in the pot. If you take out the onions, the pot still stinks. The onions aren't in there anymore, but you have the residual smell. The onions are like the afflicted obscurations. Even if the afflicted obscurations are purified or cleansed from the mindstream, you still have the cognitive obscurations. It's a subtle stain or veil on the mind that is like the imprint of the afflictions. The afflictions are all eliminated, but there's some kind of veil or stain, something there. That produces a dual appearance, so that when you're not in meditation, you don't have a direct perception of reality. You're still seeing things as if they are inherently existent even though you don't grasp at them as inherently existent anymore.

We have these residual stains because since beginningless time, things have appeared to us to be solid and concrete and existing in and of themselves, and in addition to that appearance, we grasp at that as true. When you remove the afflicted obscurations, you are taking away the grasping at it as true, but your mind is so habituated with them appearing as truly existent that that appearance still comes when you're

not in meditation on emptiness. So you need to meditate on emptiness even more to purify that level of obscuration.

Now, the motivation you need to purify that level of obscuration has to be the bodhicitta, the altruistic intention. No other motivation is going to push you to also remove the cognitive obscurations. If you don't have the bodhicitta and if you're basically doing the spiritual practice so that you can free yourself from cyclic existence, once you free yourself and you become an arhat, you've accomplished what you've wanted to do and you are going to hang out in that blissful nirvana. You still have the cognitive obscurations, but they don't really bother you so much because you are just meditating on emptiness and you are out of cyclic existence, which is what you wanted. You don't have any more suffering. There is no particular motivation to go on and remove the subtle stains from the mind. So the motivation that makes you go on and purify the mind completely is the bodhicitta motivation.

Why is that so? Well, the thing about bodhicitta is that we cherish others even more than we cherish ourselves, or at least as much as we cherish ourselves. We want them to be free of cyclic existence. But there is no way we can possibly free them as long as we have the subtle stains on our mind, the cognitive obscurations. As long as we have the cognitive obscurations, our clairvoyance is incomplete. We can't really know everybody's karma very well. If we don't know people's karma very well, then we can't teach them exactly according to what they need to hear at the time they need to hear it. So it's really

important to purify the mind completely so that the compassion is there to stick by everybody when you are trying to help them, and the wisdom is there so that you can completely know where they are at. Also, your skills are fully developed so you know what to do to help them.

In order to have those three things—the compassion, wisdom and skill—completely developed, we need to remove the cognitive obscurations. And we do that with the motivation of bodhicitta. When we do that, we have attained what is called full enlightenment or Buddhahood.

I'm giving you lots of terminology here but if you can remember it, it makes a lot of things clear later on. You see different levels of practice, different levels of motivation, different levels of aspiration, and different levels of achievement.

Right here, when we are talking about becoming convinced of the nature of the path to liberation, we are talking about the path to remove the afflicted obscurations, the first level.

Also, His Holiness said, “Don't think liberation is some place far away.” Don't think, “How am I going to get there? The train is late!” [Laughter.] But to remember that liberation or nirvana is a state of mind. As soon as we recognize emptiness, realize the way things exist and use that realization to purify our mind, then liberation is right here.

## **The Kind of Body with Which to Break out of Cyclic Existence**



The first point under the path to liberation is the kind of body with which we can break out of cyclic existence. We've just finished looking at all the different kinds of life forms there are. What kind is the best kind to break out of this cyclic existence? It's the precious human life. So we got it, folks!—the body with the best capacity to free ourselves of cyclic existence. When you think of cyclic existence with all the infinite number of beings—this universe is enormous!—and you think of all the animals and the insects, the fish, all these other beings and all these different places, you will see that all of these beings want lasting happiness, but it is very difficult in many of these life forms to have the tools that are needed to purify the mind and bring lasting happiness.

The rebirth that gives you all those tools, that gives you that capacity, is the precious human life, which is what we have right now. We have a human body, with human intelligence. We are born in a place where the Buddha has descended and the teachings exist, and the lineages are pure. We have access to teachings and to teachers and pure lineages and we have the material wherewithal and the religious freedom and the health and the sanity and everything else we need to really practice in the easiest and most effective way.

It's like we hit the jackpot. You can't think of anything better! I think this is very important for us to remember, because we tend, in our life, to pick out the one thing that didn't go well today and meditate on that, and get really hooked into that. We forget how fortunate we are just to have this life that we do have, the capabilities that we do have. It's very

important to remember that.

## **The Kind of Path to Follow to Break out of Cyclic Existence**

The second point here is the kind of path to follow to break out of cyclic existence.

Once we've got the basis, the precious human life which is the most advantageous of all the different realms and bodies and life forms we've had in infinite, beginningless time, then what path are we going to follow? When you think about this—from infinite beginningless time—and that we have a precious human life right now, it's really quite remarkable. Having got this, what is it that is going to lead us out of our continual habitual confusion and constantly recurring problems? What is it that is going to free us from this? The path is called the Three Higher Trainings. Those are the things that we need to develop in our mindstream in order to free ourselves. These Three Higher Trainings are ethics, concentration and wisdom.

We ask, “Why are ethics, concentration and wisdom the path out of cyclic existence? What's so good about them? How come they're going to work and nothing else is going to work?”

Well, let's go back and remember what the cause of cyclic existence is. What's the cause? Ignorance. Ignorance is having a false sense of self, this grasping on to the false appearance of a truly existent or inherently existent self, a self that is independent from our body and mind, that exists solidly as some kind of

essential, unchangeable thing that exists without depending on anything else. This concept of a self, that we grasp on to so much, causes infinite problems. Not only do we grasp on to ourselves as inherently existent, but we grasp onto everything as inherently existent.

## **Only wisdom can remove our ignorance**

So this ignorance is not only of persons, but it is also of phenomena. Persons meaning the self, phenomena meaning our body, our mind, the flower, your pay check, everything else, all the other things. We grasp on to all of them as being inherently existent, so we look at everything as if it has some kind of inherent quality making it what it is.

Talking about grasping at inherent existence, look at how we deal with problems—when we have a problem, we have a problem, don't we? Our problem is real and it's solid and it's there and it's made of concrete and it's independent. It's like when we have a problem, we feel like we're encountering this solid block, there's no way we can deal with it at all, because it's this solid, rigid, fixed thing. The way we approach things is by grasping at them as being inherently existent. “My problem.” Or rather, “My problem is you. You're my problem.” Everything just has this incredible solidity.

Similarly, our pain and our pleasure become very solid. We don't see these things as dependently arising, as having causes, as changing, and as having parts or being dependent on labels. We see them as PAIN, PLEASURE—everything is just really solid.

All the phenomena, we grasp at them as inherently existent. Definitely we grasp on to our body. What happens when you have to jam on your brakes and stop really quickly? What happens? You know that feeling that comes? We're definitely grasping on to the self at that time. More specifically, we have a lot of fear about this body. When you go into a hospital, you are trembling. When you go into the doctor's office or the dentist's office, there's a lot of trembling. We're not only seeing the self as inherently existent, we are also seeing our body as inherently existent. We are so afraid of losing this solid, real thing, this precious bunch of concrete.

This ignorance causes all the problems. It is the source of all the problems. Since this ignorance is grasping at a false way of existence, then the only thing that is going to be able to remove it, is a wisdom that sees that the false thing that you've been grasping at, in fact doesn't even exist. The only way to remove that ignorance, is to see that what it thinks is true, isn't true at all.

That's why the wisdom realizing emptiness is the real antidote to cut off cyclic existence. That's why nothing else can do it. Without this wisdom, nothing else sees things as they are. No other mind state has the ability to remove this grasping at true existence, this grasping at solidity. Nothing else can do it. This is very important to note, because in the spiritual supermarket of America, you will hear many, many paths to enlightenment. You'll have to listen carefully and see what they say is the cause of cyclic existence and what they propose as the antidote to remove that cause. Really check up.

We're analyzing deeply here because if you don't, it's very easy to be swayed by a lot of nice, sweet words, like 'dwell in the infinitude of space'. 'Let your mind rest in the blissful, infinitude of space.' It sounds great, doesn't it? 'Let go of all concepts and just rest in the infinitude of blissful light.' This sounds great, but what is the meaning of all those nice-sounding words? Has that teaching, has that path really isolated what is the cause of cyclic existence? Does it know what needs to be eliminated in order to be free? It's like if you have a whole lot of people in your house, and one of them is a thief, you have to know which one is the thief and how to kick him out. We need something that really pinpoints the problem here. That's very important.

"It's much nicer to rest in the infinitude of bliss,"—I don't know about you, but those words, to me, means having all the space to make up my own path to enlightenment. I make up my own bliss. I make up my own infinitude. And I still continue to make 'me' very, very concrete. Everything is still really concrete. That's why we went through all those teachings in the last weeks talking about the evolution of cyclic existence, the causes, and how ignorance perceives things so that we can be convinced that wisdom is the thing that eliminates it. It is a very specific kind of wisdom. It's not just any old kind of wisdom. It's the wisdom that can see that there's no truly existent person there. We have been having this perception of a solid *me* that's so special, that's so vulnerable, that needs to be protected at all costs, and we grasp on to this so tightly. This wisdom says, "Hey! This thing that you think exists, actually,

there's nothing there.” “There's nothing there, folks. What are you grasping on to? That thing doesn't even exist.” It really pulls the rug out from under your feet.

## **Concentration is necessary to make the wisdom effective**

Wisdom is the thing that cuts the root of cyclic existence. In order to make this wisdom really effective, we have to have concentration. We have to be able to keep our mind stable, to keep it on one point. We have to have this ability to concentrate, because otherwise, we won't be able to keep our attention on reality and we won't be able to go deep in our meditation, because our mind will be all over the place. We can tell that already, can't we? We can see the necessity of concentration.

## **The importance of ethics in helping to build concentration**

Then, to have concentration, what aids in building concentration is ethical conduct. Why is ethics so important for the development of concentration? Why can't we just sit down and do samadhi? Forget about abandoning the ten negative actions. Who wants to stop criticizing people anyway? [Laughter.] Who wants to stop lying when it's actually quite convenient? Let's just meditate. Get single-pointed concentration. Why do we need ethics? This is very, very important, especially in America. [Laughter.] I mean all over the world, but especially here.

Why is ethics so important for your meditation

practice? They give the example of when you want to chop down a tree, you need a sharp axe. You need to be able to hit the tree in the same place every time, and you need to have a very strong and firm body. If you're missing any of that, you're not going to knock the tree down. The axe is the wisdom realizing emptiness, because that's what cuts the tree. The tree here in this case is ignorance. You need to be able to hit the tree in the same point every time, because if you hit up here and you hit down there, like me trying to do it, it's going to be a disaster, you're never going to chop the tree down. So concentration is the ability to get the axe, the wisdom, in the same place, time after time after time. And in order to be able to do that, your body has to be firm and strong. The firmness and the strength, that is ethics. That comes from good ethics.

Some people who act unethically may think what they do isn't really bad, at one level. But I think when they're home alone, they have a difficult time being alone with themselves, because some kind of remorse and confusion comes up. In addition, by acting unethically, you put all this karmic imprint on your mind. What were the causes of cyclic existence? Disturbing attitudes and karma. Without good ethical behavior, we're putting more negative karmic imprints on the mind. So it just adds more obscuration.

## **Questions and answers**

*[Audience:] Since our human body gives us the best basis with which to break out of cyclic existence, isn't that a reason to grasp onto our body?*

I'm sure we can find many reasons to grasp onto our body. But we can realize the importance of our precious human body without grasping on to it, because if our mind gets really tight over our body, that doesn't benefit us. I've seen this happen sometimes—this is the way I was at the beginning of my Dharma practice. I grasp on to my precious human life, and there was this feeling of, "I've got to use every single minute, exactly perfectly, because otherwise I am going to waste my life!" [Laughter.] My mind was so tight, not this spacious, relaxed mind. That's not conducive for practice. We should recognize the body's good qualities without making it solid and concrete.

*[Audience:] Shouldn't we be concerned with taking good care of our body and keeping it healthy?*

Definitely we should be concerned for our physical survival. But there's a difference between keeping our body healthy with wisdom, and keeping the body healthy with grasping. And you can tell, there are two different mental qualities about that, isn't there? There's a difference when you just want to keep your body healthy because you care about yourself, or when you care about your spiritual practice. When you're doing this because of some sense of self-respect and wanting to keep yourself well to practice the Dharma, versus, "Well, I've got to do aerobics, I've got to go to the beauty shop and I've got to go to the gym ... and I have to have my special jogging suits and my walkman to jog with. I've got to have skates with pink rolls and green laces ...." [Laughter.]



*[Audience:] Why do some practitioners aim to achieve rebirths in the pure lands to further their practice if the human body is the best vehicle to remove obscurations?*

Definitely, rebirth in pure lands is good. But what they say is that some bodhisattvas who are in pure lands want to practice the tantra because it enables them to remove their obscurations very quickly, so they pray to be born with a precious human body (with its physical elements which are conducive for tantric practice).

*[Audience:] Are there Buddhas on this earth, and is there any tangible way to distinguish them from ordinary people?*

Don't think that the arhats and Buddhas moved somewhere else. Just remember, Shakyamuni Buddha was on this earth, and thousands of people became Buddhas and arhats under his guidance, and they were here.

If you're asking whether there's any medical way, like if a Tibetan doctor could feel somebody's pulse and see if that person is a Buddha? I don't know. [Laughter.]

The thing is, you have people like His Holiness whom we regard as a Buddha, and His Holiness gets sick and the doctor comes and treats him. We say that this is a manifestation that he is doing for our benefit, so that he can appear like us. What is really going on in his body, I have no idea. His mental experiences are very different. He gets cold, flu and everything else.

But the way people look at it is, if he gets sick, it is a reflection of our karma.

Also, due to the kindness of the Buddhas, they appear in ordinary form so that we can relate to them, because if we can relate to them, then it gives us some kind of inspiration that we can become like that too. Whereas if, say, Chenrezig opened the door and walked in with 1000 arms and a body made of light, [laughter] we may not be able to relate. So we say it's the kindness of the Buddhas to appear in bodies like ours and act like us so that we can have some sense of relationship and we can aspire to become like them. We can see that we are capable of developing extraordinary qualities just like them.

### **Advantages of observing the higher training in ethics**

Next under the path to follow to break out of samsara, we have the advantages of observing the higher training in ethics. You'll find that between now and the end of this outline, we're really concentrating on ethics until we get to the bodhicitta, the next major section.

You might ask, "Why are we concentrating on ethics when you said it was ethics, concentration and wisdom?"

Well, it is ethics, concentration and wisdom, but remember that here we are talking about the middle scope, the being who aspires to be free from samsara and attain liberation? Here, what we're doing is in common with the person of middle scope. The middle scope person wants liberation, but what we're doing is

only *in common with* that person. We say it's 'in common with', because it's not exactly the same. We don't want to stop at liberation. We want to go on to enlightenment. The higher trainings of concentration and wisdom are taught in the next phase of the path, the trainings on the path for higher capacity or higher motivated person. These are done in-depth there, because it's better for us in the development of our mind, to establish the basis of ethics, then generate bodhicitta and then develop the concentration and wisdom, instead of first developing the ethics, concentration and wisdom, and then go back and generate the bodhicitta. If we do the ethics, concentration and wisdom first, we might wind up in nirvana and then we stay there and we hang out there because we have no motivation to go on any further.

To attain full enlightenment, they say it's quicker if we first generate the bodhicitta and then zero in on the concentration and wisdom. That doesn't mean that you ignore concentration and wisdom while you're developing bodhicitta. You can still meditate on those things, but it means that you're really emphasizing the bodhicitta, keeping that in your mind all the time. In this session, because we're doing the practice in common with the middle level being, we're only talking about ethics. The teachings on concentration and wisdom will come when we talk about the bodhisattva path, and how a bodhisattva is going to generate ethics, concentration and wisdom to become a Buddha.

What is the higher training of ethics? It's principally abandoning the ten destructive actions. The 'pratimoksha' vows or the vows of individual

liberation, these are the vows that help us abandon the ten negative actions. ‘Pratimoksha’ is a Sanskrit word that means individual liberation. The pratimoksha vows are the five vows of a lay person, the eight vows that you take for one day when you do it without bodhicitta. They’re the monks and nuns vows, both novice and fully ordained. All those are included in the pratimoksha vows.

The higher training of ethics here then is principally abandoning the ten destructive actions through keeping whatever level of the pratimoksha vows that we are capable of. Even if you don’t take any of the pratimoksha vows, it’s still about abandoning the ten negative actions.

They say that the higher training of ethics is like the capital with which you can do business. If you spent some time and you’ve developed your ethical conduct, then it’s like you have a very good foundation for the rest of the path. You have the capital to do business. You have a reservoir of good karma and you don’t have a bank account full of negative karma, speaking crassly here.

The thing is that, as you keep good ethical conduct, especially if you keep vows of whatever level you’re keeping, after a while, you feel the change in yourself, and you feel like you have some support in your practice from keeping the vows. Many of you have taken the five vows. It’s something to reflect on—what were you like a year or two or three years ago, before you took the five lay vows? How was your spiritual strength then? Compare it to how you are now, and you can begin to see that yes, you have developed some kind of foundation, some sense of

confidence.

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

## **Role of the Sangha in determining the existence of the Buddha's doctrine**

They say that the Sangha community—the fully ordained monks and nuns in a place—determines the existence of the Buddha's doctrine in that place. Why do they say that? Because when the monks and nuns take vows and keep vows, they are practicing the fundamental basis of the Buddha's teaching.

Pure ethics is like step one of the Buddha's teaching. People who have taken vows, who live within that conduct, have that. They're keeping level one of the Buddha's teachings. So that establishes the existence of the Buddha's teachings in a place.

The question may come up, "Why can't lay people do that?" There are lay people who keep the five lay vows. That's very true. The keeping of the five lay precepts is really valuable and very, very special. But you can also see that there's a difference between keeping five lay precepts and the full ordination.

There is a difference. As a lay person, you can go to the disco. You can turn on the stereo. You can wear makeup. You can dress up. You have a lot more opportunity to distract yourself. Not that any of these things are bad in and of themselves. They certainly aren't. There is nothing wrong with music. Music is not negative karma. Wearing nice clothes is not negative karma. But it's just that it gives you more opportunity for distractions. True? Not true?

When you're ordained, you don't have to sit and look in your closet every morning thinking, "What do I put on?" [Laughter.] You just don't have that problem. You don't need to look at all the coupons for the hair cutting places and how to have your hair styled. You don't need to look at the magazines at what the latest fashions are, and the sales that are going on at all the department stores. You don't have to do all that stuff. It's just easier in that way.

So the Sangha in a place determines the existence of the Buddha's doctrine in that place, but this does not establish a power hierarchy. We have to look at this because especially in America, I have read some of the American Buddhist publications and they say, "We have got to stop hierarchy. Who wants hierarchy? Everybody's equal." So somehow in some people's mind, they begin to see a Sangha-lay people hierarchy, like the Sangha is holy and noble and they have special rights and privileges, and everybody else is just supposed to serve them. That is not the way.

It's not a hierarchy like, "All monks and nuns are special and they can impose their will and do a big power trip." It's not like that. It's just seeing that there are different levels of commitment, different levels of practice, and this is something that some people have really committed themselves to, and so that part of them that's committed, we respect. It's not a thing of some Sangha member showing a tag of, "I am a monk or a nun", to legitimize doing all sorts of not very nice things. It's not a hierarchical thing of having a lot of power that you can then abuse. Or at least it shouldn't be like that.

So it's not like the person of the monk or nun is

holy or special. The person is just a person like everybody else. They're not inherently existent. It's the vows in that person's mindstream that you show respect to. So when you go to a big Dharma gathering like when His Holiness comes here, then you let the monks and nuns sit in front, not because they're pulling rank or something like that, but just that part of them that has vows, you show respect to.

In a similar way that part of you that keeps vows, that has the five lay precepts, you respect yourself for that. And you respect everybody else in the group for the vows that they keep. It doesn't mean that every behavior that somebody with vows does is wonderful. Monks and nuns certainly aren't Buddhas. We make a lot of mistakes. At least I do. And it's the same with other Dharma practitioners. It's not that somebody is a Buddhist, and therefore everything they do is perfect. It's that part of them that keeps good ethics, that keeps their vows, that is definitely worthy of respect. And that part in ourselves that keeps good ethics, that keeps vows, is worthy of respect. That's why when you take the eight precepts for twenty-four hours, at the end of the day, you look back and you rejoice. You rejoice at what you did because it's something worthy of respect, worthy of rejoicing.

### **Questions and answers on the ethics of the Sangha**

*[Audience:] If there is a monk or a nun who doesn't keep very good ethics, can they still teach and is it wise for us to follow their teachings?*

That is something that every individual has to look at.

Because the thing is, we never know who is a Buddha and who isn't, and so somebody who looks like they are keeping bad ethics, we may not know exactly what's going on in their mind and what they're doing. So we can never really judge what the person is. But we can say that behavior is not a good role model for us.

You sometimes hear instances of very great masters who are doing things that seem really unethical. You read the stories of the great siddhis in India, and some of them acted pretty weird to ordinary eyes. You had Tilopa who would kill fish and then of course bring them back to life. He would kill them and fry them and eat them and then transfer their consciousness to other bodies. Something like that. It was this really high level of practice.

Then you have this whole thing of high practitioners having sexual contact. The thing is that on very high levels of the tantric path, that is allowed, but there are many vows and things like that governing it. Or sometimes you have people drinking. Again, sometimes, I have heard stories of people getting completely drunk and delivering incredibly accurate teachings. I have no idea how that works! I certainly couldn't do that, and I know if I drank, forget it! So it's like I don't know what that person is doing. I can't comprehend their behavior. But I do know that I can't do that behavior.

The tricky thing in here is trying to figure out whether this is a high level being who is doing these things but their motivation is really pure, or if it's somebody who has a lot of titles but their ethical conduct is really sloppy. It's touchy, and we often



don't know. I know for myself personally, I really need the example of teachers who keep very, very good ethical conduct because I don't have the wisdom to be able to discriminate when you can drink and when you can't drink. That's just too high on the level of the path for me. I just need another example for me to follow.

Similarly, while somebody is doing a lot of negative actions, they might be a very great master. I don't know. I don't know their level of achievement. But I do know that living in that kind of situation would make me very, very confused. So the thing is, sometimes we can go and we can hear teachings by these people, but we may not take them as our personal teachers. There is a difference between going and hearing teachings and going and hearing a lecture and saying, "This person is my spiritual teacher." But then you'll find other people who have some of these masters, their external conduct is maybe drinking and womanizing, but they seem to help many people, and many people come to Buddhism in that way. And many people seem to tame their mind in that way. So you can't deny that they have some beneficial effect on others.

*[Audience:] Should we make use of advice or information for our practice, only from the people we respect?*

If the information is good and it improves your practice and understanding, use it. It doesn't even matter if a dog or a cat or a drunk says something. Whoever says something that helps you practice, you

should practice that. Even other religions. If you go to church on Sundays to make your mother happy, because somebody is taking communion and they give a sermon about keeping good ethics, that's something we should practice. It doesn't matter whose mouth it comes out of.

## **The advantages of keeping vows**

So, we maintain the Buddha's teachings as a living tradition by keeping vows.

The advantage of keeping vows rather than just abandoning negative actions without keeping a vow, is that when you have a vow, every moment you're not violating it, you're accumulating good karma. There're two people sitting in this room. One of them has a vow not to kill. The other one doesn't have a vow not to kill. In terms of their current behavior, both of them are not killing. But the person who doesn't have the vow, they don't have any special motivation not to kill at this particular moment. It's like they've never really thought about it, that situation is not part of them. But the person who has the vow, they've made a very conscious determination, "I'm not going to kill," and so just by sitting here in this room and not killing, they are accumulating that good karma and abandoning that negative karma, purifying the negative karma. So the advantage of taking vows is that you allow this accumulation of positive potential.

In addition, it helps you clarify a lot of confusing situations in your life. It's like we say to ourselves, "I really don't want to lie," but then the next time a

situation comes up where it's much more convenient to lie, then we lie. Well, when you take a vow, what you're doing is you're looking at the situation beforehand, you're making a very strong determination and then when you get in that situation, your strong determination will carry you on, and that rationalizing mind that looks for whatever is convenient to please the ego, it can't rise up as strongly, because you've made a very firm determination where you want to go.

Like if you take the fifth lay precept, which is to avoid intoxicants. If you take that, then it just clarifies a whole bunch of situations. Whenever you go out or you go to a party or whatever, and somebody asks you if you want to drink, you know you'll say "No." You've thought about it beforehand. You know that that is what you are going to do. Somebody offers you a drug, you just make the decision of, "No, thank you." It doesn't throw you into any conflict of, "Oh, maybe I should do it a little bit. This person is my friend and if I don't do it, we won't have anything in common. They're going to think I'm weird. It's just a little bit. It doesn't really matter anyway. I won't do it anymore. It'll make this person happy. Definitely if it makes the other person happy for me to drink something, then I should." OK? You know the logic? [Laughter.]

So here, when we take the vow, we're just leaving that stuff behind. It makes the mind a whole lot clearer. There is a lot of benefits in this life and future lives in keeping vows.

Another one that I think is very powerful to think about, is that for example, if we've taken the precept

or the vow not to kill, then that means every other sentient being in this whole world is safe around us. That's a tremendous thing to offer sentient beings, this safety. That nobody has to worry about their life when they are around us. Talking about world peace, this is a very substantial commitment and contribution to world peace.

Or we take the precept not to steal. That means every single sentient being doesn't need to worry about their personal belongings when they're around us. Everybody can relax. When we are around, nobody needs to lock their doors. Nobody needs to get paranoid. Nobody needs to worry about loaning their money and not getting it returned. It is a very great contribution to the welfare of sentient beings when we take vows. It's very directly benefiting them.

Similarly, if we stop lying, that means every single sentient being can trust what we say. And trust is a very important thing in creating harmony in a society. When we have that precept not to lie, then we create a bond of trust with every single sentient being, because they can trust us.

Similarly, the vow to abandon unwise sexual behavior. That means everybody in the world can relax around us. Can you imagine being a woman walking down the street, knowing that every single man you walk by had a precept against sexual misconduct? Wouldn't it change how you feel as a woman walking down the street? Sorry men, to point you out [Laughter.]. But it does make a difference. It makes an incredible difference how much people can just relax and stop worrying.

When we take precepts and live in them, it's a

tremendous contribution to harmony in the society and world peace. It's very important to remember this, because sometimes, we forget to rejoice at the good things that we do.

I think I'll continue with the advantages in the next session. Anybody has any more questions?

### **More questions and answers**

*[Audience:] Is there any situation that justifies white lies?*

Unless it's something to protect somebody's life.

*[Audience:] Is it alright if we exaggerate or say something untrue as a joke?*

You have to be very careful. This is a good question. I notice with Lama Yeshe, whenever he cracked a joke, he always mumbled, "I'm joking" afterwards. And I had always wondered, "That's funny. Why does he do that?" And then I watched, and you know how sometimes one person is joking but the other person doesn't know they're joking? And they get really hurt and offended? Then I begin to go, "Oh, that's why Lama always says 'I'm joking.'" He really made it clear that it was a joke. So it's important to be very clear about that. Especially with kids. Not to lie to kids as a way of teasing them, like, "The boogie man is going to come and get you." Or "There are caterpillars crawling up your back." You watch what adults say to kids.

*[Audience:] What constitutes breaking of the killing precept from the root?*

To break the killing precept completely, it's volitionally killing a human being. But included as branches of this killing precept is killing any living being. However, you break it completely from the root when you volitionally kill a human being.

If you go out and kill an animal to eat it, it's killing and it's negative karma. People often say, "Well, what about the Eskimos? What about if you're born in a place where there are no vegetables, what are you going to do?" Samsara isn't fun!

In a situation where people kill for survival, it would be a different kind of karma from that of a hunter going out and shooting a deer in Washington. But it still is taking life. Also, if it's done with a sense of regret, that lightens the karma.

*[Audience:] Are vegetables considered sentient beings? What about trees?*

Vegetables aren't considered sentient beings. So you can eat carrots and not worry.

Sometimes they say certain spirits take rebirth inside of trees. But generally, trees aren't sentient beings. But then it's interesting because when they chop trees down or things like that, sometimes they do mantras in case there is a being there.

Let's meditate for a few minutes.

## **Review of points covered in Part 1**

To review what we talked about in the last session, we said that to break out of samsara, the best kind of body to do this with was a precious human life because with this particular body, this particular intelligence that we have as a human being, we have the greatest possibility for generating the realizations of the path. So our present situation is very fortunate, very rare, and very excellent. Next time you start complaining about something, remind yourself of this. [Laughter.]

Then the path to free us from cyclic existence is the path of ethics, concentration and wisdom. Wisdom is needed because that is the thing that actually cuts the ignorance, by seeing that the object that ignorance thinks exists doesn't exist at all. Wisdom sees that there is no elephant in the room, so you don't need to be afraid of an elephant. That is why wisdom is so important, because it's able to see that the inherently existent objects that our ignorance, attachment and anger grasp onto do not really exist at all and as a result, it dissolves those afflictions.

In order to generate wisdom, we need to be able to analyze what exists and what doesn't exist, and we need to be able to hold our attention on whatever conclusion we get. We need to have some concentration, because it's difficult to keep your mind on something when it's roaming all over the place. If you can't keep your mind steady, then it becomes very difficult to meditate and to hold your mind on the conclusions that you get, as well as to keep your mind even on a line of reasoning long enough to get to the end of it.

To have concentration, which is a mental stability,

we need to first develop this stability in our verbal and physical actions. The mind is much more difficult to control than the body and speech, so if we want to control the mind through concentration, we need to start training with what is easier, which is doing something about how we speak and act towards others. That is the higher training in ethics.

Training in ethics is an important thing to remember because you see many people who don't want to act ethically but they want to meditate and gain concentration. But how are you going to control the mind and subdue the mind if you can't even do what's easier, which is to control the verbal and physical actions, and realize that our verbal and physical actions are motivated by the mind. It's like first the mind has the intention, then we speak, then we act. There is this delayed process going on. Ultimately we have to control the mind, but because it's much easier to control what we say and do, we start with that and then having controlled that, then we begin to be able to do something with the mind and its motivations.

'Control' is a touchy word, because in America we think of control as: "This person is controlling." "I've got to control this!"—like putting a noose around something and holding it and now it's controlled. But when we are talking about controlling our mind or controlling our actions, it isn't putting a straightjacket on. We have to be very clear about this because a lot of our subtle preconceptions about words sneak in and influence our understanding even though we are not aware of it. So we're not trying to put a straightjacket on our mind. We're not trying to make



ourselves completely tight; more tied up in knots than we already are. [Laughter.]

‘Control’ means letting go of the things that tie up our knots so that we can be a little bit peaceful, because our mind is quite tied up in knots already. So when I say, “Let go of those knots,” it does not mean act them out and do whatever you want, but to untie the knots of jealousy, pride and so on, let them go. Maybe rather than say ‘control’ the mind or ‘control’ the speech and body, you can say ‘manage’. Of course, ‘manage’ is another loaded English word [Laughter.]. Somehow, you get the feeling of what I’m saying?

Returning to the specifics of the higher training of ethics, it meant abandoning the ten destructive actions. Specifically, if you can keep the five lay precepts or the vows of a novice or fully ordained monastic, then that’s very good for doing the higher training of ethics. We started talking about the advantages of doing that in the last teaching.

## **Advantages of Observing the Higher Training in Ethics**

### **1. We will maintain the Buddha’s teachings as a living tradition**

We have said that the first advantage was that we will maintain the Buddha’s teachings as a living tradition. Here we discussed how the Buddha, at the time he passed away, said, “After I passed away, look at the pratimoksha, the Vinaya, as your teaching.” In other

words, he was referring to the higher training of ethics as the basic thing to look for as his teaching after he passed away. So, we maintain the Buddha's teachings as a living tradition when we live in ethical conduct.

## **2. We will become a vessel for holding the bodhisattva and the tantric vows**

The second advantage we will have by keeping ethics is we will become a vessel for holding the bodhisattva and the tantric vows. The pratimoksha vows—the five lay precepts or the monks' and nuns' vows—are specifically to help tame our body and speech. The bodhisattva vows are specifically to help free ourselves from the self-centeredness, so that's taming the mind. And then the tantric vows are to help free us from dual appearance, which is a very subtle taming of the mind.

So it's a progressive thing, and to be a good vessel, not a leaky one or a punctured one [laughter] or an upside-down one, one that can hold the bodhisattva vows or hold the tantric vows, then it's good to have trained in the pratimoksha vows beforehand. This is because they're much easier to keep than the bodhisattva vows and the tantric vows. The pratimoksha vows, like your five precepts, they have to do with body and speech, whereas the bodhisattva and tantric vows are dealing with the mind.

Now again, I'm pointing this out because you will see many people in America don't want to take the five lay precepts, but they sure want bodhisattva and especially tantric vows. "Let's collect tantric initiations and tantric vows!" They don't have much

understanding of what the vows are all about, or they have a weakened capacity to hold them because of not having some training in the things which are easier, like the five precepts. The way to build yourself up so that your practice can kind of grow in an organic way is to start with the five precepts, get used to them, then take the bodhisattva vows, get used to them, then take the tantric vows and get used to them. Then things kind of build up and fill you up in a nice, comfortable way.

These days, it's kind of happening like that—where people just plunge into taking the higher level vows. I think because many times, people come in very excited and they want high practices, and the teachers, from their side, figure, “Well, better plant some seeds in their mind and give them some karmic connection, and then in a few lifetimes, it will ripen.” And so I think they do it to put seeds in people's mind even though people aren't properly prepared to do the actual practice, and to somehow also inspire the people maybe to go back to the beginning. Like if you get something high, then maybe it inspires you to go back to the beginning and do the things so that you can get up to where you thought you were before. [Laughter.] So I think it happens like that sometimes.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

*There are four classes of tantra. When you take initiation into the lowest two classes, often you take the bodhisattva vows then. And in the higher two classes, you take bodhisattva and tantric vows. You don't just get vows by sitting somewhere. They're*

*actually given in a ceremony. So you know what you're going into before you do it and then you can understand what's happening.*

## **Understanding the meaning of 'vows' in the context of Buddhism**

Here also, I should say, don't be afraid of vows. Again, we are importing our Judeo-Christian meaning here, aren't we? You see, what is good to do is that when our mind reacts to the Dharma, instead of thinking it's the Dharma that causes it, start looking at what our preconceptions are. How come we get so nervous about vows? What is our understanding of vows? In the Jewish tradition, there are more than six hundred vows that you're supposed to keep. In Christianity, there's poverty, chastity and obedience, and then all the vows. We've somehow in our culture made everything really heavy—if you don't keep vows, you are a sinner and you know what happens to you if you are a sinner.

We come into Buddhism with this same, very tight attitude about fear and guilt and failure and not being good enough. That is something we're importing to Buddhism. That's not coming from Buddhism. Vows are just things to help us. They are guidelines to follow. Nobody's saying, "Thou shall not do this!" Nobody is imposing it on you. Rather, you're saying, "I want to develop my mind. If I keep doing this [negative action], I'm not going to be able to grow in the direction I want to grow in. So I think I'd better change. What kinds of ways do I want to change in?" So you look at the vows, and say, "Oh yeah, these are

the kind of things I want to develop.” In that way, you see the vows as a companion on the path, as something that’s going to help you and aid you and nurture you and free you. And again, we take them because we can’t keep them purely. If we could keep them purely, we don’t need them!

Last week when I was in St. Louis at this Catholic high school, one of the kids asked, “What happens if you break a vow?” I’m not sure whether he was expecting me to say, “Well, you know, hell looks like this .... You get a direct Metro ticket there on the express bus.” [Laughter.] In Buddhism, what happens if you break a vow? You use it as a tool to look at your own mind and what is happening with you as a way to understand and improve, and then you do some purification. So it’s a very different attitude. We have to be clear here, not import our old attitudes.

### **3. We will become a living example to inspire others**

The third advantage of ethics is that we will become a living example to inspire others. “Who, me? I’m going to be an example that inspires others? Inspires them to do what?”

It is important to give ourselves credit for the vows that we hold, for the precepts or the guidelines that we live according to, because it does have an inspiring influence on other people. Like I have said before, the fact that you as one person keeps the precept not to kill, means that every single living being on this planet doesn’t have to fear for their life around you. That is inspiring.

Or if you don't steal, that means five billion human beings and I don't know how many billions of animals and insects, do not have to worry about their possessions. The same goes with lying and unwise sexual behavior and taking intoxicants. Just by settling our life down, it becomes a safety mechanism for other people to feel safe around us. So we're contributing to world peace, contributing to harmony in the society just by being one person keeping precepts. And so that inspires other people. It not only makes them feel safe, but it also inspires them to become like you.

You can also recall, in your own evolution in becoming a Dharma student, what was it that inspired you? What kind of people did you come into contact with that you said, "Hm ... these people seem to have something in them, I think I'll like to be with them"?

Somebody went to a retreat at Cloud Mountain [Retreat Center] because they met a couple of people from the group and these people were so nice that they figured, "Gee, if I went on retreat, I might become nice like them too!" [Laughter.]

In lots of ways, you don't have to try to be an example, but just by living ethically, automatically you become one. I think it's difficult if we try and be a good example to others, because I know whenever I try and be a good example, it's like... "Forget it!" I was thinking about my teachers, I don't think they try to be a role model or try to be a good example, but just by doing their practice, they become one.

Often, we don't realize how we benefit others by keeping good ethics, or just by being friendly, happy, cheerful people, or by welcoming other people.

Somebody new comes into the group, and you're friendly and happy and welcoming and show them around. Small things like these that show that we're putting the teachings into practice can really influence others in many, many ways.

Just yesterday, one woman who had been sick called one person in our group just to talk to her, and that person cheered her up and that inspired her to come to the session last night. So we can benefit others in many ways. Just look at His Holiness and how inspiring he is. What is it that inspires us about His Holiness? His compassion. And the root of compassion is non-harmfulness, not harming others, which is ethics. Also, it's good to give ourselves credit for what we do and to aspire to do more because we can see benefits like this that accrue for both ourselves and others.

Even when you blow it, even when you completely demolish your ethics because you totally lost control [laughter], by the process of figuring out why we did that, and how we can counteract that in future, we can inspire other people. Because then they can see that they can do it too.

Look at Milarepa. He came to the Dharma having killed thirty-five people! When you talk about botching it, killing thirty-five people is pretty heavy karma! And yet if you look historically, he is somebody who has inspired so many people. Why? Because he was able to look back at what he did, sort it out and purify it, and forgive himself and grow. So even in the mistakes we make, there can still be benefit for self and others.

#### **4. We will uphold the insight Dharma**

The fourth advantage of keeping ethics is that we will uphold the insight Dharma. We have what's called the Dharma of insight and the Dharma of doctrine. Sometimes it's called realizational Dharma and verbal Dharma. There're different ways of translating it. The Dharma of doctrine is the teachings, the intellectual understanding of the teachings and the words of the teachings. You uphold those as you study and as you teach. The Dharma of insight is the actual practice. When you abide in ethical conduct, you are practicing. Your precepts become that Dharma of insight. And so you're able to uphold that Dharma of insight.

It's funny because we sometimes don't think of precepts or vows as insights into the path. And yet they are, aren't they? These are actual things that we are doing, understandings that we are gaining, ways of practicing. So we uphold all the teachings of insight. And this is what makes the Dharma flourish. When the realizations of the path, the practice of the path, the integration of the path into our life is alive in human beings' consciousness, that's the Dharma flourishing. Building a big huge temple is not the Dharma flourishing. Because you can have an enormous temple and millions of dollars spent on statues and stuff, but nobody goes there and nobody keeps precepts and nobody studies. When we pray for the Buddha's teachings to flourish, the principal way they flourish is by our practice. The temples and the buildings and the statues and all the external things, these are aids. They are tools and ways of making the



practice of the Dharma easier, but they aren't the Dharma flourishing in and of themselves.

I saw this quite clearly when I was in Singapore. There was one temple there, which was huge. This temple was so rich. (We had a little bitty struggling group, completely poor.) The prayer room was just enormous, with huge statues. It was in a separate building, and I used to go there and lead camps for the university and the polytechnic students. They also had a big kitchen and the monks' quarters and beautiful landscape and a pond where you can liberate animals. They only had maybe three monks living there. The lay people who came mostly came on Sundays to do a little bit of chanting and to offer money. But in terms of what you people are doing, giving your time and coming for teachings on a regular basis and doing regular practice and going to retreats, very few people were doing that.

So that always made me feel really sad. I used to go in the main temple room and think, "Wouldn't it be incredible to have His Holiness here and the whole room packed?" When they did special ceremonies, for example on the Buddha's birthday, then many people would come, and people would come on Sundays to do some chanting, but what you people are doing in terms of learning and understanding, thinking and looking at your own mind and working with the teachings, what you're doing is really making the Dharma flourish. So again, it's important to remember that, it's something to rejoice at. [Note: the situation has since changed and there are many Dharma activities and people practicing there now.]

## **5. It is especially beneficial in degenerate times**

The fifth advantage of keeping the higher training in ethics is that it is especially beneficial in this degenerate time. Times are very degenerate, and they say because of this, when we compare holding one precept now versus holding the entire monastic ordination at the time of the Buddha, the merit you get from holding one precept now is greater, because the times now are more degenerate. In other words, at the time of the Buddha, it was much easier to keep precepts. People's minds, the society and the whole atmosphere made it very easy to practice.

But in the degenerate times, we have so many obstacles, both internal and external. When we succeed in keeping even one precept now, it's much more noteworthy and valuable. You create much more positive potential than somebody who kept the whole ordination at the time of the Buddha. It's very surprising, isn't it? So it's important to remember that. And then also, to remember that keeping even one precept creates more positive potential, more merit than making offerings to all of the Buddhas for eons. This might seem rather shocking—how come keeping one precept is more valuable than making huge elaborate offerings to all the Buddhas for eons? This is because it's much more difficult to keep precepts, and because when you keep precepts, you're really taming your mind. You're really working with your mind and putting things into practice. So there's a very strong influence on your mindstream.

### **Advice for keeping our ethics well**

In order to keep our ethics very well, they usually give some suggestions at this point, particularly to monastic people, like not to do business unless you have debts. This is a difficult thing. Actually, monastics shouldn't be doing business, but then the way the society is, it has become extremely difficult. You look, even in old Tibet, the monasteries—this doesn't mean every person in the monastery did business—but the monasteries themselves did business and they owned land and they sold things and so on. Therefore, while the actual way is it is better not to do business, you have to see what's happening in the society and how you can survive.

See, this is part of the degenerate time. It doesn't look too good when monastics go and do business and they're bargaining and dealing and everything like that. And yet... for example, I've known many Westerners, they take vows, but there is no system of support for monastics established in the West like there is in Thailand or China, and so the people have no choice but to go out and get a job and work. As Dharma develops in the West, I think it's something to think about. If we want to keep the monastic tradition alive in as pure a fashion as we can, we have to try and set up ways so that people don't have to do business and don't have to put on lay clothes and roll their hair out and go downtown and work.

Monastics are also not supposed to seek sponsors out of greed. Very often, monastics need to seek sponsors, and it's a really touchy one if you try and get sponsors and your mind is being greedy and manipulative and wanting more and not being satisfied. These are the kinds of things that make

ethics deteriorate.

Then a general advice for all of us to help us have good ethics, is to have the minimal number of possessions, in other words, not have our house chock-a-block full of things. Why? Because the fewer things we have, the fewer things we need to worry about.

It is true; we live in a very complicated society. At the time of the Buddha, you didn't need a computer and a car and a telephone. Nowadays, almost just to live in the society, these are things that you need. But the thing is, what are things that we need just to function in a normal way with a good motivation, and what are things that we don't need that we're accumulating because we want more and better? The fuller our house is with things (because we want more and we want better and we have to upgrade this and do that), the more complicated our life becomes. As much as you can simplify your life in terms of possessions, it just makes your ethical conduct that much easier, and your life that much easier actually.

In a similar way, as much as you can, simplify your social life. Now, I'm not telling people to cut off all relationships, go home every night and lock yourself in your room and pretend it's a cave. [Laughter.] I'm not encouraging this. But rather, to deal with the mind that always has to keep busy. The mind that has to go to this party and has to see this person. Has to talk to that person. Has to socialize. Wants to see this movie and that dance, that theatre performance, concert etc. Our life just becomes incredibly complicated. As much as you can make your life simple and select only the things that are important for you, then you

will have less stress and as a result, your ethical conduct improves.

Simple life—it's something to think about, especially in American society. I think one important way to have a simple life—we talked about this before—is to not have too much contact with the media. This is because our mind is so swayed by the media. This is a discipline in itself. Can you imagine the Buddha coming now making another monastic vow—you can only read the front page of the newspapers; you can't read anything else. You can watch fifteen minutes of news and nothing else. [Laughter.] Just to make sure that the life stays simple.

So basically, just to have the possessions that we need. Again, I'm not saying go on deprivation, but just have what you need and get rid of everything else. Maintain your friendships and things, but you don't have to be the socialite of Seattle. Keep some quiet time. When you do get things, you don't have to get the best quality of stuff, you can get what's adequate. You don't need the absolute best quality of everything. Keep the place where you live neat and clean, without tons of junk all around. I know I sound like your mother [Laughter.]. But my teachers told us this, and I think there is a lot of value in it. I know for myself, when I simplify my life and keep the place I live in relatively neat and tidy, it affects my mind. It just makes life a whole lot easier. The basic thing is to cultivate an attitude of contentment. The way to help us to be happy human beings as well as to keep good ethics is to cultivate contentment, "What I have is good enough. It's OK."

## **Disadvantages of Not Observing Ethics**

The next outline is the disadvantages of not observing ethics.

The disadvantages of not observing ethics is that you don't get all the benefits from observing them. Plus, your life just becomes a mess. You read in the newspapers how these big important people's careers crashed, and so much of that was due to basic ethical violations. Even if you don't consider future lives, bad ethics just makes a disaster of our current life. It creates so much confusion.

I talked to one man just a few days ago. It was funny. I had just been going over karma and talking about the ten non-virtues at this place. We were talking and I asked him how his girlfriend was, and he said, "Well, our relationship isn't going well because actually, I went off with another woman and it happened just like what you said in the teachings. You said it was disadvantageous because it made a mess in your life and you're right." [Laughter.] His life has been in a mess for the last six months just because of this thing. And he owns it. He says it was his own fault, and you can see how much suffering he's having, let alone his girlfriend and everybody else involved.

Just in things like this, you can look around and see that when we don't keep good ethics, our minds and our lives fall into disarray and we cause a lot of harm to others and we feel guilty about it. That's how we generate guilt, because we act negatively. So one way to get rid of guilt is to abandon the ten destructive actions.

Furthermore, even if we practice tantra without any kind of basic foundations in ethics, our practice isn't going to get anywhere. Even if you grab for something high and wonderful, the highest teachings, "I'm going to meditate on bliss and voidness", "I'm going to meditate on Dzogchen", "I'm going to meditate on Mahamudra." But if we can't do the basic practice, as much as we squeeze our mind to gain realizations, it's going to be really difficult. This is because the mind won't be fertile.

The whole conclusion is when we see the benefits of keeping ethics and we see the disadvantages of not doing it, then it becomes something that we *want* to do. It will not be something that we *have* to do or something the teacher said you *should* do, or something the Buddha said you *ought to* do, because otherwise you're not going to be good or you won't get realizations. We have to really look at the situation clearly—"This happens if I do it and this happens if I don't. So what's really good for me? What's really good for the society?"—and draw our own conclusion. What is really important in all these teachings that are given is that you really go home and think about them and come to your own conclusion. The teachings aren't 'should's and 'ought to's and 'you'd better's, and these kinds of things. They're things for you to contemplate so you can gain your own understanding, because it's only by understanding that our practice becomes 'tasty'.

## **Four Factors That Lead Us Away from Pure Ethics**

There is also another thing to talk about here that's not listed directly in your outline. There are four factors that lead us away from pure ethics. These four are important to know because if we see the advantages of ethics and the disadvantages of not living ethically, then we want to know how to practice ethics well? What are the pitfalls to avoid?

## **1. Ignorance**

The first of these four factors is ignorance. This means specifically, ignorance of what the vows are, and what negative and positive actions are. When we don't know the difference between positive and negative actions, it's going to be difficult to cultivate one and abandon the other. When we take vows but we don't ask for teachings on the vows, or we don't receive teachings, then it's going to be difficult to know how to keep the vows and what constitutes keeping the vows and what constitutes breaking them. Ignorance is a door through which our ethics degenerate, simply because we don't know.

The way to counteract this is to have teachings—to listen to teachings, to read books, to study, to ask questions. In other words, to learn what constructive actions are and what destructive actions are. To receive teachings on your five lay precepts, to learn what constitutes breaking the precept from the root and what constitutes an infraction.

**What constitutes breaking the five precepts from the root?**



How do you break the five lay precepts from the root? Breaking it from the root means that you have really botched it. When you break the vow from the root, then that ordination becomes like ashes. It becomes ineffective.

For example, the precept of killing. How do you break it from the root, a serious break so that your lay precept becomes like ashes? If you kill a goat, is that breaking this vow from the root? No. You break it from the root when you kill a human being with all those factors [that were explained in previous sessions on karma]—you have the intention, it's not an accident, you want to kill this one and not the other one, and you do it and you feel good about it. If you kill a goat, it's definitely an infraction of the vow. It's negative karma. But your whole lay ordination doesn't crumble to ashes and it's not as serious karmically as killing a human being...

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

...With lying, breaking it from the root is to lie about your spiritual attainments. Deceiving somebody in spiritual terms, so that they think that you're some kind of high, realized being when in fact you're not. The reason why this is said to be breaking it from the root is because this is very damaging to other people. If we lie about our spiritual attainments and other people think we're some great bodhisattva or something, but we are not, we can really damage that person.

For example, you did some small favor for somebody, then they told you, "Oh you are so kind.

You must be a bodhisattva.” And you go, “Um hm [agreeing].” [Laughter.] Or you kind of go around saying, “I realized bliss and emptiness.” “I entered samadhi.” Making these kinds of public statements. Look at Genla [Gen Lamrimpa]. Genla is such a good example [of a good practitioner]. He has been meditating for years. He has incredible meditation experience. What does he say? “Oh, this is what the holy beings do,” kind of, “I don’t know. I don’t have any realizations.” Genla is just really humble and a very good example.

With the drinking one, I’m not really sure what constitutes breaking it from the root. I do know that the Buddha said that his followers shouldn’t take even one drop. But I’m not sure if one drop would be breaking it from the root or not. My assumption would be if one gets completely loaded.

With the intoxicants precept, it’s not only the alcohol. It’s also cigarettes and other intoxicating things.

*[Audience:] What do we do when alcohol is passed around during the tsog puja?*

You’re supposed to stick your little finger in and take a drop. There is one puja called the tsog puja, and they have a little bit of meat and alcohol. The thing is when you do this puja, in your meditation you dissolve these things into emptiness, and generate them as pure substances, and then later when they’re passed around, you taste a little bit of both, looking at them as pure substances because you’ve done this meditation. Still when you do this, you take just a little

piece of what looks like meat and you dip your finger in the alcohol and take a drop. At least that's the way my teachers have taught us. Other teachers might do it differently. At that time when you are doing it, you are not seeing it as ordinary alcohol, because you have done this whole meditation process of transformation and seeing things as pure.

So, the first door leading to the downfall is ignorance, not knowing what the precepts are and not knowing how we break it from the root, not knowing what the ten destructive actions are, not knowing that we need four factors in order to complete a negative action perfectly. We spent a lot of time in previous sessions going over karma and the four factors necessary for each negative action. That isn't just a legalistic pickiness. It's giving us information on how to look at our own actions, to see how serious our action is. It's to give us an idea of how to act constructively as well.

## **2. Disrespect**

The second door that leads us away from pure ethics is disrespect—disrespect for the Buddha's doctrine, disrespect for our own precepts, disrespect for sentient beings. It can sometimes be a very proud attitude, like I just don't care. It's like, "Who's the Buddha to give all these guidelines? Why do I need to follow them? What am I going to get out of it? Why shouldn't I harm these other sentient beings? He's a real idiot!" [Laughter.] This kind of disrespect for the teachings, for others, for ethics itself. It's clear that when you don't respect ethics, it becomes more

difficult to live ethically.

The antidote is to reflect on the qualities and the kindness of the Buddha, to reflect on the advantages of keeping ethics and the disadvantages of not, and to develop friendships with Dharma practitioners and people who really help us, who inspire us, who set good examples. If we're around people who respect ethics, then we come to do so too. When we are around people who don't take it seriously, then we easily gain their view as well.

### **3. Lack of conscientiousness**

The third door is lack of conscientiousness. Remember when we did the twenty secondary afflictions, lack of conscientiousness is one of them? It is a very reckless attitude that isn't at all interested in avoiding destructive actions or acting constructively. It's just reckless. It just doesn't care. "I can't be bothered to be mindful. I don't really care if I act positively or negatively. I can't be bothered to be mindful. It takes too much time. It's too much energy." Just this very reckless attitude. We talk about being kind to ourselves—that's a big thing in American culture, being kind to yourself. If you want to be kind to yourself, keep good ethics. It's true, isn't it? If you want to be kind to yourself, act ethically.

The way to overcome this lack of conscientiousness is to contemplate the advantages of keeping good ethics or being kind to ourselves, and to contemplate the disadvantages of not respecting our own ethical integrity, not respecting ourselves as human beings. Often when we have this careless

attitude towards ethics, we're not in touch with our potential as human beings. We've forgotten about our Buddha potential. It's almost as if we don't even respect ourselves enough to let our Buddha potential come out, when we have this very reckless attitude. The things to cultivate, in order to oppose it, are to cultivate an awareness of the advantages and disadvantages, and also to remember that we are followers of the Buddha. It gives us some kind of energy as well. Also, train ourselves in mindfulness, to be aware, to be mindful of what we're saying, thinking and doing, and to see how it fits in with the ethical behavior that we've learned about.

#### **4. Having lots of afflictions**

The fourth door leading us away from pure ethics is having lots of afflictions. We might not be ignorant. We might not be disrespectful. We might not lack conscientiousness. But when we have very strong afflictions, the force of our own emotions pushes us. I'm sure we've all had that happened. It's like you're in the middle of saying the most outrageous, horrible, cruel things to somebody, and one part of your mind says, "Why in the world am I doing this? Why don't I just close my mouth. I'll be a whole lot happier if I close my mouth right now." [Laughter.] But somehow, you can't close your mouth.

Our afflictions just come on very strongly and whisk us away, even though we don't want to be acting that way or saying that or doing that. I'm sure we've all had that experience. You might be in the middle of being so angry and ticked off at somebody,

and thinking of all these cruel things to say to them, and part of your mind is saying, “Why don’t you just be quiet, mind? Leave me alone! I really don’t want to think like this.” But your mind still continues to be obsessed. Or you might be in the middle of doing something and like I said, part of your mind is going, “Why don’t I just stop this?” All these happen because of the force of the afflictions that haven’t been tamed before, and so they’re just coming on very strongly at that moment.

### **Reviewing the antidotes to the individual afflictions**

The antidote to that is to learn the antidotes to the individual afflictions. The wisdom that realizes emptiness is, of course, the general antidote to all of them. Contemplating death and impermanence is also a very good antidote. But specifically, for anger, the simplest antidote to mediate on is compassion and patience. If you have attachment, lots of greed and desire coming up, you meditate on impermanence. Besides impermanence, which is really good for attachment, we look at the ugly aspect of the thing. This is not to develop aversion or anger, but to balance the mind out and take the fantasy away. When we are very jealous, the antidote is to rejoice, because jealousy can’t stand them to be happy, and rejoicing is being glad that they’re happy.

When your mind is really restless and you have a lot of cynical, nitpicking doubt about the Dharma, you meditate on the breath. When your mind nitpicks, like asking, “Why did the Buddha say this? I don’t know why the Buddha said that ...”, refuge is helpful, but

especially the breath, just settling the mind down, coming back to the present moment, getting rid of all that junk.

*[Audience: inaudible]*

You brought up resentment. That could fall under the category of anger. Because when we resent things, we're holding on to anger. It's a form of anger. Or it could be a form of jealousy. You have to look at the particular kind of resentment it is.

For pride, you meditate on the twelve links and rebirths. Because they're so difficult to understand, this gets rid of your pride. There is another point, which is not in the scriptures, but is something that I've discovered myself. It is that when I think of how whatever I'm proud about has come due to the kindness of others, then that takes the pride away, because I realize it's not mine to be proud of. It's only nominally labeled 'mine' basically because other people made it possible.

So although emptiness is the general antidote, if we can't use emptiness because we're not advanced enough, then we use one of these other antidotes, and we become familiar with it in our daily meditations so that we can take it out and use it.

In addition, we try and cultivate the attitude of self-respect. Remember when we talked about the afflictions and death, one point was the 'lack of self-respect', not caring about your own ethics and your own practice? The antidote is to develop a sense of self-respect. I value myself enough to keep good ethical behavior, and I value my own integrity as a

human being.

Also, cultivate a sense of consideration for others. Remember we did ‘inconsideration for others’ as one of the twenty secondary afflictions? ‘Consideration for others’ is where we abandon acting negatively because we don’t want it to affect others in a harmful way—for others to lose faith in the Dharma or lose faith in us, or to be harmed.

Consideration for others and a sense of self-respect really help us get rid of the afflictions.

### **Work with the most serious afflictions first**

In this light, it is very helpful to try and figure out which is your greatest affliction. Do most people have an idea of which is their biggest problem? It’s very helpful to figure out what’s your biggest problem, and work specifically with that one and try and balance it out, and then go on to work with the other ones.

I remember Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey was teaching one text that says, if your greatest affliction is attachment and greed, then the skillful teacher will put that student in difficult situations where they can’t have whatever it is that they’re attached to, or where they have to give up what it is they are attached to. Not necessarily ascetic situations, but in circumstances where they’re forced to overcome their attachments and let go.

On the other hand, a student whose basic problem is anger, you don’t do that, because if you do that, that person only gets angrier. For a person who has a lot of anger, you’re nice and sweet to them and give them the basic things that they need and then teach



them to meditate on patience.

Learn to be skillful with your mind and not push yourself, but figure out what your biggest affliction is and then working specifically like that. You've got to learn to be like a skillful doctor for your own mind.

Purification practice helps too. When you feel stuck, and you feel, "Gosh! My mind is just going totally bonkers and I can't control it. Ethics is beyond me," then do some purification. Do some prostrations; do the prostrations to the thirty-five Buddhas. Or do the Shakyamuni Buddha meditation. Because that helps you to let go of that energy and restore your confidence.

We've now completed the teachings in common with the practitioner of the middle level.