



The
Gomchen Lamrim

STUDY GUIDE

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01 The Gomchen Lamrim 08-07-15:

The four great qualities of the lamrim

1. The text states that the Buddha's teachings are free of contradiction. Why is it important to understand this?
2. What is the benefit in seeing the teachings as personal instruction?
3. How might seeing the greatness of the teacher and teachings benefit your mind as you approach the Dharma?

02 The Gomchen Lamrim 08-14-15:

How to listen to and explain the Dharma teachings

1. Consider the many benefits of hearing teachings (mind filled with faith, delight in spiritual practice, wisdom will grow and ignorance dispelled). Why is it important to know the benefits?
2. Venerable Chodron said that the Dharma is more important than even our own body. Consider this in light of some of the decisions you make.
3. Why does veneration for the teacher, even seeing the teacher as the Buddha, benefit the mind?
4. Describe the three faulty pots and why we want to avoid listening in this manner.
5. How does reflecting on the six recognitions prepare our mind to hear the Dharma (you as the sick person, the teacher as the doctor, the teaching as medicine, steady application as the cure, tathagatas as superior beings, dedication)?
6. What are the benefits of teaching and what qualities should we cultivate in order to teach?

03 The Gomchen Lamrim 08-21-15:

The qualities of spiritual mentors and students

1. Spend some time really thinking about the qualities of a good spiritual mentor as Venerable Chodron described. She also said that the Buddha helps us through our spiritual mentor. So how do these specific qualities in a spiritual mentor help US progress along the path?
2. Also spend some time thinking about the qualities of a qualified disciple. Why are they important? To what extent do you have these qualities? What specific things can you do to help strengthen and cultivate them?
3. Why are we instructed to not look for the faults in our spiritual mentor once we have checked them out and chosen them as our teacher?

04 The Gomchen Lamrim 08-28-15:

How to rely on spiritual mentors in thought and deed

1. Consider the kindness of your teachers in light of the following verses:

“They look for me who has roamed in cyclic existence for a long time. They awaken me from a long time of obscuration and torpor due to ignorance. They pull me out as I sink in the ocean of existence. They show good paths to me who has entered bad ones. They free me, who has been bound in the prison of existence. They are a doctor to me who has been tormented by illness. I should generate the notion of them as rain clouds, pacifying me who has been ablaze with the fire of attachment and the like.

“These are my spiritual friends, expounders of Dharma, exhaustively teaching the qualities of all Dharmas. Fairly teaching the conduct of bodhisattvas. With these thoughts in mind, I have come here. As they give birth to all that, they are like my mother. They give me the milk of virtue, so they are like nurses. They cleanse me completely by means of enlightenment’s branches. These spiritual friends completely exorcise harm. They are like doctors, releasing from death and old age. Showering a rain of nectar, they are like the Lord Indra. Like the full moon, they flourish with virtuous qualities. They show the direction of peace just like bright sunlight. Regarding friends and foes, they are like mountains. They have minds as undisturbed as the tranquil sea. They give perfect support, some say like boatmen. With this in mind, I have come here. Bodhisattvas bring forth my understanding. Bodhisattvas cause enlightenment. These beings, these friends of mine, are praised by the Buddha. With such virtuous thoughts, I have come here. As they save the world, they are like heroes. They have become captains, protectors and refuge. They are the eye bestowing happiness on me. With thoughts like these, honor your spiritual friends.”

2. What are some of the usual worldly motivations you have for cultivating a relationship with your teachers? What can you do to transform these into Dharma motivations?
3. What does it mean to “please” our teachers?
4. What are the three ways to rely upon our teachers in deed? How are you currently doing this? (Rejoice!!!) What can you do to enhance this aspect of your practice?
5. What are the benefits of relying on our teachers and the drawbacks of not relying on them?

05 The Gomchen Lamrim 09-04-15:

The six preliminary practices, part 1

1. Consider the six preparatory practices: cleaning the room, setting up the altar, getting your body in the proper sitting position, visualizing the merit field, reciting the 7-limb prayer, making requests to the lineage mentors for inspiration. Why are each of these important?

2. Take the time to really think about taking refuge and bodhicitta (reminding ourselves of WHAT we are doing and WHY). How does this affect the rest of the practice session?
3. Venerable Chodron repeatedly challenged us how, on one hand, our mind rejects the idea of visualization, thinking it's just "made up," and yet on the other hand we totally buy into all the story-lines of our afflictions (when we're anxious, craving something, angry...). Really spend some time watching the mind and investigate how we fabricate our experience.
4. Along the same vein... Visualization is incredibly powerful. Venerable Chodron said, "Choose your make-believe!" Investigate the difference between visualizing the refuge tree or the merit field and the "visualizations" we normally indulge in under the influence of the afflicted mind. How do these different kinds of "visualizations" affect the mind and by extension the way we see and interact with the world?

06 The Gomchen Lamrim 09-11-15:

The six preliminary practices, part 2

1. Take the time to really look at each of the parts of the 7-limb prayer. How do each of these transform the mind in its own particular way?
2. Explore your own personal mandala offering. What do you crave? What are you attached to? What do you aspire for? What do you find beautiful? In the mandala, we are requesting that obstacles be removed and that we realize the steps of the path. In return we offer everything. Imagine what that "everything" entails and mentally offer it to the Buddha. How does this make you feel?

07 The Gomchen Lamrim 09-18-15:

What to do during the meditation session and between sessions

1. In the introduction, Venerable Chodron challenges us to investigate our view on the world; how our interpretations and where we put our attention determines our experience. Take some time to look for the goodness in the world. Take some time to also recognize all the opportunities in your life. How does a change in the where you put your attention change your experience?
2. The day of a practitioner is divided into our formal session time and the time in between sessions. These influence each other. What can you do in between sessions to better keep your mind in the Dharma? What can you do to bring what you meditate on into your experience the rest of the day?
3. Along those same lines, the text encourages us to use our in between session time to create merit and purify negativities. Are there things you can bring into your daily life to accomplish these two? What are ways you can transform mundane

things you are already doing so that these activities become acts of creating merit and purification?

4. Consider the four causes for serenity and insight to arise easily: controlling the senses, eating with moderation, sleep only as much as the body needs and immerse the mind in the Dharma before going to sleep, being aware of what we're doing with our body, speech, and mind in the break-time. What role does not being mindful of these four play in experiencing hindrances in your practice? What can you do to strengthen these four?
5. Think about the two meditation methods (serenity and insight). Why do we need to cultivate both in our practice?

08 The Gomchen Lamrim 09-25-15:

The freedoms and fortunes of a precious human rebirth

1. Look at each of the 8 Freedoms and 10 Fortunes. Consider: Do you have each of these? What might it be like to *not* have these freedoms and fortunes (consider them, one at a time)? What would your life be like if even ONE of these were missing? What would it mean for your spiritual practice?
2. What can you do to create the causes for any of these you might be missing?
3. How can you ensure that you create the causes to have these freedoms and fortunes in the future (this life and in the next)?

09 The Gomchen Lamrim 10-02-15:

How to take full advantage of a precious human rebirth

1. The text rather directly said that to be concerned with the happiness of JUST this life is to be no better than animals:

Once you have attained a life with the ten kinds of good fortune, striving after the concerns of this life is animal behavior.

Take some time to think about this statement. If you have a precious human life, are you using it to its potential? What might you do to make use of this rare opportunity to practice the Dharma?

2. It is said that as a human, we have the perfect balance of happiness and suffering that provides the conditions to practice as well as the desire to leave samsara altogether. What is it about being born in the other realms that doesn't afford us this opportunity?
3. The two goals of a practitioner are higher rebirth and liberation/awakening. Why are both of these needed and how does ethical conduct influence these goals?

4. Venerable Chodron said that we fall all over ourselves planning for retirement (which may or may not come), but not for rebirth (which will SURELY come and may come soon). What does it mean to prepare for our next life?
5. Why is it so hard to accumulate the virtue that is the basis for a human life?
6. What are the three capacities of beings on the path, what are their motivations, and what do they practice to accomplish their goal?
7. Why do Mahayana practitioners say they practice “in common with” the first two levels of practitioners? Why are these first two levels so important?
8. Generating bodhicitta is what has the power to transform our ordinary activities into the spiritual path. Why is it that we must first recognize our own suffering in samsara before we can generate bodhicitta?
9. Why is it important to have an overview of the whole path, understanding how the teachings fit together, as well as follow this prescribed path?

10 The Gomchen Lamrim 10-09-15:

The drawbacks to not remembering death

1. What does it mean to be in the present moment from a Dharma perspective? What role does ethical conduct play in this?
2. Venerable Chodron said that the standard we can use to measure our actions as Dharma practitioners is asking ourselves “Am I creating virtue? Is this getting me closer to liberation and awakening?” Spend some time this week bringing this to mind in your daily life. From your experience investigating this, how is directing your mind in this way beneficial?
3. Why does meditating on death and impermanence help us “live in the present?”
4. What are the three disadvantages of not remembering death and impermanence?
5. Venerable Chodron said that the Eight Worldly Concerns are the demarcation line for what is and what is not a Dharma activity. List them and consider how they play a role in your life. Consider... Is this how you want to spend your time and energy? What kind of karma are you creating when you engage in these 8 Worldly Concerns? What are practical things you can do in your daily life to begin to overcome them?

11 The Gomchen Lamrim 10-16-15:

Antidotes to the eight worldly concerns and the ten innermost jewels

1. Venerable Chodron listed many disadvantages of following the Eight Worldly Concerns (being attached to just this life). Consider each of them and come up with some of your own as well. What does thinking in this way do for your mind and your practice?

2. What does it mean to practice the Dharma? What is the demarcation line between Dharma activity and not Dharma activity?
3. Venerable Chodron presented the first 7 of the 10 Innermost Jewels of the Kadampa. Take time to go through each one of them slowly. What does thinking in this way do for your mind and your practice? How can you cultivate them in your daily life?

12 The Gomchen Lamrim 10-23-15:

The benefits of remembering death

1. Think about each one of the 10 innermost jewels of the Kadampa and imagine situations where you have the strength of mind to live in this way. What would it feel like to have this kind of fortitude? What are the advantages of thinking in this way and what can you do to cultivate them in your life?
 - as our innermost outlook on life, being willing to accept the Dharma with total trust
 - as our innermost attitude towards the Dharma, being willing to accept with total trust even becoming a beggar
 - as our innermost attitude towards becoming a beggar, being willing to accept with total trust even having to die
 - as our innermost attitude towards death, being willing to accept with total trust even having to die friendless and alone in an empty cave
 - to go ahead without consideration for what others think to keep the constant company of the wisdom of our precepts and commitments to carry on continuously without getting caught up in useless concerns
 - being willing to be expelled from the ranks of so called “normal people” because we don’t share their limited values being willing to be regarded amongst the ranks of dogs being completely involved in attaining the divine rank of a Buddha
2. The reason we contemplate these 10 innermost jewels is to counter the influence of the Eight Worldly Concerns. Which of the Eight Worldly Concerns do you find most prevalent in your life and how can meditating on these 10 innermost jewels and reflecting on death help you to overcome it?
3. Venerable Chodron listed six disadvantages of not thinking about death and six advantages of thinking about death. Consider each of these in depth. Why does thinking in this way overcome our laziness and help us practice?

Disadvantages:

- we don't practice
- if we practice, we put it off
- if we don't put it off, we don't practice purely
- we'll lose energy to practice over a long time
- we will create a lot of destructive karma
- we'll die with regret

Advantages:

- we'll act meaningfully and won't waste time
 - all our positive actions will be powerful and effective (naturally be more generous and not harm others)
 - it gets us going at the beginning of our practice
 - it keeps us going in the middle of our practice
 - keeps us focused on attaining our goal at the end of our practice
 - we die happily and pleasantly
4. You have to have a wish to attain awakening that is so strong that you accept whatever comes up and meet it head on. What meditations can you rely on to keep yourself balanced and keep from falling into depression and complacency?
 5. What expectations do you have of your own practice (constant inspiration and bliss)? Are these realistic? Do you get discouraged when others disrobe or give up their practice or does it inspire you to work harder?
 6. What does it really mean to benefit others? If you practice well, can you be ok with others being unhappy with you? Even if you did everything that someone wants, would they be happy?

13 The Gomchen Lamrim 10-30-15:

Gomchen Lamrim review: The teachings, teachers, and students

1. Consider some of the benefits of studying the lamrim that Venerable Tarpa laid out: shows us where all the teachings fall into the bigger picture, helps us practice consistently, we see that the teachings work, it nourishes the mind, we understand that practice is the most important thing we can do with our lives, etc. Think about your own practice. How have you seen these benefits in your life? What other benefits have you experienced having studied and practiced the lamrim?
2. Why is it so important to actually engage with the teachings on a personal level? How are the three faulty pots hindrances to receiving the teachings and what can you do to avoid being like them?
3. The spiritual mentor is said to be the root of the path. What qualities are we taught to look for in a spiritual mentor and why?

4. Consider the characteristics of a good student: impartial, intelligent, full of endeavor. Why are these qualities important? To what extent do you have these qualities? What specific things can you do to help strengthen and cultivate them?
5. The relationship we have with our spiritual mentor is the most important relationship. What does it mean to rely on a teacher in thought and deed? In what areas of your life do you find this difficult? What can you do to overcome obstacles that prevent you from fully relying on your spiritual mentor?

14 The Gomchen Lamrim 11-06-15:

Nine-point meditation on death

1. The text says, “Consequently, from the depths of your heart contemplate your death, and see that the great importance you attribute to this life is futile.” What “importance” is this line instructing us to relinquish? In what ways IS this life important?
2. What is the purpose of meditating on death? What kind of mind is it designed to evoke?
3. The text uses a sutra quote to illustrate the fleeting nature of this life. Consider each of these analogies: “The impermanence of the three worlds is like autumn clouds; beings’ births and deaths are like watching scenes from a play; beings’ lives pass like flashes of lightening in the sky; and are swiftly spent like water down a steep mountainside.”
4. Think of the people in your life who have died, how old they were, and how they died. Get a feeling that death is certain and that the time is uncertain.
5. Go through the 9-point death meditation, really spending time to contemplate each point and coming to the conclusions that we must practice, we must practice now, and we must practice purely.
6. Ask: In what ways am I using my time wisely in this life? What excuses do I have for putting off my practice? How can I relate to the people and things in my life in a way that creates merit? What are things I need to change or abandon to really make this life meaningful?

15 The Gomchen Lamrim 11-13-15:

Avoiding rebirth in the lower realms

1. Imagine finding out you have a terminal diagnosis. Who would you want to tell and not tell? What would you do to prepare for your death? Who do you need to forgive and what do you need to purify? What do you want to do with the time you have left in this life?
2. Contemplate the suffering of a hell being, a hungry ghost and an animal. What is the purpose of having an awareness of the suffering of the lower realms?

3. According to Chapter 2 of Shantideva, what is the danger of not thinking about death? What karma have you created to acquire the pleasures of this life? In light of all this, how do you want to move forward?
4. We get so distracted with the Eight Worldly Concerns that we don't remember to contemplate death. What reminders can you employ in your daily life to reflect on the impermanence of your life?
5. What kinds of things prevent you from your Dharma aspirations? What do you spend time on instead of practicing the Dharma?
6. Why does thinking about death and the potential for the lower realms lead us to refuge?
7. What are the three causes of refuge and why might creating these causes lead to deeper refuge?

16 The Gomchen Lamrim 11-20-15:

The qualities of the Three Jewels

1. The text says, "Those who are worthy of refuge are entirely free of all personal fears, skilled in the methods to free others from their fear, and whose compassion encompasses all." Consider these qualities of the Buddha and why they make him a reliable object of refuge.
2. Venerable Chodron said that the Buddhas have more compassion for us than we have for ourselves. Spend some time thinking about this. Why is this? What prevents us from having great compassion even for ourselves?
3. Venerable Chodron read a number of quotations on the qualities of the Buddha. Thinking about these qualities, what does it inspire in your own mind? How does it deepen your refuge?
4. Venerable Chodron said we have to do more than be inspired. We need to consider: How did the Buddha get these qualities? How do I need to practice to develop these qualities? What is the use of having these kind of qualities? How can I use whatever level of these qualities I have now to benefit others? How have I benefitted from these qualities myself?
5. The King of Concentration sutra says:

"I instruct you and you should understand, people's minds become absorbed in something to the degree that they reflect on it. Therefore recollect the master of the sages as having a conqueror's physical posture and limitless sublime wisdom. If you constantly familiarize yourself with such recollection, your mind will become absorbed in it. You will desire the sublime wisdom of a holy being whether you walk, sit, stand, or recline because you yourself will want to become a sublime conqueror in the world. You will also make prayers aspiring to enlightenment."

Reflect on this. Venerable said, “We’re the ones who have to choose what we reflect on.” How might you go about redirecting your thoughts so that it leads you to aspiring to become a Buddha and practicing the path?

6. The Buddha is effortlessly and continuously guiding us, but we’re not always receptive to this, and as a result we can often feel stuck. Venerable Chodron said we have to be aware of our own mind and be able to tell when we’re feeling sluggish. She suggested that creating merit and purification practice can help make us more receptive. Why do these practices help and how can you go about incorporating these practices into your day?

17 The Gomchen Lamrim 11-27-15:

How to take refuge in the Three Jewels

1. Venerable Chodron touched briefly on the qualities of the hearer and solitary realizer arhats and then extensively on the qualities of the arya bodhisattvas. Consider these qualities of the Sangha and how they increase as the aryas continue to progress along the path, particularly on the bodhisattva bhūmis. How do these qualities inspire faith and confidence in their ability to guide, teach, and befriend sentient beings?
2. Understanding the differences between the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha helps to deepen our refuge, giving us clarity into how each of them help us and why it’s so important to take refuge in all three. Consider the differences in each category Venerable Chodron discussed (characteristics, awakening influence, fervent regard we have for each, how we practice, what we are mindful of, how we create merit in relation to them) and make examples of how these ways of relating to the Triple Gem would look in your own life.
3. Why is Dharma our real refuge?
4. Consider how deepening our understanding of the qualities of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha helps us to be clear in our refuge and not take refuge in worldly things, giving us clarity and fortitude when the Eight Worldly Concerns are pulling at us.
5. What are the benefits of taking refuge? How have you personally benefitted from taking refuge?
6. Consider: The Buddha, Dharma, Sangha are always 100% engaged, but you have to be receptive. Are you paying attention? Are you actively looking for their instruction and guidance in your life?

18 The Gomchen Lamrim 12-04-15:

Gomchen lamrim review: How to rely on the teachings and teachers

1. Regarding analytic meditation, Venerable Jigme said that this is what takes us from hearing the Dharma to actually being able to use it. We have to bring it into our experience. In what ways has analytic meditation benefitted your life and experience?
2. From time to time, the teachings may seem to contradict themselves, but if we understand where they fit into the lamrim, we'll see that different ways of looking at things are meant to generate a particular mental state necessary for attaining particular goals at different stages of the path. What are some examples of this?
3. Some of the benefits of the teachings are that 1) we are filled with faith/confidence, 2) our practice is stable, 3) wisdom grows and ignorance is dispelled. Consider each of these. How have you seen this in your life? What are other benefits from the teachings that you have received?
4. Consider the three qualities of a disciple: unbiased, intelligent, interested. To what extent do you have these qualities? What can you do to cultivate these in your mind?
5. Think about the benefits of relying on a teacher and the drawbacks of not relying on one. Develop conviction that this is the most important relationship you can cultivate.

19 The Gomchen Lamrim 12-11-15:

Gomchen Lamrim review: The six preparatory practices

1. Venerable Tarpa said that the depth of our wisdom depends on how much we study and reflect. Spend some time thinking about why this is true and what you can do to give yourself time to engage in these activities.
2. Venerable Tarpa focused the review on the mental aspect of the six preparatory practices. As you are doing these practices each morning (cleaning and setting up the altar, making offerings, preparing the body and mind, imagining the merit field, reciting the 7-limb prayer, and the mandala offering/requests) take the time to really cultivate the corresponding mental states that these practices are designed to generate. How does this change your practice and by extension how you go about your day?

20 The Gomchen Lamrim 12-18-15:

Gomchen Lamrim review: The actual meditation session

1. Take time to think through an extensive dedication like the ones Venerable Samten described. How does this benefit your mind? What is the long-term benefit of dedicating in this way?
2. Consider Tenzin Palmo's advice to have a daily practice, even if its only 10 minutes a day. Why is daily habituation such an important part of the spiritual path?
3. Consider the four factors that facilitate serenity and insight. What changes can you make to cultivate these factors in your life?
4. Why are both analytic and stabilization meditation critical on the path?
5. Carefully go through each of the 18 factors for a precious human life. What would your life be like if you didn't have even just one of these?
6. What are the motivations of the three levels of practitioners? What does it mean to practice "in common with" other levels?

21 The Gomchen Lamrim 12-25-15:

Gomchen Lamrim review: Remembering death brings life to our practice

1. Review the 10 Innermost Jewels of the Kadampa and consider that if you devote your whole life to the Dharma, you can get real practice done. Imagine your life completely devoted to the Dharma. How might that look? How would holding these attitudes make it easier to practice and to benefit others? What steps might you make today to start cultivating these attitudes in your life?
2. Why is it that cleaning up our ethical conduct allows us to be present in each moment?
3. Why is it said that if we don't remember death and impermanence in the morning, afternoon, and evening that we have wasted the day?
4. One of the disadvantages of not remembering death is that we don't remember to practice because we're focused on the happiness of just this life. What activities distract you from the path? What can you do to overcome these and shift your focus to the Dharma?
5. Consider: Remembering death makes our spiritual practice easier. Why is this?

22 The Gomchen Lamrim 01-01-16:

Gomchen Lamrim review: Two meditations on death

1. Go through the 9-point death meditation. What is the wisdom fear that we should have coming out of the death meditation? How does this wisdom fear act as an antidote to the usual fears we have about death?
2. What kinds of excuses do you come up with for putting off spiritual practice?
3. What kinds of negative karma have you created in relation to possessions, friends and relatives, and your own body that you will carry with you at the time of death? Take time to purify these things and determine to abandon the eight worldly concerns.
4. Go through the points of the meditation on imagining your own death. Having meditated in this way, what do you want to do with the time you have left? What does it mean to live a meaningful life?
5. His Holiness the Dalai Lama says that the state of our mind as we approach death is very important as it steers the course of our rebirth. With this in mind, in addition to the fact that we do not know when we will die, how do you want to direct your mind in each moment? Is anger or jealousy or greed worth it if you could die in the next moment?
6. Why is it important to consider the possibility of being born in a lower realm? How does this benefit our practice?

23 The Gomchen Lamrim 01-08-16:

Gomchen Lamrim review: Refuge in the Three Jewels

1. What originally prompted you to take refuge? How has that changed as you've continued to study and practice?
2. Consider the many qualities of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Which ones most resonate with your mind for each of them?
3. How are the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha different from each other? Why is it essential to take refuge in all three?
4. Consider the benefits of taking refuge. How have you seen these in your life? How would deepening refuge bring even greater benefit?
5. Tsong Khapa said that what we reflect on is what our mind becomes absorbed in. Do you find this true in your life? Consider how directing your mind towards the qualities of the Triple Gem would transform your life and practice.
6. On the basis of taking refuge, how has your life changed?

24 The Gomchen Lamrim 01-15-16:

Developing conviction in karma

1. What is “faith of conviction” or “convictional faith?” Why is it beneficial on the spiritual path?
2. Why is an understanding of karma and its effects so important?
3. Think of ways in which you very much believe in the law of cause and effect in your every day life. Why do you think its so hard for us then to act in line with ethical cause and effect (karma)?
4. Explain the difference between morality in theistic religions vs. Buddhism. Why is it important for us to understand the difference?
5. Describe the four characteristics of karma. Make examples of how you’ve seen them operate in your own life.
6. What are the three branches of a complete action (sometimes it is described as four branches). How might a deeper awareness of these affect how you interact with others?
7. Describe the branches for a complete action of killing. Think of different situations where one of the branches might not be complete for the act of killing? If the action is not complete with all branches, does the person still create karma? Why or why not?

25 The Gomchen Lamrim 01-22-16:

The nonvirtues of stealing and sexual misconduct

1. What is the definition of stealing? Looking at it with this wording and using some of the examples given in the teaching, think of ways you have stolen in the past either willfully or not realizing it was stealing. Are there any actions that came up in considering this non-virtue that you would like to abandon in the future? Remember to purify these past negativities using the four opponent powers.
2. Describe the branches for a complete action of stealing. Think of different situations where one of the branches might not be complete. How does this affect the result of the karma created?
3. Describe the branches for a complete action of unwise and unkind sexual conduct. Think of different situations where one of the branches might not be complete. How does this affect the result of the karma created?
4. Why do you think we get so charged about the non-virtuous pathway of sexual misconduct?
5. What role does society play in your perceptions of these two non-virtues? Why is it important to be aware of this?

26 The Gomchen Lamrim 01-29-16:

The nonvirtues of lying and divisive speech

1. What kinds of things are included in the non-virtuous pathway of lying? How have you seen this non-virtue operate in your life? How has acting in this way been harmful to you? To others?
2. Describe the branches for a complete action of lying. Think of different situations where one of the branches might not be complete. How does this affect the result of the karma created?
3. Consider the cultural differences when it come to the acceptance of lying? Is it still lying? Were there forms of lying you were encouraged to do growing up and/or as an adult that you now see aren't beneficial?
4. What kinds of things are included in the non-virtuous pathway of divisive speech? How have you seen this non-virtue operate in your life? How has acting in this way been harmful to you? To others?
5. Describe the branches for a complete action of divisive speech. Think of different situations where one of the branches might not be complete. How does this affect the result of the karma created?
6. Which branch MUST be present in order for there to be karma created? Why?
7. We've gone over 5 non-virtuous pathways so far. Think of times in your life when any or all of these have been big dilemmas for you.

27 The Gomchen Lamrim 02-05-16:

The nonvirtues of harsh speech and idle talk

1. Venerable Chodron commented that we don't have to spend time cultivating these non- virtuous pathways unlike effort we have to apply to create the virtuous ones. In fact, non-virtue comes quite naturally. Do a life review. Do you find this true for yourself?
2. What kinds of things are included in the non-virtuous pathway of harsh speech? How have you seen this non-virtue operate in your life? How has acting in this way been harmful to you? To others?
3. Describe the branches for a complete action of harsh speech. Think of different situations where one of the branches might not be complete. How does this affect the result of the karma created?
4. Why do you think we, in general, speak harshest to our loved ones? In what ways is this approach counter-productive?
5. What kinds of things are included in the non-virtuous pathway of idle talk? How have you seen this non-virtue operate in your life? How has acting in this way been harmful to you? To others?

6. Describe the branches for a complete action of idle talk. Think of different situations where one of the branches might not be complete. How does this affect the result of the karma created?
7. Why do you think that idle talk is such a hindrance to spiritual practice?
8. Take some time to make examples of conversations in your own life that were idle talk and those that were purposeful speech. How does our motivation impact whether or not it is idle or purposeful speech?
9. Which of the four non-virtuous verbal karmic pathways is the most prevalent for you? What can you do to be more mindful of this in your daily life?
10. Venerable Chodron said that when we have problems with others, it often comes down to one of the ten non-virtuous pathways. Spend some time reviewing your relationships, both past and present. Do you find this true?

28 The Gomchen Lamrim 02-12-16:

The mental nonvirtues: coveting, malice and wrong views

1. What is the difference between a karma and a karmic pathway? Which of the ten non-virtues are afflictions and which are karma?
2. Describe the branches for a complete karmic pathway of covetousness. Think of different situations where one of the branches might not be complete. How does this affect the result of the karma created?
3. Venerable Chodron said that the karmic pathway of covetousness isn't just the passing thought of wanting something. It is built up over time and becomes a strong motivation. Make examples from your life of ways in which covetousness arose in your mind. How has acting in this way been harmful to you? To others?
4. Describe the branches for a complete karmic pathway of malice. Think of different situations where one of the branches might not be complete. How does this affect the result of the karma created?
5. Again for this one, it's not the passing thought of anger, not liking someone, etc. Make examples from your life of ways in which malice arose in your mind. How has acting in this way been harmful to you? To others?
6. Describe the branches for a complete karmic pathway of wrong view. Think of different situations where one of the branches might not be complete. How does this affect the result of the karma created?
7. What wrong views have you cultivated in the past? What wrong views do you see in the world? Consider the harm that wrong views lead people to do.

29 The Gomchen Lamrim 02-19-16:

The factors that influence karmic weight

1. What is the difference between a karmic pathway and karma? What is intention karma, what is intended karma, and which comes first? Make some examples from your life.
2. What is the order of the physical non-virtuous pathways from most serious to least serious? The verbal non-virtuous pathways? The mental ones?
3. What are factors that make an action heavier or lighter? Go through each of the non- virtuous pathways and make real-life examples of the different factors that make an action heavier or lighter. Why is it so important to be aware of this?
4. Go through each of the virtuous pathways and make real-life examples of the different factors as well.
5. Does meditating on these factors make you more aware of your intentions and actions throughout the day? How can you use awareness of these factors to strengthen the virtuous karma you create in your daily life?

30 The Gomchen Lamrim 02-26-16:

What makes karma powerful

1. Spend some time considering the four factors that make karma heavier or lighter according to the text: powerful with respect to the field, the basis, the action itself, and the intention behind it. Think of specific examples in your life of things you do that create strong virtuous and non-virtuous karma. What are specific examples of weak virtuous and non-virtuous karma. With this knowledge, what specific things can you do to weaken the negative and strengthen the positive karma?
2. Powerful with respect to the field (the recipient of the action): Actions done in relationship to the Three Jewels, our spiritual mentors, our parents, and the ill and poor create heavier karma for us. Why is this the case?
3. Powerful with respect to the basis (you as the person creating the karma): Consider the ways in which we affect the heaviness of our karma: not concealing our negativities and practicing the four opponent powers, increasing our wisdom, taking (and keeping) precepts, etc.)
4. Why are the negativities of the wise lighter?
5. Why does having (and keeping) more precepts make actions heavier?
6. Powerful with respect to the action itself: Why are sharing the Dharma with others and offering your practice both the highest forms of generosity and the most powerful karma with respect to the action itself?
7. Powerful with respect to the intention behind it: Consider the role of intention in making an action heavier or lighter (actions motivated by bodhicitta vs. by strong affliction, things done over a long time, etc).

8. Venerable Chodron said studying what makes karma powerful is helpful in getting to the heart of what is valuable to do and not do. Have you found that these teachings have begun to transform your actions?
9. Venerable Semkye commented that what has been powerful for her in these teachings is recognizing just how often she runs on automatic, isn't paying attention to her motivation, and misses endless opportunities to create virtue. Do you find the same true for yourself? What can you do to increase your awareness so that you can make use of the many opportunities you have each day to create virtue?

31 The Gomchen Lamrim 03-04-16:

The effects of negative karma

1. What are the three results of karma (divided into 4 where the second has two aspects)?
2. Go through the ten non-virtues and consider each of the four results that come from them. Can you see how the results correspond with the cause created? It can be very powerful for the mind to list this out in a spreadsheet. Try this. How does it affect your mind to see this in writing?
3. We've all experienced these results to some degree, haven't we? Consider how you can transform your unpleasant experiences, and instead of getting angry and blaming others, see your experience as the result of past negativities, purify anything that might still be on your mindstream, and use the experience to motivate you to not recreate the causes for future suffering.

32 The Gomchen Lamrim 03-11-16:

Virtuous karma and its effects

1. There are two aspects to doing virtuous actions (although the lamrim itself only explains one of them). What are these two?
2. What is the motivation we often have for doing virtue/refraining from non-virtue when we first start off on the path? What motivation do we eventually progress to?
3. Go through the ten virtues (or 20 if you'd like to do both aspects) and consider each of the four results that come from them (if you created a spreadsheet of the 10 non-virtues last week, add the 10 virtues and the four results for each). How does really examining the results of virtue affect your mind?
4. How does taking precepts play a part in creating virtue?
5. What makes karma polluted? What kind of being creates polluted karma? What kind of being creates unpolluted karma? What kind of being doesn't create karma at all?

6. Consider that as ordinary beings, every action we do is creating the cause for rebirth in samsara. Why is this not a cause for discouragement? What does creating virtuous karma, even though it is polluted, do that eventually leads to liberation?
7. What is the difference between throwing and completing karma? Go through the four points of throwing and completing karma. Does examining this aspect of karma help you to better understand the various situations of beings in samsara?

33 The Gomchen Lamrim 03-18-16:

The permutations of karma

1. What are definite and indefinite karma? In the context of definite and indefinite karma, what is the definition of “done?” What is the definition of “accumulated?”
2. What about virtuous and non-virtuous mental karma? Are they necessarily done? Accumulated?
3. Karma that isn’t accumulated doesn’t mean it is lost. How might unaccumulated karma manifest?
4. Consider the ten actions that are considered done but not accumulated (actions done in dreams, done unknowingly, done unconsciously, done without intensity or not continuously, done mistakenly, done forgetfully, done without wanting to, that are ethically neutral, eradicated through regret, and eradicated with a remedy). Think about actions you have done in your own life that fall into these categories. Why are they considered done but not accumulated?
5. Consider the six characteristics of karma that are both done and accumulated: actions done deliberately, all parts of the action are complete, the person doesn’t regret the action afterwards, no antidote is applied to purify, the person rejoices at having done the action, the result is certain to be experienced. Think of examples in your life of actions (both virtuous and non-virtuous) that were both done and accumulated. Why are these actions considered the main cause of a ripening result?
6. What is an example of karma that is not done but accumulated? What is an example of an action that is neither done nor accumulated?
7. Why is it that karma that is definite does not imply predetermination? What can impede the ripening of definite virtuous karma? What can impede definite non-virtuous karma?
8. In terms of WHEN a karma can ripen, consider the factors that make a karma more likely to ripen quickly, even in this very life: strong attachment or disinterest in the body, great malice/great compassion for others, deep malice/great regard for Three Jewels and spiritual mentors, intense animosity/intense wish to repay kindness of those who have been kind to us. Why is it that these particular actions

make the karma more likely to ripen in this life vs. in the next or in lives beyond the next?

9. How does thinking about these factors change the way you think about how you interact with the world?

34 The Gomchen Lamrim 03-25-16:

Gomchen Lamrim review: Developing conviction in karma

1. Explore the first general characteristic of karma, that karma is definite. Consider examples of this characteristic in the physical world. Does it make sense that karma would work in the same way, that happiness can only come from virtue and suffering can only come from non-virtue?
2. Explore the second general characteristic of karma, that karma increases. Consider examples of this characteristic in the physical world. Does it make sense that karma would work in the same way, that an action of virtue or non-virtue can grow into a larger result. Can you think of examples of this from your life?
3. Explore the third general characteristic of karma, that if you don't create the cause, you don't get the result. Consider examples of this characteristic in the physical world. Does it make sense that karma would work in the same way, that we can't experience the result of virtue or non-virtue if we do not create the cause?
4. Explore the fourth general characteristic of karma, that karma is not lost. Consider examples of this characteristic in the physical world. Why does this characteristic not imply predetermination? What can impede the ripening of negative karma? What can impede the ripening of virtuous karma?
5. Venerable Tsepel mentioned some benefits of thinking about the four characteristics of karma (we're more likely to refrain from negativities, we'll purify, we can bear hardship, we have a stable mind...) What are other benefits of a deeper understanding of karma? How has studying karma benefitted your life?
6. Consider the process of samsara: self-grasping ignorance —> afflictions —> karma —> karmic seed —> results. Spend some time reflecting on each of these steps as well as how and why one leads to another.

35 The Gomchen Lamrim 04-01-16:

Contemplating specific aspects of karma

1. What is the difference between naturally non-virtuous and proscribed actions? Go through the four points and give examples of each (naturally negative and proscribed, naturally negative but not proscribed, not naturally negative but is proscribed, and neither naturally negative nor proscribed). How do we purify naturally negative actions? How do we purify proscribed actions (offenses)?

2. Venerable Chodron specifically indicated that she prefers the use of the term “precept” to “vow,” a precept being something in which we are training our mind. Do you find a different flavor in your own mind when you use the term “precept” instead of “vow?” Does it help you to think of precepts in this way?
3. Review definite and indefinite karma from last week. What are examples of actions you did in the last week that were definite (done intentionally and accumulated) and indefinite (actions without intention like the 10 examples given)? How does thinking of karma in this way help you to act virtuously and refrain from negativity?
4. Consider each of the eight conditions that enhance a precious human life: long life, having an attractive and healthy body, coming from a reputable family, wealth and reputation, credibility, strong influence on others, having willpower and being intrepid, and having a strong body and mind. These are said to give us an especially good opportunity to do very strong Dharma practice and benefit many beings. Which of these conditions do you have? How can you enhance your practice and your ability to benefit others through these conditions?
5. Venerable Chodron said that it’s not so much that we HAVE these conditions that is so important, but HOW we use them. Make examples of ways in which these conditions are used for non-virtue in our world. Determine to avoid wasting these precious conditions on negativity and resolve to use them to grow in your spiritual practice and benefit others.
6. Consider the three factors that make these favorable conditions ever greater: pure attitude, pure practice, and pure field. Why is it so important to have these three if we are to make good use of our opportunities?

36 The Gomchen Lamrim 04-08-16:

Gomchen Lamrim review: Reliance on a spiritual mentor

1. What does it mean to receive the blessing of our spiritual mentor(s)? What part do we play in this process?
2. What is the purpose of relying on a spiritual mentor?
3. What are the six main outlines to relying on a spiritual mentor? Venerable Tsepal said knowing these allows us to take the teachings with us wherever we go...
4. Consider the 10 qualities of a qualified spiritual mentor (being disciplined, being serene, being thoroughly pacified, having good qualities surpassing those of the student, being energetic, having a wealth of scriptural knowledge, possessing loving concern, possessing thorough knowledge of reality, having skill in instructing disciples, and having abandoned dispiritedness). How do these qualities benefit the teacher? How do they benefit the disciple?
5. Contemplate each of the benefits of relying on a spiritual mentor that we did in the guided meditation. Determine to deepen your relationship with your spiritual mentor:

- We will become closer to attaining Buddhahood. Why is this true?
 - It pleases the Buddhas. Why is this true?
 - We will not be disturbed by maras or misleading friends. Why is this the case?
 - We will naturally put a stop to all delusions and destructive actions. How has this been true in your own life?
 - Insights, realizations, and meditative experiences will increase. Draw from your own experience how this is true or how it is true for Dharma friends or those you have observed. You will never lack spiritual guides in all future rebirths. Think about how actions towards teachers in this life affects our relationship with them in future lives. We will not fall to the lower realms. Reflect on why that might be the case. We will effortlessly achieve short and long term goals. Why is this?
6. What conclusions can you draw from meditating on properly relying on a spiritual mentor?
 7. Venerable Tsepal said that our relationship with a spiritual mentor is very dynamic: sometimes we feel very connected and at other times distant. Assess your relationship with your spiritual mentor(s). What can you do to build and support that relationship from your side?

37 The Gomchen Lamrim 04-15-16:

Gomchen Lamrim review: Precious human life

1. Take your time to go through each of the freedoms and fortunes one by one, and imagine being born without it. What would your life be like? What would it mean for spiritual practice?
2. Come back to the present and feel the appreciation for having each freedom and fortune; feel how they allow you to practice the Dharma; feel how each and every one of them must be present for the precious human life you now have.
3. What can you do to ensure that you don't lose these freedoms and fortunes in this life? What can you do to ensure that you create the causes to have these freedoms and fortunes in the next life?
4. Make a determination to not waste this precious opportunity to practice the Dharma; determine to use every moment, every experience, to create virtue, abandon negativity, purify and transform your mind.

38 The Gomchen Lamrim 04-22-16:

Gomchen Lamrim review: The importance of remembering death

1. Consider each of the disadvantages of not reflecting on death:
 - We don't remember to practice: How much time do you spend accumulating wealth, fame, and possessions? How much time do you spend averting

discomfort? Is the Buddha's teachings even on your radar most of the time? How does contemplating death and impermanence overcome this?

- We remember to practice, but we procrastinate: Do you find that there is always something better to do than practice? What things distract you from the spiritual practice you want to do? Reflect that practice doesn't mean we give up our family and every day activities, but rather that we transform the way we relate to them, integrating them into our life in a meaningful way. How does contemplating death and impermanence overcome this?
 - We practice, but we don't practice purely: How does attachment to *gain* and aversion to *loss* pollute your practice? How does attachment to *praise* and aversion to *blame* pollute your practice? How does attachment to *fame* and aversion to *shame* pollute your practice? How does attachment to *pleasure* and aversion to *pain* pollute your practice (this includes pleasant tastes, sounds, smells, tactile sensation, and sights)? How does contemplating death and impermanence overcome this?
 - We lose the determination to practice intensely or consistently: Have you had the experience of tuning out during your routine practice, feeling disconnected from and not present for your practice? Do you find your practice dry and unsatisfying? How does contemplating death and impermanence overcome this?
 - We do destructive actions that create negative rebirth and prevent us from liberation: What destructive actions have you done in the past to attain the pleasures and avoid the discomforts of this life? How does living in this way prevent us from liberation? How does contemplating death and impermanence overcome this?
 - We die with regret: What have you spent your life doing that at the time of death won't matter? Have you spent this life purifying and creating merit? If not, we're likely to have deep regret at the time of death which will surely come and we don't know when. How does contemplating death and impermanence overcome this?
2. Consider each of the advantages of reflecting on death:
- We will act meaningfully: Imagine that you have the inner discipline and enthusiasm for practice. Imagine that even when you don't feel well or things aren't going your way, that you use the experience to progress on the path and benefit sentient beings. Imagine not being distracted by worldly activities. Imagine being completely focused on creating the causes for a series of precious human lives so that you can progress on the path and be of greater and greater benefit to sentient beings. What does thinking in this way do for your mind? How does contemplating death and impermanence achieve this?
 - Our actions will be powerful and effective because we won't be attached to worldly things: Imagine not reacting with attachment and anger towards worldly things, but with virtuous states of mind like kindness, fortitude, and generosity. Imagine being able to concentrate on whatever it is you are doing. Imagine freely giving to others since you know you cannot take anything with you at the time of death. Imagine being able to monitor your actions, always reflecting on what you are doing and why, and what the results will be so that

you can mindfully create only virtue. Imagine not having any doubts about what you are doing or worrying about what others think because you know what you are doing is meaningful and beneficial, and you are so grounded in the Dharma that you have great courage, fortitude, and confidence. What does thinking in this way do for your mind? How does contemplating death and impermanence achieve this?

- It gets us started at the beginning of the path: Contemplating death compels us to seek out the Dharma to discover the meaning in our life. Have you found this true in your own experience?
 - It keeps us going in the middle of the path: Contemplating death helps us to persevere, not lose interest, and encourages us to not give up. Have you experienced times of discouragement? How has/might contemplating death help you to persevere? It keeps us focused on the goal of liberation at the end of the path: Imagine having the great energy and focus to accomplish the path due to the force of meditating on death and impermanence. How might contemplating in this way help beings at the end of the path achieve their goal?
 - We die happily and pleasantly: Imagine dying, having spent your life cultivating love, joy, contentment, peace, forgiveness, fortitude, generosity, etc. Imagine leaving this life like a bird taking off, flying away, and never looking back. How does that make your mind feel? How does contemplating death and impermanence achieve a happy and pleasant death?
3. Consider the saying that if we don't think about death in the morning, we waste the morning. If we don't think about death in the afternoon, we waste the afternoon. If we don't think about death in the evening, we waste the evening. Instead of being depressing, this actually fuels our life with energy, peace, and joy. How can you bring a greater awareness of death and impermanence into your day?
 4. If we think about life and death in this way, it makes us examine how we might live our lives differently; we see that the importance we place on the pleasures of this life are futile. What are things in life that are worth doing? What are things in life that distract you from the path that you'd like to abandon? How can you transform your motivation to transform ordinary activities into virtue? Make a determination to use the reflection on death and impermanence to inform your priorities in very specific ways in your life.

39 The Gomchen Lamrim 04-29-16:

Gomchen Lamrim review: The causes for taking refuge

1. Start by contemplating the words of Je Rinpoche:

“Since it is certain that you will die soon, you cannot remain in this life. Furthermore, you will be reborn in either a happy place or a miserable place because there is no birthplace other than these two types of beings. Since you are controlled by your karma and cannot choose where you will be reborn, you will be reborn in the manner in which your virtuous and non-virtuous karma impel you to

be reborn. This being the case, contemplate the suffering of the miserable realms, thinking, 'how would it be if I were born in a miserable realm?' "

2. Contemplate the suffering of the realms (as a metaphor, if that's more beneficial for your mind)

- **Hell realms:** The hells are characterized by the suffering of intense heat or intense cold. Imagine having a mind that is completely overwhelmed with rage. Angry words are heard, having a feeling of being under constant threat. Imagine how it would feel to experience constant physical pain, your mind filled with rage, terror, trapped in this state with no way out, no relief. Imagine having a body as big as a mountain and every atom experiences excruciating suffering. Realize that you must experience these sufferings until the force of the karma is exhausted. Feeling how unbearable it is, generate compassion for all the living beings who are undergoing such intense misery. Open your heart to everyone experiencing this right now.
- **Hungry ghost realm:** It's a rebirth characterized by intense craving, but no satisfaction. Physical sufferings of hunger, thirst, heat, cold, and fatigue overwhelm the mind from seeking and seeking and seeking satisfaction. And the mind is filled with fear. Imagine being born with a body with a huge, insatiable belly and a tiny throat that can't allow anything in. Being in an arid place of famine where you couldn't find anything to go in anyway. The addictive, craving mind, unable to fill its desire, even for survival. How would it feel? Realize that you must experience these sufferings until the force of the karma is exhausted. Feeling how unbearable it is, generate compassion for all the living beings who are undergoing such intense misery. Open your heart to everyone experiencing this right now.
- **Animal realm:** This birth is characterized by overwhelming, blinding ignorance and stupidity. These beings experience being eaten by others, usually eaten alive. Having to kill and eat others in order to stay alive. Again, suffering from heat and cold, hunger and thirst. Exploited by humans and made to work. A victim of human environmental degradation. Try this on in different forms (sea creature, cockroach, jackal, Abbey turkey). How does it feel to be a mouse with an owl swooping down, catching you in its claws? How does it feel to be so ignorant that you don't know you are eating another living being? Realize that you must experience these sufferings until the force of the karma is exhausted. Feeling how unbearable that is, generate compassion for all the living beings who are undergoing such intense misery. Open your heart to everyone experiencing this right now.
- **Human realm:** Imagine being reborn as a human being but without the full set of eight freedoms and ten fortunes of a precious human rebirth... Imagine being born as a human being, being destitute, not having enough to eat or adequate shelter. Imagine being born as a human being in a place where there is constant and continual warfare, overwhelmed by fear, struggling to survive. Imagine being born as a human being with defective senses or mental

development, or in a place where there is no possibility for education. Imagine being born as a human being, reasonably healthy, but with no access to the Dharma: no books in your language, no teachers, no practice community, no support whatsoever. Realize that you must experience these sufferings until the force of your karma is exhausted. Feeling how unbearable that is, generate compassion for all the living beings who are undergoing such intense misery. Open your heart to everyone experiencing this right now.

3. With that in mind, let's reflect on the qualities of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha:
 - The Buddha is the completely purified and fully developed one, the one who is free of all fear, skilled in the methods to free others, whose compassion encompasses every living being.
 - Reflect on what we know are the good qualities of the Dharma: it protects us from suffering, it is the path to liberation and full awakening. Think, how does it protect us from suffering?
 - Reflect on the good qualities of the Sangha: the arya beings who have direct realization of the Buddha's teaching on the nature of reality and whose progress on the path inspires us and encourages us. Think of their good qualities and take refuge...
4. Je Rinpoche guides us to complete our meditation by reflecting in this way:

"After you have ascertained these things and entrust yourself to the three jewels with a single-pointed focus, develop this certainty from the depths of your heart, for once you are able to do this, they cannot fail to protect you. This is so because there are two causes of your being protected: an external cause and an internal cause. The teacher, the Buddha, has already fully realized the external factor, but you suffer because you have not yet developed the internal factor in trusting yourself to the refuge. Therefore, know that the Buddha, moved by his great compassion, assists you even if you do not request his help. He is not lazy at this and he, the unrivaled and auspicious refuge, abides as your personal protector."

40 The Gomchen Lamrim 05-06-16:

Gomchen Lamrim review: Karma in daily life

1. Identify some habits or patterns of behavior that result in difficulties for yourself, patterns that destroy your peace of mind. Without judgment, identify those patterns that are problematic.
2. Now take one of those habits or patterns that you thought about and maybe one of them that brought you a problem very recently, so it's fresh in the mind... Trace your mind back a little bit. Think about the incident. Think about what your mind was doing before that. Where was your attention? What were you involved in? Try to get a sense of some of the moments before this pattern arose.

3. Now go back and imagine the situation again, and as it plays itself out and you are imagining it, imagine yourself responding to this example with “No big deal. Nothing special here. It’s not affecting my peace of mind. I can open my view. Nothing to hold tight to. Just let it go...” Play that out.
4. Seeing how we can transform our experience of a situation by being mindful of our habits, make a determination to watch for patterns of behavior that cause suffering for yourself and others, and apply the antidotes as early as you can.

41 The Gomchen Lamrim 05-13-16:

Gomchen Lamrim review: Specific aspects of karma

Venerable Tsepel reviewed a number of ways to meditate on karma and its effects:

1. Meditation on four characteristics of karma (bring in your own life experience to prove to yourself that these characteristics function as they are described).
2. Meditation on the ten non-virtues, focusing on the various parts that compose a complete pathway of action.
3. Meditation on the ten non virtues, reflecting on where we personally avoid it and where we engage in it.
4. Meditation on the effects of the ten non-virtues, recognizing the results in your life as well as in the lives of those around you and tracing back their causes.
5. Meditation on the distinctions of the ten paths of action (weights and seriousness of our action, strength of the performance, etc). How can you strengthen virtue and weaken non virtue?
6. Meditation on current events in the news (What results are being experienced now and what must their causes have been? What causes are being created now and what must the results be in the future?)

42 The Gomchen Lamrim 05-20-16:

Points on karma and purification using the four forces

1. Consider the point that until we can generate the wisdom that eliminates our ignorance and frees us from samsara, understanding karma and its effects is what gives us power to create the situations we want and avoid the ones we don’t want. What does thinking in this way do for your mind? How does it motivate your practice?
2. Consider the importance of mindfulness and introspective awareness. How would strengthening these factors in your mind benefit your practice? How would it benefit the lives of the beings around you? Imagine how you might move through space and interact with others with a heightened sense of mindfulness and introspective awareness.

3. Consider the five heinous and five parallel heinous actions. What makes them so powerfully negative that the Sutrayana says they can't be purified in this life?
4. Consider the difference between the immediate (timely) and causal motivation. Think of situations in your life. What was the causal motivation? What was the immediate motivation? How can an awareness of these two types of motivations strengthen your practice and how you go about your day?
5. Consider the importance of having a conviction in karma and its effects before doing in depth study and meditation on emptiness. Why is this so? What is the danger of not doing so?
6. Review the four opponent powers (the four forces) of purification. Why are all four steps necessary? Why is regret the most important? What are the various practices you can do to purify using the four opponent powers? Why is it so important to purify our negativities?
7. Consider this line from the text: "Regarding how negativities are purified, it is taught that the suffering to be experienced is shortened, lessened or neutralized completely; or that which would otherwise be experienced severely in a low rebirth occurs instead in the present life simply as a minor illness." What does thinking in this way do for your mind? How does it help you bear present suffering?

43 The Gomchen Lamrim 05-27-16:

Contemplating the eight types of dukkha, part 1

1. Consider the five aspects of the dukkha of birth in depth:
 - as a source of pain
 - associated with dysfunctional tendencies (makes it hard to create virtue)
 - it is the basis for all the others suffering we experience
 - it is the basis for all the afflictions
 - it will result in unwanted separation (death)
2. Consider the five aspects of the dukkha of aging in depth:
 - our body declines
 - our strength fails us
 - our senses deteriorate
 - our enjoyment of objects lessens
 - life degenerates
3. Consider the five aspects of the dukkha of sickness in depth:
 - the physical transformation
 - mental anguish
 - no desire for attractive things
 - must undergo unpleasant treatments
 - you die

4. Consider the five aspects of the dukkha of death in depth:
 - separation from the body
 - separation from your belongings
 - separation from dear relatives
 - separation from friends
 - mental anguish
5. Meditating on these points can be difficult, but it is not meant to make us depressed. Rather, it is to recognize the situation that we are in and aspire to be free of it. Having meditated on these points and understanding the disadvantages of craving a body in cyclic existence, resolve to practice the path so that you can be free of the cycle of birth, aging, sickness, and death.

44 The Gomchen Lamrim 06-03-16:

Contemplating the eight types of dukkha, part 2

1. Consider the five aspects of the dukkha of encountering the undesirable in depth:
 - suffering arises from the simple encounter with unpleasant people
 - fear of being punished by others
 - fear that they will speak maliciously
 - fear of dying horribly
 - fear at the thought of falling into a lower rebirth after death
2. Consider the five aspects of the dukkha of separation from the desired in depth:
 - sorrow fills your mind
 - you cry/lament
 - you harm yourself
 - you miss what you lost and you're full of anguish
 - you grieve a future that will no longer happen
3. Consider the five aspects of the dukkha of not getting what you want in depth:
 - sorrow fills your mind
 - you cry/lament
 - you harm yourself
 - you miss what you lost and you're full of anguish
 - you grieve a future that will no longer happen
4. Consider the five aspects of the dukkha of the five aggregates (taken under the influence of afflictions and karma) in depth:
 - they lead to future suffering (just having these aggregates is a setup for suffering in future lives)
 - they are the basis for all our present suffering (in this life)
 - they are vessels for the dukkha of pain
 - they are vessels for the dukkha of change

- just by having these aggregates, we are susceptible to the other two dukkhas (dukkha will come to us in one way or another)
5. Recognizing that these are the natural results of cyclic existence, consider times in your life where you were complaining or frustrated that things weren't going your way. Think, "This is samsara. Of course its going to be like this." How might thinking in this way transform your mind and your experience of the events in your life?
 6. Meditating on these points can be difficult, but it is not meant to make us depressed or discouraged. Rather, it is to recognize the situation that we are in and aspire to be free of it. Having meditated on these points and understanding the disadvantages of rebirth in cyclic existence, resolve to practice the path and develop the qualities you need to free yourself.

45 The Gomchen Lamrim 06-10-16:

Reflecting on the six types of dukkha

1. Contemplate the dukkha of uncertainty. Make examples from your life:
 - We make all sorts of plans in our life, but we can't control what happens.
 - The more we cling to permanence, trying to make the world the way we want it to be, the more unhappy we are.
 - Intellectually, we understand uncertainty, but when we get up each morning, there we are with our plans and again we are disappointed. We do this again and again, day after day, year after year, life after life.
2. Contemplate the dukkha of dissatisfaction. Make examples from your life:
 - Consider that in infinite previous lives, we've been born as every kind of being and done everything, yet we haven't gained any satisfaction in all that time.
 - We never seem to have enough money, financial security, love, appreciation... We never seem to be enough, to do enough... Whatever we have, whatever we do, whoever we are is never enough.
 - As a result, we run around all day looking for more and better and yet we are still never satisfied.
 - In the process of this pursuit we make ourselves quite miserable.
 - We do this again and again, day after day, year after year, life after life.
3. Contemplate the dukkha of abandoning the body repeatedly. Make examples from your life:
 - Death is not something we look forward to. It means separation from what is familiar, from the people we care about, from our very ego identity (who we think we are).
 - As long as we're in samsara, this separation is a given; we cannot avoid it.

- We do this again and again, losing our loved ones, our possessions, our identity, life after life.
4. Contemplate the dukkha of taking a new body repeatedly. Make examples from your life:
 - Because we haven't realized the nature of reality, misapprehend how things exist, are full of wrong views, etc, death doesn't bring an end to our suffering. We are just reborn again.
 - If you attain a human rebirth, you start out as a baby where you can't control anything and you can't communicate. You are helpless and at the whim of others. You go through school all over again, adolescence, relationships not working out, working for a living, losing the people you love...
 - Imagine being born as a hell being, a preta, an animal... What would it be like to be born with limited mental faculties, so much pain or craving or confusion that you don't even know to act virtuously; there is no thought of anything bigger than the next meal or escaping pain...
 - We do this again and again, life after life after life.
 5. Contemplate the dukkha of repeatedly changing status. Make examples from your life:
 - We can have wealth and power in one life and then be reborn destitute, unable to secure even our basic needs in the next life.
 - Because our rebirth is dependent on the karma we create and what ripens at the time of death, we are never quite sure where we will be reborn or what conditions we'll encounter.
 - Think of people in your life or in the news... Think of people with great power, money, and influence. How are they using it? Are they creating the causes for happiness or suffering? To what realm will their actions take them?
 - Even in this life, our status goes up and down. Think of specific examples from your own life.
 - There is no security and yet that's what we work for day and night. Do we ever feel totally secure?
 - We do this again and again, life after life after life.
 6. Contemplate the dukkha of dying alone. Make examples from your life:
 - You can have as many people as you want surrounding you when you die. You can have an incredible obituary and your funeral can be televised, but when you die, you die alone.
 - We spend our lives in pursuit of things and relationships from morning to night, tinkering with all the details of mundane daily life trying to eke out the most pleasure... while the only thing that makes things better for us is the state of our own mind. Do we even pay attention to this most of the time?
 - We do this again and again, life after life after life...
 7. Consider that to lessen our anguish, we have to release our attachment, anger, resentment, and so on...

8. Seeing the defects of samsara, feel a sense of disenchantment with it and a desire to be free of these forms of dukkha entirely. Determine to practice the path that leads to liberation.
9. Consider that all other sentient beings are experiencing the same forms of dukkha. No matter who they are or what they look like, they experience these. Think of specific people (those you like and those you don't). Allow compassion to arise and determine to practice the path for their sakes as well.

46 The Gomchen Lamrim 06-17-16:

Attachment, anger, and conceit

1. We've spent the last few months looking at karma and the last couple weeks looking at the first truth of the Aryas: the truth of dukkha. Take some times to explore your understanding of karma and its effects, and of this truth of dukkha, relating it to current events as Venerable Chodron did in the introduction to the teachings.
 - How does a deeper understanding of these teachings help you to process the attack at the nightclub in Orlando, the two year old boy who was snatched from his parents by the alligator, other situations you might have news of in your own area of the world.
 - Contemplating in this way helps to punctuate the importance of what we do with this life. With these understandings firmly in mind, what do you want to do with the time you have left in this life? What do you want to avoid doing?
2. Next, we move onto the truth of the origins of dukkha. Consider that not only do afflictions cause the creation of karma, but they must be present for the results to ripen. Think about your experience of this.
 - When you were acting in a way that was non-virtuous, can you identify the affliction that was present in your mind?
 - When you have experienced dukkha, can you identify the affliction that was present that enabled the dukkha to ripen? Take some time with this.
3. Venerable Chodron taught on the first three of the root afflictions (attachment, anger, and conceit). Examine each:
 - Attachment exaggerates the attractiveness of a polluted object, takes a strong interest in it, clings to it, and wants to possess it. There are many degrees and variation of attachment, but they all share that factor of exaggerating and clinging. Think of how attachment operates in your life. What are you attached to? Give specific examples. Venerable Chodron said that all attachment in the desire realm is non-virtuous. Are there ways you rationalize your attachment? How does attachment harm yourself and others?
 - Anger exaggerates the defects of people, places, things, ideas, etc with the wish to harm or distance ourselves from them; it is the fight or flight response. Think of how anger operates in your life. What triggers your anger (remember

there are many forms of anger like frustration, annoyance, hatred, righteous anger...)? Are there ways you rationalize your anger? Consider specific examples of anger in your life using the nine reasonings that we use to justify our anger. How does anger harm yourself and others?

- Conceit is an inflated sense of self based on the view of a personal identity, it grasps at “I” or “my.” Venerable Chodron said we can get conceited over the tiniest things. Think of specific ways conceit operates in your life. How does conceit harm yourself and others?
- Seeing how these afflictions operate in your life, leading you to create negativities and the conditions under which you experience dukkha, resolve to watch for them in your life and apply the antidotes throughout the week.

47 The Gomchen Lamrim 06-24-16:

Ignorance, doubt, and afflictive views

1. Ignorance: What are some of the different types of ignorance that Venerable Chodron described? Consider the ignorance of conventional phenomena. Consider the ignorance of ultimate phenomena. Think of how ignorance operates in your life (via these 2 forms). Give specific examples. How does ignorance harm yourself and others?
2. Afflictive doubt: Consider that afflictive doubt (doubt that leads to the wrong conclusion regarding spiritual matters) is like a two-pointed needle. Consider how it immobilizes us, preventing us from making decisions. Think of how it operates in your life. What doubts do you find arising in your mind regarding spiritual matters (give specific examples)? How do these afflictive doubts harm yourself and others?
3. Afflictive views: There are five forms of afflicted views. This week, we talked about the first, the view of a personal identity or “jigta.” Because of it, we grasp to an inherently existent “I” and “mine.” Venerable Chodron said that the reason this view is so pernicious is that once we have this view of a real me, we see the entire world in terms of me (what benefits me? what harms me?) and thus begins our conflict with other beings and the world. We feel there is a real “I” that has to be protected, must have happiness. This becomes the purpose of our life and through that we create a ton of negative actions. Think of how this form of afflictive views operates in your life. How do it harm yourself and others?
4. Seeing how these afflictions operate in your life, leading you to create negativities and the conditions under which you experience dukkha, resolve to watch for them in your life and apply the antidotes throughout the week.

48 The Gomchen Lamrim 07-01-16:

The five types of afflictive views

1. View of a personal identity or jigta: Because of it, we grasp to an inherently existent “I” and “mine.” Venerable Chodron said that the reason this view is so pernicious is that once we have this view of a real me, we see the entire world in terms of me (what benefits me? what harms me?) and thus begins our conflict with other beings and the world. We feel there is a real “I” that has to be protected, must have happiness. This becomes the purpose of our life and through that we create a ton of negative actions. Think of how this form of afflictive views operates in your life. How does it harm yourself and others?
2. View of extremes: This is an afflictive intelligence that, because of the view of the personal identity, we think that at the time of death, we either go out of existence entirely or we will exist unchanging forever. Think of how the view of extremes operates in your life. How does it harm yourself and others?
3. Holding wrong views as supreme: This is thinking that our wrong views are the best views to hold (we’re digging our heels in). Consider that when we think in this way, we stay stuck, putting up a barrier to spiritual progress that is very difficult to breach. How has holding wrong view as supreme operated in your life? How does it harm yourself and others?
4. View of rules and practices: This is a wrong idea of what ethical conduct and practices (or observances) lead to upper rebirth and liberation. What afflicted views of rules and practices do you see in the world around you? What afflicted views have you seen operate in your own life? How do these harm yourself and others?
5. Wrong view: This is specifically referring to wrong views about the spiritual path and either denies the existence of something that exists or accepts the existence of something that doesn’t exist. Give examples of both of these that you observe in the world around you. Have you held any of these wrong views? How do these harm yourself and others?
6. Seeing how these five forms of afflictive views operate in your life, leading you to create negativities and the conditions under which you experience dukkha, resolve to watch for them in your life and apply the antidotes throughout the week.

49 The Gomchen Lamrim 07-08-16:

How the afflictions arise

The six root afflictions

Reflect on how the six root afflictions operate using current events:

1. Venerable Chodron talked about some of the current US events: the killing of black citizens in Baton Rouge and St. Paul, and the attack on police officers in

Dallas. Spend some time thinking about the six root afflictions that led up to actions done in each situation (attachment, anger, arrogance, ignorance, afflictive doubt, and afflicted views).

2. How do you see these same six root afflictions operate in your own life?
3. Consider that as long as those same afflictions are in our own mind-stream lying dormant, under conducive conditions (in this life or another), we could act in the very same way.
4. Determine to stay focused on practicing the path, subduing the afflictions until you are able to eliminate them from your mind-stream altogether for the benefit of yourself and others.

Antidotes to the afflictions

Reflect on the specific antidotes to each of the root afflictions. Consider why these antidotes counter the affliction.

1. Attachment: meditate on impermanence, meditate on the unattractiveness of the object, consider the disadvantages of attachment, play out the scene in your mind where you get everything you want... then what?
2. Anger: meditate on fortitude, love, compassion and the disadvantages of anger.
3. Arrogance: rejoicing in others' good qualities, meditate on difficult topics, remember that everything we have and are comes from the kindness of others, consider that if you were the the best, we'd all be in trouble...
4. Ignorance: for ignorance of ultimate truth, meditate on emptiness; for ignorance of conventional truth, meditate on dependent arising.
5. Afflicted doubt: learn, reflect, and meditate, ask questions, think about the topic.
6. View of a personal identity: meditate on the wisdom realizing emptiness.
7. View of extremes: meditate on dependent arising and emptiness, and their compatibility.
8. Holding wrong views as supreme: meditate to resolve the other views and realize that this one is also incorrect.
9. View of rules and practices: meditate on karma and its effects, emptiness.
10. Wrong view: meditate on topics you have wrong views about, apply your analytical wisdom.

Keep these antidotes handy, watch for afflictions to arise, and resolve to apply the antidotes as soon as possible.

Factors that trigger the afflictions

Venerable Chodron said that if we can understand the cause and conditions that give rise to our afflictions, we can work to eliminate our exposure and not fall under the sway of our afflictions so much. Let's look at the 6 factors that trigger manifest afflictions...

1. **Latencies of the afflictions:** Because the afflictions haven't been removed from the mind, they can arise under the right conditions. Think about the seeds of afflictions in your own mind, how you can be fine one moment and in the next, anger or attachment is triggered. Do you see how that seed of affliction is what links the manifest affliction in the past to what arises in the moment? What is the one thing that can be done to eliminate the latencies of the afflictions?
2. **Contact with the object:** We all have objects (can be people, places, ideas, etc) that spark our afflictions. What things trigger different afflictions in your own mind? What can you do to limit your exposure to things that trigger your afflictions?
3. **Detrimental influences:** We are very influenced by the people around us. How do you see the influence of others (both positive and negative) in your own life? What can you do to promote relationships with people who encourage your aspirations for how you want to be in the world?
4. **Verbal stimuli:** This includes books, magazines, film, social media, etc. How does media influence you personally? How does it influence your self-image and your consumer habits? How does it influence your ethical conduct? What can you do to limit access to media that doesn't promote a healthy mind?
5. **Habitual ways of thinking:** The more we are familiar with a certain perspective on things or a particular emotion, the more likely it is to arise. What emotional habits do you find yourself in? What can you do to interrupt these habits and create beneficial ones instead?
6. **Inappropriate attention:** This is our mental screen-writer. It misinterprets, exaggerates and projects meaning and motivation. Look back on specific situations in your own life where inappropriate attention was active. How did it blow a situation out of proportion and allow for the arising of afflictions? What can you do to recognize and interrupt the factor of inappropriate attention?

Doing this contemplation helps us get to know ourselves and how our mind works. Resolve to watch for personal triggers, and eliminate or limit them where possible so as to reduce the arising of afflictions.

50 The Gomchen Lamrim 07-15-16:

Afflictions and the accumulation of karma

Go through the six (or ten) root afflictions and really examine the disadvantages of each, listed below. Reflect on how you have seen these disadvantages in your own life and in the world around you. How has it caused suffering for yourself and others?

1. Afflictions destroy you.
2. Afflictions destroy others.
3. Afflictions destroy your ethical discipline.
4. Due to afflictions, your property declines and is depleted.
5. Due to afflictions, teachers and protectors admonish you.

6. Due to afflictions, you quarrel, lose your reputation and are reborn in a condition of non- liberty.
7. Due to afflictions, you lose [the virtue] gained and not yet gained, and are despondent.
8. Due to afflictions, your life becomes joyless, you lack confidence, you die with regret and your spiritual aims are not fulfilled.

Conclusion: Having reflected extensively on these disadvantages, seeing how afflictions can lead to only suffering and unhappiness, and recognizing the they will continue to destroy your happiness until you transform your own mind, resolve to watch vigilantly for these afflictions and apply the antidotes quickly.

51 The Gomchen Lamrim 07-22-16:

Gomchen Lamrim review: Birth, aging, sickness, and death

1. These kinds of topics are not about light, love and bliss, but it is critical to be able to look at our situation in samsara. Otherwise, we'll not generate the desire to be free of it. What are some of the ways you have avoided facing the truth of dukkha in your life?
2. Take your time going through each of the following points. Make it personal and get a strong feeling for it. Hold that feeling. Think to yourself... "Do I really want to be born again and again in samsara, experiencing these results again and again...?"
 - **Your attractive body declines:** Bring to mind how you were when you were younger. Just take a look and see how you've been changing. Look at the ways you used to invest energy towards being attractive (no need to be judgmental, just look at it). Look at the fact that despite not wanting to age, you age. How are you with the fact that you are getting older, will get sick and will die?
 - **Your strength and vigor wane:** You will lose physical strength and mental capacity. Your speech will deteriorate and your words will become unintelligible. Although you see elderly people in this position, does it ever occur to you that you will soon be like this?
 - **Your senses deteriorate:** Slowly it will become more difficult to hear the teachings. It may be that gradually, you'll no longer be able to read. Mentally, your mind will begin forgetting more and more.
 - **Your ability to enjoy sense objects decreases:** Food, beautiful sounds, sights, pleasures of touch no longer will have any attraction and if they do, you lack the capacity to indulge in those desires.
 - **Separation (death) is inevitable:** If you have not prepared, death can only bring you great sorrow and regret.
3. Remember, we have to meditate on these points again and again and again until we get a genuine thought of renunciation. And then, rather than get depressed, we have to make use of the time we have to practice the Dharma, to work towards

freedom from samsara. Resolve to do that now. Think to yourself: This is part of the nature of samsara and I don't want to keep going through this. I want liberation!

52 The Gomchen Lamrim 07-29-16:

Death and the intermediate state

This week, we looked at what causes death, how the thoughts we have at the time of death influence our experience at the time of death as well as the rebirth we take, and what happens in the intermediate state (bardo).

A student asked a question at the end of the teaching about how understanding this process influences how we practice day to day. In response to his question, Venerable Chodron said that the point of this section of the lamrim is not to get lost in the details of the death process, but to fuel our renunciation. Let's contemplate the teachings with that in mind:

1. Consider the three factors of death (exhaustion of lifespan, exhaustion of merit, and death from failing to avoid danger) in light of people you know who have died. Which of these factors was at play? Venerable Chodron said we have this idea that we will live a long time and that we'll have the opportunity to plan our death. With these three factors in mind, and getting a sense of the reality around how others have died, cultivate a feeling of the instability of samsara... that karma can ripen at any time that could lead to your own death.
2. Consider the powerful influence that our state of mind has at the time of death. We can die with a virtuous mind, a non-virtuous mind, or a neutral mind. We like to think that we'll think of the Dharma, cultivating a virtuous mind, at the time of death, but the truth is our mind will quite naturally default to the kinds of thoughts we habituated during our life. Do you naturally rest in a virtuous state of mind? Or does your mind have a long list of complaints, attachments, and resentments? When something suddenly doesn't go your way, do you let go or do you get angry and resist? You are creating those habits right now, making it critical that you vigilantly watch your mind, cutting afflictions as soon as they arise and turning the mind towards virtue. Resolve to devote great effort towards this end.
3. Consider the process of transitioning to the next life in the bardo. We are reborn and die, going through this process again and again and again. We leave our bodies, our possessions, and our loved ones again and again and again. We start over with nothing but our karma again and again and again, struggling to survive, clinging after our objects of attachment again and again and again. Do you feel exhausted at the thought of this painful cycle of existence? Resolve to abandon the causes for it and to cultivate the path that leads to liberation from it.

53 The Gomchen Lamrim 08-05-16:

Taking rebirth from the intermediate state

The reality of transitioning to the next life isn't glamorous. The mind can be resistant to thinking of the details of the death process, our time in the bardo, and how we take our next rebirth. As we looked at last week, the point of studying these teachings is to fuel our renunciation, to cultivate a healthy sense of aversion for samsara. With that in mind, contemplate:

1. What does hearing a teaching like this bring up for you? Do you feel resistance? Why do you think that is?
2. Venerable Chodron said we are "creatures of habit." meaning that at the time of death, the same kinds of thoughts will arise in our mind that we have spent a lifetime cultivating. The death process is very confusing and we'll have very little control over our minds at that time. As a result, the thoughts we cultivate in our mind in each and every moment, right here, right now, will determine the kinds of thoughts that will arise at death and influence our rebirth.
 - Knowing that a mind of negativity and clinging will surely lead to rebirth in the lower realms, and thoughts of virtue and refuge will lead to rebirth in the upper realms, what kinds of thoughts do you want to cultivate in your mind in your every day life?
 - What can you do today to start working towards overcoming the complaining, dissatisfied mind, and instead cultivate contentment, refuge, and a wish to be of benefit to others.
3. Keeping in mind that we have to pay attention now and do what we can to set really good habitual patterns, consider ways to start that process.
 - Venerable Chodron suggested starting with cultivating contentment. For instance, when something sudden happens, what is your response? Frustration? Anger? Aversion? When you don't get what you want, when someone criticizes you, when the food isn't just right or someone doesn't say "Hi" to you in a way you consider friendly, what is your response?
 - What can you do to cultivate contentment in these small ways, helping to build a greater sense of equanimity for your experience?
 - Consider how doing this now benefits you at the time of death.
4. Sunsets, flowers, romance, our favorite meal, a child's laugh... these things all make us forget the realities of samsara. We cling to them and forget that there is more to it. We are reborn and die, going through this process again and again and again. We leave our bodies, our possessions, and our loved ones again and again and again. We start over with nothing but our karma again and again and again, struggling to survive, clinging after our objects of attachment again and again and again. Feel a sense of exhaustion at the thought of this painful cycle of existence. Resolve to abandon the causes for it and to cultivate contentment, refuge in the Three Jewels, and to practice the path as best you can.

54 The Gomchen Lamrim 08-12-16:

Generating renunciation

1. The first section of the Gomchen lamrim that we looked at this week is the measure of achieving the mind of renunciation. In his *Three Principal Aspects of the Path*, Lama Tsongkhapa says that the measure is that when we have “day and night unceasingly the mind aspiring for liberation” we have generated the determination to be free.

- Why is it that renunciation is so important on the path?
 - Why do we have to have renunciation before we can develop bodhicitta?
 - Image having this mind that is day and night unceasingly aspiring for liberation. What effect would that mind have on the way you interact with people, things, and situations in your life?
 - How is having renunciation a form of having compassion for yourself?
 - What can you do to cultivate renunciation based on the teachings we’ve received in the last couple months?
2. We, as ordinary beings, take rebirth under the influence of ignorance, afflictions, and karma, but there are bodhisattvas who take rebirth under the influence of compassion and prayer. What does this mean? Imagine what it might be like to take a mental body instead of this gross physical form. What does having such a body enable these bodhisattvas to do?
3. Having a precious human life is said to be the best opportunity for spiritual practice in cyclic existence. Living the life of a monastic provides even greater opportunity and support for spiritual practice.
- Why is this so?
 - If you are a lay practitioner, what obstacles do you have in your life to practice that you might not have as a monastic?
 - Consider that we can aspire to live a monastic life later in this life or in a future life, and admire those who already do, without feeling inferior or discouraged in our own practice.
4. What is it about samsara that we find so exciting? We study the various forms of dukkha in cyclic existence and see them operate in our life and yet we are constantly striving for more of it. We hear stories about people feeling fine one day and fighting for their lives in the next, and yet we never think it will happen to us.
- What is holding you back from letting go/renouncing samsara and the pleasures of just this life?
 - What can you do to cultivate the mind of renunciation?
 - Consider: Samsara doesn’t run out on its own because we perpetuate it ourselves, in our own minds and through our own actions. Resolve to stop this cycle by continuing to study, reflect, and meditate, by continually bringing to mind the defects of samsara as a means to transform the mind that now clings to it.

55 The Gomchen Lamrim 08-19-16:

The 37 harmonies with awakening

We started looking at the 37 Harmonies this week, which are included in the middle scope teachings (things we practice in common with those whose goal is to attain liberation from cyclic existence). There is probably a lifetime (or many lifetimes) of meditation materials in just this one week, so please feel free to explore the rest of this site for more in depth meditations and teachings on each of these. These points are painted with a fairly broad brush, as they were taught in this particular week.

Four Establishments of Mindfulness

Consider how each of these leads to liberation in addition to meditating on the following:

1. Mindfulness of body:

- Cultivating mindfulness of body counteracts the strong feeling we have that the self resides in the body. Where is the self in you? Do you feel it is behind the eyes? In the chest? Use reasoning to refute why this kind of self cannot exist.
- Meditating on the mindfulness of body also counteracts the distortion of perceiving things that are foul to be clean or beautiful. It's pretty common in society to see the body as something magnificent. Is that realistic?
- In what way is the body foul?
- Consider that this meditation is not meant to generate a feeling of hatred or disdain for the body, but to counteract the insatiable pampering of and attachment to our own and others' bodies. What kinds of negative karma have you created in your life because of these misperceptions about the body? What is a realistic and healthy way to see the body?

2. Mindfulness of feelings:

- Cultivating mindfulness of feelings counteracts the conception that there is an independent self that enjoys and experiences feelings. Use reasoning to refute why this kind of self cannot exist.
- Mindfulness of feelings can also counter the distortion that our feelings are pleasurable when they are actually in the nature of dukkha. Look at your own experience. What do you find when you examine your feelings of pleasant, unpleasant and neutral. Are they stable? Do they bring lasting happiness?

3. Mindfulness of mind:

- This refutes the conception that we are our mind, that there is a real self that controls everything else. Use reasoning to refute why this kind of self cannot exist.
- Mindfulness of mind also counteracts the distortion that the mind is permanent. As you sit quietly and observe the mind, what about it can possibly be permanent? What does ignorance apprehend that just cannot be?

4. Mindfulness of phenomena:
 - Venerable Chodron said that mindfulness of phenomena is about investigating our attitudes and emotions, how we make ourselves worthy or worthless, stupid or wonderful, because of a misconception that there is a real self. In what ways do you judge yourself (bad because of this and good because of that)? Why is this not a valid or realistic form of self-esteem?
 - Consider your buddha nature as a realistic and valid source of self-esteem.
 - What does cultivating these different forms of self esteem (realistic ones vs. unrealistic ones) do for your mind? Which one leads to virtue and which to non- virtue? Do you see how the one can only lead to suffering and the other to happiness?

Four Supreme Strivings

Consider how each of these leads to liberation in addition to meditating on the following:

1. Apply effort into preventing non-virtue: What kinds of non-virtue do you see in the world that you want to avoid doing? What is it about restraining the senses that helps in preventing non-virtue? What things have you done in your life to restrain the senses that has led to refraining from non-virtue?
2. Arouse aspiration and apply effort to abandon non-virtue already generated by applying antidotes: What kinds of non-virtue do you struggle with most? What are the benefits of applying antidotes and what can you do to increase your use of them?
3. Arouse aspiration and apply effort to generate new virtues not already generated: What virtues do you see in the world that you would like to increase in your own life? What can you do to cultivate them?
4. Arouse aspiration and apply effort to maintain and enhance the virtues that have already arisen in our mind: What kinds of virtue have you participated in in your own life that you would like to strengthen?

Four Bases of Supernormal Powers

How do each of these facilitate the attainment of supernormal powers? For someone on the spiritual path, what is the purpose of attaining supernormal powers? How do they lead to liberation?

1. Aspiration
2. Effort
3. Intention
4. Investigation

Five Faculties and Five Powers

Consider how each of these five leads to opposing the non-virtuous states of mind listed with it. How do each of these lead to attaining liberation?

1. Faith opposes non-faith 2. Effort opposes laziness 3. Mindfulness opposes forgetfulness 4. Concentration opposes the five hindrances to concentration 5. Wisdom opposes the wrong conception about the four truths

56 The Gomchen Lamrim 09-02-16:

The 37 harmonies with awakening, part 2

Seven Awakening Factors

Practice of the Seven Awakening Factors is for Middle Level Practitioners intent on liberation (and those practicing in common with it). Consider each of the seven and how they build from one to the next, guiding our minds to the state of liberation:

1. Mindfulness: helps the mind stay on the object of meditation and helps subdue the gross afflictions.
2. Discrimination of phenomena: a form of wisdom that knows what to practice and what to abandon on the path.
3. Effort: the energy we put into our practice.
4. Rapture: a state of supreme joy that floods the body when you have single pointed concentration.
5. Pliancy: the ability to put the mind on whatever object you wish.
6. Concentration: the ability to keep the mind on whatever object you wish.
7. Equanimity: the mind abiding in a neutral feeling.

Noble Eightfold Path

Practice of the Noble Eightfold Path is for Middle Level Practitioners intent on liberation (and those practicing in common with it). Consider each of the eight and how you can practice it in your daily life right now.

1. **Right view:** for where WE are on the path, this is about having the right view of conventional reality (karma, rebirth, the Buddhist worldview). Why is it so important to start out with right view and put our energy and time into developing it?
2. **Right intention:** Venerable Chodron listed three parts to right intention: 1) renunciation, 2) benevolence, and 3) compassion.
 - With renunciation, it is not giving up happiness, but rather giving up the distraction and misery that is our obsession with sensual desire. What kinds of sensual desire do you get caught up in that distract you from practice?
 - Benevolence makes us look at how we approach the world. Do you look on others with kindness, or do you tend to see them with suspicion, competition/judgment, or how you might be able to get something from them? What can you do to transform these negative attitudes to ones of kindness. Think of situations in your own life and how you might think differently in the moment that might change the experience.

- With compassion we really start reaching out to reduce the suffering of others. Where have you made effort in this area? Where do you struggle with this? What can you do to grow your compassion?
3. **Right speech:** Our speech is incredibly powerful. Consider your speech with friends, family, strangers... What motivates your speech? In terms of lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, and idle talk, are you aware of what you are saying and how it affects others? What can you do to be more aware of your speech and to focus it on what is beneficial?
 4. **Right action:** This is about refraining from actions that harm ourselves and others (namely killing, stealing, and unwise and unkind sexual behavior). Consider what you read/see in the news and the drama that affects your own life and the lives of those around you. Do you see how these are the root of so much suffering in our lives? Make a determination to refrain from them.
 5. **Right livelihood:** For the lay practitioner, this is about being honest in your work and not harming others through it. If you're a monastic, it's about refraining from the 5 wrong livelihoods. Think of examples of wrong livelihood that you have performed or witnessed in the world around you. How has this brought harm to yourself or others?
 6. **Right effort:** This is about putting effort into doing our practices and not keeping ourselves busy doing things of no consequence. Are there things you do regularly that distract you from spiritual practice? Consider the many benefits of spiritual practice and the disadvantages of not practicing as a means to increase your energy for it.
 7. **Right mindfulness:** This is about being mindful of our precepts and values and living according to them. Think of times where your precepts and values were very clear in your mind and helped you to avert creating non-virtue. Then think of times you created non-virtue because you were not holding them in mind. How did you feel in each situation? What can you do to continually keep your precepts and values in mind so that they influence your daily life?
 8. **Right concentration:** this is about training the mind to being single pointed. It takes time, effort and a special environment. What can you do to help create the causes for this in your life?

57 The Gomchen Lamrim 09-09-16:

Chandrakirti's homage to great compassion

This week, we started studying the stages of the path for the advanced practitioner (those going for full awakening). It is compassion that has us practicing at this level of the lamrim, that has us going for full awakening. We are no longer working for our own liberation but seek to be a Buddha so that we can be of great benefit to ALL beings.

With this in mind, contemplate the following points from the teaching:

1. At the beginning of the text, it says that bodhicitta “is the source of all goodness.” Why is it that everything that is good in the universe comes about through bodhicitta? Spend some time really considering how every happiness you have and will experience can be traced back to bodhicitta.
2. “By working for others’ welfare, you achieve your own naturally.” Why is it that working for our own pleasures causes us so much suffering? Why is it that when we give up this pursuit of our own pleasure and work for others’ welfare, that our own happiness comes about quite naturally? How have you seen this truth in your own life?
3. Venerable Chodron said that it’s important to know the definition of compassion: the wish for others to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering (dukkha). But we have to go further than this. It goes a lot deeper than we think.
 - We usually think that suffering is just the ouch kind of mental and physical pain and that the causes of suffering come from others. What does the dharma teach is suffering (the three kinds of dukkha) and what are its true causes?
 - Consider each one and how you’ve seen this in your own life and in the lives of others. What are you really wishing others to be free of?
 - What does compassionate action mean and how is it different from people-pleasing?
4. Consider the three causes for bodhisattvas given by the Homage to Great Compassion: compassionate mind, non dual awareness, and bodhicitta. Let’s look at each:
 - Compassionate mind is a form of compassion that cherishes others more than self and cherishes all living beings equally.
 - Consider what this means: being willing to go out of our way, do things that might be inconvenient, threaten our reputation or wellbeing... all in the name of benefitting others. How have you seen this kind of compassion in the world. Have you experienced this kind of compassion in your own life?
 - Venerable Chodron says we have the ability to develop this kind of compassion and that to whatever extent we can cultivate and practice it, even if in small ways, we make things better for ourselves and all sentient beings. Take some time to consider how even a little bit of compassion can make an incredible difference in the world?
 - How have you see your own compassion grow as you’ve practiced the Dharma? What can you do to continue to strengthen the compassionate mind?
 - Non dual awareness here is being free of the extremes of absolutism and nihilism. Why does being free from these two extremes become a cause for becoming a bodhisattva?
 - The awakening mind/bodhicitta that is the cause for a bodhisattva is fabricated bodhicitta. It is referred to as “bodhicitta like sugar cane bark” in that contrived bodhicitta is like chewing on the bark whereas spontaneous

bodhicitta is like tasting the sugar cane itself. Why is it so important to put so much energy into cultivating this form of bodhicitta? How does it lead to becoming a bodhisattva?

5. Consider the three functions of compassion: the seed at the beginning of the path, the water and fertilizer that makes the seed keep growing in the middle of the path, and the ripened fruit that is the harvest of the path. Let's look at each:

- Compassion as the seed at the beginning of the path:
 - How is it that compassion got you started on your own spiritual path?
 - How has seeing your own dukkha and the dukkha of others led to feeling a wish to free yourself and others from their suffering?
 - How does compassion lead to the GREAT compassion of a bodhisattva, the kind of compassion that has the bodhisattvas "getting their feet wet?"
 - Of course it takes time, joyous effort, and habituation to get from our level of compassion (mostly aspiration) to that of a bodhisattva (spontaneous action). What can you do now to begin to work towards greater and greater levels of active compassion?
- Compassion as the water and fertilizer that makes the seed keep growing in the middle of the path:

When you're doing the bodhisattva activities like generosity, ethical conduct, fortitude, joyous effort, concentration and wisdom, it's bodhicitta that underlies it and keeps us going. How has compassion helped keep you motivated on the path when your practice isn't going the way you want or when your trying to help someone and it's not going as you had hoped?
- Compassion as the ripened fruit that is the harvest of the path:

At the end of the path, we've become a Buddha. How does compassion lead to the activities of a Buddha?

6. Consider the analogies of the water wheel, illustrating that migrating beings have no autonomy in samsara. How does thinking in these ways fuel your renunciation and your compassion?

- Just as the buckets are tied by a strong rope, we are tied to samsara by ignorance, afflictions and karma. Just as the pulley moves the water wheel, the afflicted mind propels us into various rebirths where again and again, we find ourselves in difficult situations.
- Just as the water wheel continuously goes up and down, beings wander without end from the highest meditative absorption to the lowest hell realm. Just as the bucket goes down easily but only goes up with great effort, it's easy to have an unfortunate rebirth and takes great effort to attain a higher one.
- Just as the water wheel goes up and down without discerning a beginning or end to the cycle, so beings go through the 12 links of dependent arising. Just as the water wheel is battered on a daily basis, hitting the sides of the well on

the way up and down, so we are battered by the constant migrations and regardless of our rebirth, we experience great dukkha.

58 The Gomchen Lamrim 09-16-16:

Three types of compassion

Consider the three types of compassion that are presented in Chandrakirti's Supplement:

1. Compassion for migrators:
 - Because of the misapprehension of a strong "I" followed by "mine," we look at everything in relationship to that big "I" and mine: this is MY body, MY mind, MY place to live, MY possessions, MY country, MY career, MY friends, MY enemies ...Look at your own life and the lives of those around you. How does thinking in this way cause you suffering?
 - Even if you get samsaric pleasure instead of great pain... then what? Does it lead to lasting happiness or does your attachment to samsaric pleasures only serve to perpetuate rebirth and dukkha?
 - Seeing the situation we are all in as the result of our ignorance, anger, and attachment, and by grasping at "I" and mine, allow compassion for yourself and all beings to arise in your mind, then resolve to get involved in bringing about the end of suffering for sentient beings by developing your compassion and wisdom, by practicing the path to full awakening.

2. Compassion observing phenomena:
 - Consider that like a reflection of the moon in water, things are arising and ceasing, not remaining the same even for a split second. We too are under the influence of causes and conditions, and are thus impermanent. Consider things and people in your life. Consider your own life.
 - When you have a real feeling that sentient beings do in fact disintegrate moment to moment, then you are able to negate the existence of both a permanent, partless and independent self (a permanent, eternal self or soul often asserted by non-Buddhists) as well as negate a self-sufficient, substantially existent self (controller of the aggregates). Because if we are changing all the time, this kind of self is impossible. In fact, the self exists as a mere designation on the basis of the aggregates. Reflect on this.
 - With the impermanence of all beings fresh in your mind, allow compassion for yourself and all sentient beings to arise. How does getting a sense of the impermanence of beings lead you to a deeper level of compassion than simply recognizing their suffering?

3. Compassion observing the unapprehendable:
 - Consider that just like when you see the reflection of the moon in water, it looks like there is a moon right there in the water, the appearance of a self is false. The self does not exist in the way that it appears.

- With the emptiness of inherent existence of all beings fresh in your mind, allow compassion for yourself and all sentient beings to arise. How does getting a sense of the emptiness of inherent existence of beings lead you to a deeper level of compassion than simply recognizing their suffering and their impermanence?

59 The Gomchen Lamrim 09-23-16:

The vast benefits of bodhicitta

This week, we looked at some of the benefits of generating bodhicitta (the aspiration to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings). Consider each of these benefits in your meditation. What does meditating on them do for your mind?

1. Bodhicitta is a mind that cherishes others, it frees us from the mind that is worried and obsessed with our own happiness; as a bodhisattva, we'd be consumed with whatever brought peace and benefit to the world.
2. Bodhicitta is the source of all goodness in the world.
3. Bodhicitta alleviates all troubles.
4. Bodhicitta is the great path travelled by all the knowledgeable ones.
5. Bodhicitta is nourishment for all who hear, see, and come into contact with it.
6. Bodhicitta is what we are all looking for, the entrance to the greatest spiritual path.
7. Because of its vast motivation, the virtue we create under the influence of bodhicitta is immeasurable (even doing a small action like feeding a crumb to an animal becomes a cause for awakening).
8. Bodhicitta is the best investment we could ever make, has the greatest return.
9. Bodhicitta easily consumes our negativities and fuels the collections of merit and wisdom.
10. Bodhicitta grants every wish that any being could ever have or hope for.

60 The Gomchen Lamrim 09-30-16:

The causes of bodhicitta

The causes for bodhicitta

Think about each of the causes for bodhicitta that Venerable Chodron discussed in the teaching. Some things to consider are: What is it about these factors that makes them a cause for bodhicitta? How do these factors benefit you now and in the future? How do they benefit others? Which of these causes are strong in your life? Which ones aren't so strong? What can you do to cultivate them? Does meditating on them inspire your mind to practice them?

1. The desire to have bodhicitta.
2. Accumulate merit and purify our negativities.
3. The inspiration of our spiritual mentors.
4. Live near practitioners of bodhicitta.
5. Study the texts that describe it.
6. Hear, think, and meditate on the teachings about bodhicitta.
7. Remember the qualities of the Buddha.
8. Value the Mahayana teachings and want them to exist forever.
9. Cultivate the thought, “If I generate bodhicitta, then I’ll be able to inspire others to do it too!”
10. Make requests for the inspiration of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas to help you generate bodhicitta.
11. Have renunciation and the aspiration for liberation.
12. Have an understanding of emptiness.
13. Have an awareness that others’ happiness depends on me.

Conclusion: Feel inspired to cultivate these causes that lead to the beautiful aspiration of bodhicitta, to become a full awakened Buddha for the benefit of all beings. Make a determination to make them real in your life.

Cultivating equanimity

Equanimity is the prerequisite for both meditations on developing bodhicitta. Consider the progression of how our bias arises, the disadvantages of the categories of friend, enemy, and stranger, and how you’ve seen this operate in your own life.

1. Starts with a wrong conception of “I” (self-grasping).
2. From self-grasping comes self-attachment.
3. Which gives rise to attachment for your own happiness.
4. Which gives rise to attachment towards “friends” who help you get what you want.
5. Which gives rise to hostility towards those who interfere with getting what you want.
6. Which gives rise to apathy for those who don’t seem to influence your happiness one way or the other.

Conclusion: With a deeper understanding of how the categories of friend, enemy, and stranger come about, and with conviction in their many disadvantages, resolve to cultivate equanimity in your life through study and application of the teachings.

61 The Gomchen Lamrim 10-07-16:

Equanimity—freedom from bias

1. Consider friend, enemy and stranger as follows:
 - Think of a dear friend for whom you have positive feelings. Are you attached? Why do you have that attachment?
 - Now think of someone you really can't stand. Ask yourself why you feel that way. Without judging your responses, listen to the reasons your mind gives.
 - Then think of some strangers, where you don't have feelings one way or the other. Ask yourself why you feel apathy towards that person.
2. What is the common thread that you notice when doing this contemplation?
3. Venerable Chodron said that WE are the ones that create these categories and then put beings in them. Contemplate this and see how it operates in your own life.
4. Consider how changeable these categories are, using examples from your own life.
5. Cultivate a sense of equanimity, balancing the bias you hold for friend, enemy and stranger.

62 The Gomchen Lamrim 10-14-16 :

Seeing all sentient beings as having been our kind mothers

1. Start by generating equanimity by investigating the categories of friend, enemy, and stranger that we looked at last week. Consider how these categories change all the time in this life and must have in previous lives. Get a feeling for how these categories aren't *out there*, how we create them.
2. Next, consider rebirth and how all beings have been our mother in a past life. Take some time to really investigate the process of rebirth, how we have had infinite past lives (many in which we had a mother), and how that every living being could have been our mother at some point in those countless lives.
3. Then consider the kindness of our mother of this life (or other caregiver). As babies, we were unable to care for ourselves. Everything we know was taught to us by someone. Consider all our mothers gave us. Then think that every single living being has offered that same kindness in some lifetime.
4. Allow the desire to reciprocate that kindness arise in your mind.
5. How do each of these points make you feel? Do they create a sense of openness? How do you think meditating on these points leads to generating bodhicitta?

63 The Gomchen Lamrim 10-21-16:

Gomchen Lamrim review: The truth of dukkha

Included here is the meditation that Venerable Damcho led at the end of the teaching:

1. Bring to mind a time when your mind was overwhelmed by fear and aggression. Imagine this mental state being so strong that it completely colors your entire environment and the kind of physical experience you have, the body you take. When our mind is overwhelmed by anger, we see everything through that lens. Think that this is what it is like to be in the hell realms, to have a body and mind that are overwhelmed by fear, rage, fury. That's your entire experience. You can generate the wish to free your mind from such a state. Now think too that there are many beings experiencing this. Extend that wish to them too, to be free from the suffering of the hell realms.
2. Bring your mind to a time when the mind was completely overwhelmed by craving. You were separated from something you wanted and no matter where you looked, it was never enough, couldn't find any happiness. So overwhelmed by the craving that you couldn't enjoy anything. Again, imagine that this overpowering dissatisfaction consumes your entire body, shapes your entire experience of the environment, how you see the world. This is what it is like to be in the hungry ghost realm. Generate the wish for yourself to be free from being in a state like this. Now extend that wish to all the beings in the same situation, wishing for them and yourself to be free from the suffering of the hungry ghost realm.
3. Bring to mind a time when your mind was clouded by ignorance and confusion. When you were unable to think clearly, couldn't seem to access your wisdom, just in a daze or fog. Again, imagine that this affects your entire body, the way you see the world, your entire environment. Think that this is what it is like to be in the animal realm where your main focus is getting food, protecting yourself, protecting your children. There is a lot of fear of being eaten, you have to eat... your whole life revolves around that. Wish for yourself to be free from the suffering of the animal realm and also extend that to all beings.
4. Now let's turn our minds to the types of suffering humans experience. At this very moment, beings are going through the 8 sufferings, including ourselves: babies being born, people in the process of aging, struggling with illness, dying right now, people grieving, struggling with difficult problems, being separated from those they love, not getting what they want. This is our common experience from having this body and mind, overwhelmed by ignorance, karma, and afflictions. Generate the strong wish for you and the other beings in the human realm to be free from suffering and its causes.
5. Now think of a time when your mind was so satiated with pleasure, that that was all you could think about: ME and MY pleasure. You were so distracted by this pleasure that you couldn't focus on anything. What others are going through doesn't matter. Again, imagine being so overwhelmed by this kind of pleasure that it shapes your entire body and environment. Imagine that this is what it is like

in the celestial realms, completely self absorbed in having everything you want. Too, see that this is suffering. It completely closes our hearts to other beings. Again, wish for yourself and all beings in the celestial realms to be free of such suffering and its causes.

6. Just reflecting on how there is no safe place in any of the six realms that is free from the suffering of cyclic existence and looking at how these are produced by our ignorance and afflictions, we can generate a very strong wish in our mind to be free, knowing that this is the most compassionate thing we can do for ourselves and others, to transform our minds and stop the cycle of rebirth.

64 The Gomchen Lamrim 10-28-16:

Heartwarming love

Before tonight, we had covered only through the fourth of the seven point instruction of cause and effect (point 5 was part of tonight's teaching). As the meditation is meant to take you step by step to generating bodhicitta, it's important to work through each step, so included below are all the points through this week's teaching:

1. Start by generating equanimity by investigating the categories of friend, enemy, and stranger that we looked at last week. Consider how these categories change all the time in this life and must have in previous lives. Get a feeling for how these categories aren't *out there*, how we create them.
2. Next, consider rebirth and how all beings have been our mother in a past life. Take some time to really investigate the process of rebirth, how we have had infinite past lives (many in which we had a mother), and how that every living being could have been our mother at some point in those countless lives.
3. Then consider the kindness of our mother of this life (or other caregiver). As babies, we were unable to care for ourselves. Everything we know was taught to us by someone. Consider all our mothers gave us. Then think that every single living being has offered that same kindness in some lifetime.
4. Allow the desire to reciprocate that kindness arise in your mind.
5. Different from love, heartwarming love is the caring affection that finds all beings endearing and feels close to them. Based on the previous points, allow that feeling of closeness and affections for all beings arise in your mind.
6. How do each of these points make you feel? Do they create a sense of openness? How do you think meditating on these points leads to generating bodhicitta?

65 The Gomchen Lamrim 11-04-16:

Great compassion and the great resolve

Transcribed below is the meditation that Venerable Chodron did at the beginning of the teaching with edits to include points from the teaching itself.

1. Begin by considering that all sentient beings have been your parent or some kind of caregiver to you.
 - You've had that kind of close relationship with each and every living being at some time in previous lives, human or non-human. We haven't always been in the physical form we are today. We haven't always been the person that we are today.
 - If you have difficulty with that concept, feeling like you've been the same person in all previous lives, then recall emptiness and the lack of inherent existence. That will help lessen that conception of a real me.
2. By using the example of your present parents, what you've observed of others' parents, or caregivers, think of the kindness that has been shown to you since you've been an infant: giving to you physically, teaching you everything you know, etc... so that you grew up to be the person you are today. Think of their kindness.
3. As you feel the kindness of others, how you could not have stayed alive on your own without what others have done for you, then let arise very naturally a wish to give them something in return, to repay that kindness in some way.
4. From there, let a feeling of affection arise in your heart, seeing all these living beings as lovable, as being worthy of affection. If it's easier, you can think of them all in human form.
5. Consider the dukkha in which they live under the influence of afflictions and karma, wanting happiness not suffering but meeting so many obstacles.
 - So these beings who have been so kind to you, who you see in beauty in this way, are really having a horrible time of it because samsara is no fun at all. So in this way, have the wish for them to be free of that dukkha (compassion).
 - Venerable Chodron went into the three types of dukkha in this week's teaching. Be sure to investigate each of these as you consider the suffering you are wishing beings to be free of, especially the dukkha of pervasive conditioning.
 - Lama Tsong Khapa talks about wanting to be free of the "four power rivers" that sweep us away (sensual pleasure, craving for rebirth, craving for self, wrong views). Then "bound by the strong bonds of karma which are so hard to undo," consider how the energy of our karma makes it difficult to overcome our negativity and pushes us towards the negative results of our own actions. "Caught in the iron net of self-grasping ignorance. Born and reborn in boundless cyclic existence. Completely enveloped by the darkness of ignorance..." Really make this visualization part of this point on great compassion.
6. While compassion is certainly virtuous, it doesn't do anything to change the situation. So generate the great determination, the great resolve, to make the welfare of other beings your priority.
 - Think that you want to dedicate your life to their welfare; that you are willing to get involved in that project.

- Seeing the dire situation we are all in, seeing that it is intolerable, generate the feeling that you can't help but want to get involved.
7. Then, knowing that in your present situation you can help others somewhat but only in a very limited way and knowing that you don't even have the present capacity to liberate yourself, generate the aspiration to attain full awakening so that you'll have all the compassion, wisdom, and skillful means to benefit them most effectively.
- Think, "I will never give up that altruistic intention. It's the most important thing in my life."
 - Return to this very firm determination throughout the day (remember "fake it 'til you make it" fabricated bodhicitta is how we get started on the path to achieving spontaneous bodhicitta).

66 The Gomchen Lamrim 11-18-16:

Gomchen Lamrim review: The afflictions

Included below is the meditation that Venerable Chonyi led during the review, along with extra points brought in from the review itself.

1. Think back to the last 24-48 hours, maybe 72 hours, a week... think of an incident where you had a flaring affliction. Just notice. It doesn't have to be a big blow up. It doesn't have to be public. Just in our own mind. Think about a situation or moment when an affliction was really big in your mind.
 - First of all, identify what it was.
 - Then think about the factors that stimulated the arising and see if you can come up with what all was involved in bringing that affliction up (factors: latencies, contact, detrimental influences, media/verbal stimuli, habits, inappropriate attention).
 - What do you see operating in your own mind?
 - What are the disadvantages of the affliction?
 - Consider that we are NOT our afflictions. Afflictions are adventitious, obscuring the clear nature of our minds. Try to connect with that awareness.
 - What antidotes can be applied next time such a situation arises or the next time that affliction arises?
2. Throughout the week, in and out of meditation, reflect on any afflictions you have experienced. What was the affliction? What factors came together to stimulate its arising? What are the disadvantages of indulging the affliction instead of working with it? What antidotes can you apply next time to help you work with it?
3. Resolve to familiarize your mind with the afflictions, the factors that stimulate their arising, as well as the antidote for each specific affliction. This is so incredibly important to do when afflictions aren't strong in your mind. Practice every day on the little disturbances you experience to build strength in working with the bigger ones.

4. And finally... rejoice in EVERY effort, no matter how small you think it is (remember the second characteristic of karma is that it grows!) and remember, we're not going to change overnight. Most important is that we start to habituate new ways of thinking, new ways of working with the afflictions, and begin to challenge them. Taking things moment by moment, day by day, eventually, with practice, we WILL become more adept at transforming our afflictions in a skillful and beneficial way.

67 The Gomchen Lamrim 11-25-16:

Gomchen Lamrim review: Karma

Included below is the meditation that Venerable Semkye led during the review, along with extra points brought in from the review itself.

1. Spend some time thinking about the main points from the review: how our body gets old, sick, and dies, how our mind is under the control of afflictions and karma, how we've been reborn countless times in this state... As Venerable Semkye said, "Who in their right mind wants to stick around?"
2. Consider that we keep forgetting how disheartening and dissatisfying and painful samsara is. Why do you think that is so? What distracts you personally from seeing the disadvantages of samsara?
3. Consider that by not taking care of our afflictions as soon as they arise, we put ourselves in great danger! We don't just harm ourselves and others now, we habituate these negativities in our own mind and they can easily ripen at the time of death when we're powerless to fight them. What kind of rebirth can you expect if you're overwhelmed with afflictions when you die? How important is it then to be aware of the situations in which you're the most vulnerable so that you can give your mind protection and begin to habituate virtue in your mind instead of negativity.
4. Consider that death can happen at any time. Think about people you know who have died, as well as those who you have read about in the news. Did they die from exhaustion of lifespan? Exhaustion of merit? Death from failure to avoid danger? Consider that you don't know what karma exists on your mindstream; that anything could ripen at any time and does for people everywhere. Get a sense for the uncertainty and instability of samsara.
5. Venerable Semkye concluded by saying that we have to think about what happens at death so that we make a determination to not keep doing this again and again and again. It is only through cultivating renunciation that we have access to great compassion and an ability to begin benefitting others in a meaningful way. This can't be an intellectual exercise; it HAS to be personal.
 - How many of my thoughts today were of renunciation and bodhicitta?
 - How many of my thoughts were about your own pleasure?
 - How many thoughts today were on how to avoid suffering?

6. Make a commitment to yourself that at the end of the day for a week, to ask these three questions of yourself. Commit to changing the balance so that renunciation and bodhicitta become more prominent.

68 The Gomchen Lamrim 12-02-16:

Gomchen Lamrim review: The 37 harmonies

Four Establishments of Mindfulness

Consider how each of these leads to liberation in addition to meditating on the following:

1. Mindfulness of body: Cultivating mindfulness of body counteracts the strong feeling we have that the self resides in the body. Where does the self seem to reside in you? Do you feel it is behind the eyes? In the chest? Use reasoning to refute why this kind of self cannot exist. Meditating on the mindfulness of body also counteracts the distortion of perceiving things that are foul to be clean or beautiful. It's pretty common in society to see the body as something magnificent. Is that realistic? In what ways is the body foul? Consider that this meditation is not meant to generate a feeling of hatred or disdain for the body, but to counteract the insatiable pampering of and attachment to our own and others' bodies. What kinds of negative karma have you created in your life because of these misperceptions about the body? What is a realistic and healthy way to see the body?
2. Mindfulness of feelings: Cultivating mindfulness of feelings counteracts the conception that there is an independent self that enjoys and experiences feelings. Use reasoning to refute why this kind of self cannot exist. Mindfulness of feelings can also counter the distortion that our feelings are pleasurable when they are actually in the nature of dukkha. Look at your own experience. What do you find when you examine your feelings of pleasant, unpleasant and neutral. Are they stable? Do they bring lasting happiness?
3. Mindfulness of mind: This refutes the conception that we are our mind, that there is a real self that controls everything else. Use reasoning to refute why this kind of self cannot exist. Mindfulness of mind also counteracts the distortion that the mind is permanent. As you sit quietly and observe the mind, what about it can possibly be permanent? What does ignorance apprehend that just cannot be?
4. Mindfulness of phenomena: Venerable Chodron said that mindfulness of phenomena is about investigating our attitudes and emotions, how we make ourselves worthy or worthless, stupid or wonderful because of a misconception that there is a real self. In what ways do you judge yourself (bad because of this and good because of that)? Why is this not a valid or realistic form of self-esteem? Consider your buddha nature as a realistic and valid source of self-esteem. What does cultivating these different forms of self esteem (realistic ones vs. unrealistic ones) do for your mind? Which one leads to virtue and which to non-virtue? Do you see how the one can only lead to suffering and the other to happiness?

Four Supreme Strivings

Consider how each of these leads to liberation in addition to meditating on the following:

1. Apply effort into preventing non-virtue: What kinds of non-virtue do you see in the world that you want to avoid doing? What is it about restraining the senses that helps in preventing non-virtue? What things have you done in your life to restrain the senses that has led to refraining from non-virtue?
2. Arouse aspiration and apply effort to abandon non-virtue already generated by applying antidotes: What kinds of non-virtue do you struggle with most? What are the benefits of applying antidotes and what can you do to increase your use of them?
3. Arouse aspiration and apply effort to generate new virtues not already generated: What virtue do you see in the world that you would like to increase in your own life? What can you do to cultivate them?
4. Arouse aspiration and apply effort to maintain and enhance the virtues that have already arisen in our mind: What kinds of virtue have you participated in in your own life that you would like to strengthen?

Four Bases of Supernormal Powers

How do each of these facilitate the attainment of supernormal powers? For someone on the spiritual path, what is the purpose of attaining supernormal powers? How do they lead to liberation?

1. Aspiration
2. Effort
3. Intention
4. Investigation

Five Faculties and Five Powers

Each of these overpowers a non-virtuous mental state. Using examples from your own life, why do these non-virtuous mental states lead to suffering? Why is it we want to abandon them? How does cultivating the five faculties (and then powers) lead to happiness and attaining liberation?

1. Faith opposes non-faith
2. Effort opposes laziness
3. Mindfulness opposes forgetfulness
4. Concentration opposes the five hindrances to concentration
5. Wisdom opposes the wrong conception about the four truths

Seven Awakening Factors

Practice of the Seven Awakening Factors is for Middle Level Practitioners intent on liberation (and those practicing in common with it). Consider each of the seven and how they build from one to the next, guiding our minds to the state of liberation.

1. Mindfulness: helps the mind stay on the object of meditation and helps subdue the gross afflictions.

2. Discrimination of phenomena: a form of wisdom that knows what to practice and what to abandon on the path.
3. Effort: the energy we put into our practice.
4. Rapture: a state of supreme joy that floods the body when you have single pointed concentration.
5. Pliancy: the ability to put the mind on whatever object you wish.
6. Concentration: the ability to keep the mind on whatever object you wish.
7. Equanimity: the mind abiding in a neutral feeling.

Noble Eightfold Path

Practice of the Noble Eightfold Path is for Middle Level Practitioners intent on liberation (and those practicing in common with it). Consider each of the eight and how you can practice it in your daily life right now.

1. Right view: for where WE are on the path, this is about having the right view of conventional reality (karma, rebirth, the Buddhist worldview). Why is it so important to start out with right view and put your energy and time into developing it?
2. Right intention: Venerable Chodron listed three parts to right intention: 1) renunciation, 2) benevolence, and 3) compassion. With renunciation, it is not giving up happiness, but rather the distraction and misery that is our obsession with sensual desire. What kinds of sensual desire do you get caught up in that distract you from practice? Benevolence makes us look at how we approach the world. Do you look on others with kindness, or do you tend to see them with suspicion, competition/judgment, or how you might be able to get something from them? What can you do to transform these negative attitudes to ones of kindness. Think of situations in your own life and how you might think differently in the moment that might change the experience. With compassion, we really start reaching out to reduce the suffering of others. Where have you made effort in this area? Where do you struggle with this? What can you do to grow your compassion?
3. Right speech: Our speech is incredibly powerful. Consider your speech with friends, family, strangers... What motivates your speech? In terms of lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, and idle talk, are you aware of what you are saying and how it affects others? What can you do to be more aware of your speech and to focus it on what is beneficial?
4. Right action: This is about refraining from actions that harm ourselves and others (namely killing, stealing, and unwise and unkind sexual behavior). Consider what you read/see in the news and the drama that affects your own life and the lives of those around you. Do you see how these are the root of so much suffering in our lives? Make a determination to refrain from them.
5. Right livelihood: For the lay practitioner, this is about being honest in your work and not harming others through it. If you're a monastic, it's about refraining from

the 5 wrong livelihoods. Think of examples of wrong livelihood that you have performed or witnessed in the world around you. How has this brought harm to yourself or others?

6. Right effort: This is about putting effort into doing our practices and not keeping ourselves busy doing things of no consequence. Are there things you do regularly that distract you from spiritual practice? Consider the many benefits of spiritual practice and the disadvantages of not practicing as a means to increase your energy for it.
7. Right mindfulness: This is about being mindful of our precepts and values and living according to them. Think of times where your precepts and values were very clear in your mind and helped you to avert creating non-virtue. Then think of times you created non-virtue because you were not holding them in mind. How did you feel in each situation? What can you do to continually keep your precepts and values in mind so that they influence your daily life?
8. Right concentration: this is about training the mind to being single pointed. It takes time, effort and a special environment. What can you do to help create the causes for this in your life?

69 The Gomchen Lamrim 12-09-16:

Gomchen Lamrim review: Homage to compassion

The water wheel

Imagine a bucket traveling in a well, tied to a wheel, controlled by an operator, going up to the top and down to the bottom over and over. It is drawn up with difficulty and strain, and easily descends back down to the bottom, clattering against the sides of the well, being battered and broken as it swings. Consider:

1. Just as the bucket is tied by the rope, so we are bound by our past actions, contaminated by the afflicted emotions of attachment, anger, and ignorance.
2. Just as the turning wheel depends on a person operating it, so our wandering in samsara depends upon consciousness.
3. Just as the bucket travels down to the bottom of the well and up to the top, so we travel among the stations of samsara, being born over and over again. We don't know what kind of form we will have in our next life, what ones we've had in previous lives, where we have lived before as hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, demigods, and gods.
4. Just as the bucket descends easily in the well, but is difficult to draw upwards, even with hard work, our own tendencies of mind, our attachment, anger, ignorance, are such that we are easily drawn down into lower states of existence.
5. So to interrupt that movement to the lower states, and move towards the higher states, we must put strong effort into our practice.

Wishing ourselves and others to be free of dukkha

Begin this contemplation by considering yourself:

1. Imagine in front of you a replica of yourself.
2. Reflect on the various sufferings/dukkha (dukkha of pain, dukkha of change, dukkha of pervasive conditioning).
3. See yourself and your own unhappiness due to being subject to sickness, loss of a dear one, a sense of loneliness.
4. Now wish yourself to be free from these conditions and their causes, Imagine what it would be like to be free from these. Really feel the newfound freedom from insecurity, fear, anxiety, anger, emotional neediness, and also have a strong sense of freedom from ignorance.

Next, do the same reflection towards teachers, those you respect:

1. Be aware of the various suffering/dukkha/unhappiness, and extend that to the subtler levels of dukkha.
2. Imagine that they are free from these conditions and their causes.

Now, turn your attention to strangers (Maybe you drove to town today and saw someone and can barely remember their face... Do the same meditation):

1. First reflect on the various dukkha and unhappiness of this being.
2. Then, go also into a subtler meditation on three kinds of dukkha.
3. Then wish them to be free of these conditions and their causes.
4. Imagine them to be free from ignorance, fear, anger, and such.

Now we apply this meditation to those we don't like, people we disapprove of or feel threatened by, those who have harmed us in the past:

1. If we really have great difficulties, we remember that they did that harm due to their internal unhappiness. People harm others when they themselves are unhappy.
2. Imagine what this person would feel like if he/she were free from that pain and misery.

Now include all beings in your meditation:

1. Wish each of them to be free from all kinds of suffering and their causes.
2. Rest your mind in that compassionate thought.

Conclusion: To finish this practice, let's go back to what His Holiness the Dalai Lama said in his book on compassion:

“Spiritual practice is removing suffering on a deeper level. So these techniques involve an adjustment of attitude. So spiritual education basically means adjusting your thoughts in a beneficial way. This means that by adjusting counterproductive attitudes, you are held back from a particular kind of suffering and are thereby

freed from it. Spiritual education protects or holds you and others back from misery. “

70 The Gomchen Lamrim 12-16-16:

Gomchen Lamrim review: Bodhicitta

The benefits of bodhicitta

This week, we reviewed some of the benefits of generating bodhicitta (the aspiration to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings). Consider each of these benefits in your meditation. What does meditating on them do for your mind?

1. Bodhicitta is a mind that cherishes others, it frees us from the mind that is worried and obsessed with our own happiness; as a bodhisattva, we'd be consumed with whatever brought peace and benefit to the world.
2. Bodhicitta is the source of all goodness in the world.
3. Bodhicitta alleviates all troubles.
4. Bodhicitta is the great path travelled by all the knowledgeable people.
5. Bodhicitta is nourishment for all who hear, see, and come into contact with it.
6. Bodhicitta is what we are all looking for, the entrance to the greatest spiritual path.
7. Because of its vast motivation, the virtue we create under the influence of bodhicitta is immeasurable (even doing a small action like feeding a crumb to an animal becomes a cause for awakening).
8. Bodhicitta is the best investment we could ever make, has the greatest return.
9. Bodhicitta easily consumes our negativities and fuels the collections of merit and wisdom.
10. Bodhicitta grants every wish that any being could ever have or hope for.

The causes for bodhicitta

Think about each of the following causes for bodhicitta. Some things to consider are: What is it about each factor that makes it a cause for bodhicitta? How do these factors benefit you now and in the future? How do they benefit others? Which of these causes are strong in your life? Which ones aren't so strong? What can you do to cultivate them? Does meditating on them inspire your mind to practice them?

1. The desire to have bodhicitta
2. Accumulate merit and purify our negativities
3. The inspiration of our spiritual mentors
4. Live near practitioners of bodhicitta
5. Study the texts that describe it

6. Hear, think, and meditate on the teachings about bodhicitta
7. Remember the qualities of the Buddha
8. Value the Mahayana teachings and want them to exist forever
9. Cultivate the thought, “If I generate bodhicitta, then I’ll be able to inspire others to do it too!”
10. Make requests for the inspiration of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas to help you generate bodhicitta
11. Have renunciation and the aspiration for liberation
12. Have an understanding of emptiness
13. Have an awareness that others’ happiness depends on me

Conclusion: Feel inspired to cultivate these causes that lead to the beautiful aspiration of bodhicitta, the wish to become a fully awakened Buddha for the benefit of all beings. Make a determination and an action plan to cultivate them in your daily life.

71 The Gomchen Lamrim 12-23-16:

Gomchen Lamrim review: Equanimity

When developing equanimity, these are points to contemplate *before* doing the Equalizing and Exchanging Self and Other meditation:

Actualizing equanimity that relies on the points of view of self:

1. Since all limited beings have been our parents, relatives, and friends in countless lives, it doesn’t make sense to feel that some are close and others far; that this one is a friend and that one an enemy; to welcome some and reject others. Think that after all, if I have not seen my mother in 10 minutes, 10 years, or 10 lives, she is still my mother. So now bring a friend, an enemy, and a stranger to mind. Think how, in past lives, they have been our parents, relatives, and friends. With caring concern and affection, they cherished us.
2. It is possible, however, just as these beings have helped me, sometimes they have also harmed me. Compared to the number of times they have helped me, and the amount that they have helped me, the harm that they have done is trivial. Therefore, it is improper to welcome one as close and reject another as distant. So bring to mind someone that you know and make a list in your mind of the times you were harmed and then make a list of the times you were helped. Get a feeling for this.
3. We will definitely die, but the time of our death is completely uncertain. Suppose for example you were sentenced to be executed tomorrow. It would be absurd to use your last day to become angry and hurt someone. By choosing something trivial, we would be using our last chance to do anything positive and meaningful with our last day. So remember a day you were angry and were planning to

retaliate. Think of what that mind is like and then think what you're next rebirth would be if you died that day.

Actualizing equanimity that relies on the points of view of others:

1. We remember that I do not want to suffer, and no matter how much happiness I have, I never feel it is enough. The same is true with absolutely everyone else. All beings from a tiny bug upwards wishes to be happy and never to suffer or have problems. So it is improper to reject some and welcome others. Again, bring to mind a friend, an enemy and a stranger and connect with the truth that each of them has the same deep wish to be happy and not suffer. And realize that not everyone has the same skill and understanding of what happiness is, what to adopt and abandon to increase happiness and decrease suffering. Connect yourself to these three and see how they are just like me.
2. Imagine that you went to the store and bought groceries. You came out of the door with your cart full of groceries, and there was a family there that was asking for some food. Would you think about giving some food to one and not the other two when they are all equal in their hunger and their need for food? So likewise, all of us want happiness, we are all tainted with ignorance, so we're all the same. Why would we reject some, keeping them far and distant, and welcome others as close?
3. Suppose there are 10 sick people. They are all equal in being miserable. Why would we favor some and treat only them and forget about the others? Similarly, all beings are equally miserable with their individual troubles and with the general problem of being caught in samsara. So they are just the same. Why would we reject some as far and distant and welcome others as close?

Actualizing equanimity that depends on the deepest points of view:

1. We think about how, because of our confusion, we label someone who is nice to us as a true friend and someone who hurts us as a true enemy. However, if they are established as existing in the ways we label them to be, then the Buddha himself would have seen them that way as well, but he never did. So bring to mind someone with whom you have difficulty. Identify the reasons. Then ask yourself, "Is that ALL this person is?" Can you open your perspective to other qualities you've seen in that person?
2. If limited beings were established as truly existing in the categories of friend and enemy just as we grasp them to be, they would always have to remain like that. Bring to mind someone who went from being a stranger to a friend, or from an enemy to a friend, or a friend to a stranger. Nothing is as fixed and solid as we feel it is. Make an example of someone who has changed status.
3. In a Compendium of Training, Shantideva has explained how self and others depend on each other, like the example of far and near mountains. They depend on, or are relative designations to one another. When we are on the close mountain, the other seems to be the far one and this one the near. When we go to the other side, this one becomes the far mountain and the other near. Likewise, we are not established as existing as self from our own side because when we look at

ourselves from the point of view of someone else, we become the other. Similarly, friend and enemy are just different ways of looking at or regarding a person. Someone can be both one's friend and another's enemy like the near and far mountains. They are all relative points of view. Contemplating this for some time loosens up our solid view of others and ourselves.

NOTE: If there is any resistance with any of these points, its important to go over them again. They can invoke a lot of feelings. If we can bring some self-empathy to ourselves and accept that we're not wanting to go there, over time, it will open and we will get into the content in a deeper way. If we don't open ourselves, we won't be able to develop equanimity, and therefore, we can't generate bodhicitta. We will continue to stay in misery. We have the capacity to move past that. These meditation points help us do that. We just have to have confidence in the path and in ourselves. And we have to do them over and over again, breaking down our solid views and habits of setting ourselves apart from others for whatever reason.

72 The Gomchen Lamrim 12-30-16:

Great resolve and bodhicitta

Contemplating the eighteen unshared qualities of an awakened one

Take the time to really think through each one, how they benefit ourselves and others. Imagine to what extent you might have a similitude of these qualities now and how you might develop them in your daily life.

Six unshared behaviors

1. Due to mindfulness and conscientiousness, a Buddha has no mistaken physical actions whether he is walking, standing, sitting or laying down; they act in accordance with what they say and their speech satisfies what each sentient being who is listening needs to understand at that moment (imagine having purified your mind to the extent that you have this; you don't act inappropriately).
2. Buddhas always speak appropriately, truthfully, and kindly and so are free from mistaken speech and idle talk.
3. Buddhas are free from any kind of forgetfulness that interferes with meditative stability and exalted wisdom, or with viewing beings and teaching them appropriately.
4. Buddhas always abide in meditative equipoise on emptiness and they simultaneously teach beings the Dharma.
5. Buddhas do not perceive any discordant appearances of a self and of inherent existence, and thus they recognize all phenomena as sharing the one taste of being empty of inherent existence. In addition, Buddhas do not treat beings with bias; they always treat them as free of prejudice. Imagine what it would be like to have leaders like this; to BE like this.
6. Buddhas abide in perfect equanimity, knowing the individual characteristics of each phenomena. Usually when WE know the characteristics of phenomena, then

we get into “I like this, I don’t like that. I want this, I don’t want that...” We are anything but equanimous, but a Buddha is able to maintain perfect equanimity and yet see all the qualities of all phenomena. Their opinion factor isn’t working overtime, unlike ours.

Six unshared realizations

1. Due to their all-encompassing love and compassion, Buddhas never experience any decline in their aspiration and intention to benefit all beings and to increase the virtuous qualities of beings. Their love and compassion is firm, stable.
2. Buddhas never lose joyous effort to lead others to awakening. They experience no physical, verbal, or mental fatigue and continuously care for the welfare of beings without getting tired, lazy, despondent, or jet-lagged. It’s all about how we condition and train ourselves, the energy we put into it.
3. Buddhas mindfulness effortlessly remains constant and uninterrupted. They are mindful also of the situations that each being encounters in the past, present, and future, and the methods used to subdue and help those beings.
4. Buddhas continuously remain in samadhi, free from all obscurations and focused on the ultimate reality. They don’t have a wandering mind; they are single pointed on the nature of reality.
5. Buddhas wisdom is inexhaustible and never declines. They perfectly know the 84,000 Dharma teachings and the doctrine of the three vehicles, as well as how and when to express them to sentient beings. Sometimes, we have good intentions, but we don’t know what to say, or we know what to say, but we don’t stop and think about WHEN to say it, and instead of helping someone, we create confusion. What would it be like to have that quality where we intuitively know the right thing to say or do at the right time that will work for someone? This doesn’t mean that as a Buddha, you can snap your fingers and completely change all beings. Rather, Buddhas see the long-term picture and can say something that plants a seed in another person’s mind that will later ripen and help them think more clearly.
6. It is impossible for Buddhas to lose the state of full awakening, free from obscurations. They know the mind to be naturally luminous and lack any dualistic appearance or grasping at duality.

Three unshared awakening activities

1. Imbued with exalted wisdom, a Buddha’s physical actions are always done for the benefit of others. They can emanate many bodies that appear wherever sentient beings have the karma to be led on the path to awakening and whatever a Buddha does has a positive effect on those beings.
2. Knowing the dispositions and interests of each being, Buddhas teach the Dharma in a manner appropriate for each individual. Their speech is lovely to listen to, accurate, truthful, and it is always knowledgeable, kind, and spot on.

3. Filled with un-declining love and compassion, Buddhas minds encompass all beings with the intention to do only what is of the highest benefit. They ONLY think of what can be of the greatest benefit to all beings.

Three unshared exalted wisdoms

1. Buddhas exalted wisdoms know everything in the past without any obscuration.
2. Buddhas exalted wisdoms know everything in the present without any obscuration.
3. Buddhas exalted wisdoms know everything in the future without any obscuration.

The suffering of the self-centered thought

1. Take some time to consider difficult situations in your life, past or present. How is the self-centered thought operating behind the scenes?
2. What are the disadvantages of the self-centered thought? What kinds of thoughts does it provoke? How do those thoughts lead you to act and how does that cause suffering both now and in the future?
3. How is the self-centered thought behind the complaining mind?
4. How does the self-centered thought thwart both worldly and spiritual aspirations and goals?
5. What antidotes can be applied to counter the self-centered thought? Consider how the Buddhist worldview offers a new way of thinking that combats the self-centered thought and leads to real and lasting happiness.
6. Seeing the self-centered thought as our enemy, not a friend, resolve to be vigilant in your daily life, apply antidotes whenever it arises.

73 The Gomchen Lamrim 01-06-17:

Equalizing self and others

Included below is the equanimity meditation to precede the Equalizing and Exchanging Self and Other method of generating bodhicitta.

Conventional level (from the view of self)

1. Sentient beings have equally helped us immeasurably, undergone hardships, and faced problems for our benefit. When we take into account our beginningless lifetimes, this is certainly the case. But even if we think about just this life, we can see that everything comes from others' effort. Everything we have owned, eaten, worn and so on has come to us through the kindness of others. It is all thanks to them. Really spend some time with this, going through the many contributions that others have made to your life, especially the people we don't normally think about (people who grow food, build houses and roads, etc). Get a feeling that others have been incredibly kind.
2. We may think, in response to this first point, that they also harm us sometimes, but the help is thousands of times greater! Do you find you gravitate towards

ruminating on the harm instead of the kindness? Take this time to bring to mind the kindness of others and get a feeling for how it outweighs any harm you've received.

3. Even in the few cases where others have harmed us, seeking revenge is completely self-defeating. Since death is definite and the time is indefinite, wanting to harm others makes no sense. It is like the squabbling of prisoners condemned to death.

Conventional level (from the view of others)

1. Sentient beings are equal in terms of wanting happiness and not wanting suffering. They are equal in having a right to these. We can't say that anybody is more important than anyone else. Every way we look at it, they are equal. Get a feel for this in your mind and generate a sense of respect for every being.
2. Given sentient beings' equal wish for happiness and their equal right to it, then it would be totally inappropriate if we helped some beings with a partial mind, if we favored some beings and not others. For example, if there were ten beggars, all hungry and thirsty, would it be right in your mind to be biased towards some and not others? Remember, on a practical level, we may not have the capacity to help everyone, but on an internal level, we can cultivate an attitude that regards them equally and would like to be able to help them equally.
3. Similarly, when you have ten patients, all sick with disease and suffering immensely, is it right to wish only some of them recovery and wish others to die?

Ultimate level

1. We develop attachment for those who help us and are nice to us. For those who insult us or do what we don't like, we loathe them and see them as bad. We see them as good or bad from their own side, independent from us. If people were really like this, from their own side, the Buddha would see them in that way and would favor some over others, but he doesn't. They say if one person is massaging him and the other is cutting him, from the side of the Buddha, he doesn't regard one as good and the other bad.
2. People appear nice and horrible from their own side as if they were permanently that way. The appearance of someone as good or bad is a dependent arising, and even that comes about in dependence upon the gathering together of particular causes and conditions, such as a little help or harm. It is thus something changeable by nature. It is not fixed. Think about how relationships have changed in your life, how friends become enemies, strangers become friends, enemies become strangers, etc. Consider how it isn't possible for the categories of friend-enemy-stranger to be solid and unchanging, rather they are transitory, so it is inappropriate to favor some vs. others.
3. Similarly, we think, "This person is my enemy and this is my friend," as if they were always, permanently, and irrevocably that way. In fact, these roles are relative. We can only posit friend because we posit enemy, so these cannot exist from their own side. Like this mountain and that mountain, to you, you are "me"

and to me, I am “me.” Who is the real “me?” It’s a matter of perspective. They don’t exist independently.

Conclusion: Seeing that all beings equally desire happiness and freedom from dukkha, and that each and every living being has shown us immeasurable kindness, it just doesn’t make sense to favor one person over another. In the end, the bias that we so easily justify leads to so much unhappiness for ourselves and others. Resolve to continue considering these points and to work towards eliminating the bias that works for the happiness of only a few.

74 The Gomchen Lamrim 01-13-17:

Self centeredness and the five decisions

We’re progressing through a series of meditations to lead us into cultivating bodhicitta. They are designed to be done in order: First, we meditate on equanimity, next on the Five Decisions, and then finally, the actual meditation on Equalizing and Exchanging Self and Other. Following is the meditation on the Five Decisions from this week’s teaching. Most important is to really take time with each point and to remember that it will be difficult at first. We have to reflect on these again and again until it changes us, until we really believe what these verses tell us.

1. Not only is there no reason to discriminate amongst sentient beings (established from the preceding equanimity meditation), there is also no reason to differentiate between myself and others. And from the Guru Puja: “There is no difference between myself and others. None of us wishes even the slightest suffering, nor is ever content with the happiness we have. Realizing this, I seek your inspiration to enhance the bliss and joy of others.”
 - Begin by looking at people you like, people you get along with. Consider this first point, that not only is there no reason to discriminate amongst friend, enemy, and stranger, there is also no reason to differentiate between myself and others. Recognize that they too, just like you, are never satisfied with the happiness they have and don’t wish even the slightest suffering...
 - Next, consider this point with strangers, using the same reasoning.
 - Finally, consider this point with people you don’t get along with, using the same reasoning. Consider that this meditation is particularly potent with people we’re having trouble with. Allow this point to open your mind to the fact that your “enemy” is the same in not wanting the slightest suffering; that they are the same in not being content with the happiness they have, just like you... And yet in not getting along, you continue to create the very suffering that you are both trying to avoid...
 - Consider that enhancing “the bliss and joy of others” also leads to our own happiness. Spend some time thinking about how and why that is true.
 - Decision #1: Having contemplated the previous points, decide... “Whatever beings do, however they talk about me, whatever they say to me, whatever they do to harm me... I will not retaliate, and I will work to enhance the bliss

and joy of others.” Spend some time with this, really make this decision in your heart.

2. To see our self-preoccupation as the real enemy. From the Guru Puja, “This chronic disease of self-centeredness is the cause for all our unwanted suffering. Seeing this, I seek your inspiration to blame, begrudge, and destroy the monstrous demon of selfishness.”
 - We usually think others are the source of our suffering, that they are our enemy. But others are simply the external conditions for what we experience and not the cause. It is our own karma and afflictions that result in suffering. And our karma and afflictions are due to our self-centeredness. Take some time to think through this, how our own actions lead to the suffering we experience.
 - Consider the wording used by the Guru Puja: “this chronic disease of self-centeredness” and “monstrous demon of selfishness.” What is it about self-centeredness that makes it like a “chronic disease?” Like a “monstrous demon?”
 - Consider that no other living being can send us to the hell realms. The most they can do is end our current life. It is our OWN actions that result in a hellish rebirth.
 - Decision #2: What really harms us is the self-centered attitude. Resolve to be vigilant in watching out for this “monstrous demon” of selfishness in your mind and to “blame, begrudge, and destroy” it through applying the appropriate antidotes. Spend some time with this, really make this decision in your heart.

3. To see that cherishing others is rich in qualities and brings all happiness. From the Guru Puja: “The attitude that cherishes all mother sentient beings, and would secure them in bliss, is the source from which arises boundless virtuous qualities. Seeing this, I seek your inspiration to cherish these beings more than my life, even should they all rise up as my enemies.”
 - Consider that the mind that wants to secure others in bliss is the source of our happiness and all the good qualities you develop. How and why is that the case? Think of some good qualities that you want to develop. Do you see how these qualities require cherishing others?
 - Consider why the self-centered thought is the source of all your bad qualities. Think of some bad qualities that you want to abandon. Do you see how these qualities depend on the self-centered thought? Consider that if we spend time thinking of others’ good qualities, we see them in an entirely different light than if we’re focusing on their negative qualities. When we’re focused on negative qualities, they can’t do anything right. This is OUR self-centeredness and not the reality of who the person is!
 - Consider that if we want to become Buddhas, the very qualities we need to develop require people to push our buttons. (in other words, how do you develop qualities like fortitude if no one is challenging you?)

- Decision #3: I want to cultivate the mind that cherishes others even more than my own life, developing my good qualities to benefit them. Spend some time with this, really make this decision in your heart.
4. Having thought about all the faults of self-centeredness and the qualities of cherishing others, we decide to exchange ourselves and others. From the Guru Puja: “In brief, infantile beings labor only for their own ends, while Buddhas work solely for the welfare of others. Discerning the disadvantages of the one, and the advantages of the other, I seek your inspiration to be able to equalize and exchange self and other.”
- Consider “infantile beings labor only for their own ends.” He’s talking about us. Why is it childish to work only for your own end, in light of all you’ve meditated on so far?
 - Consider that the Buddhas work only for the good of others. We think that if we completely dedicate our lives to benefitting others that we’ll suffer and yet we can see Buddhas are happy beings. Notice any resistance that comes up in your own mind and consider it in light of this point.
 - Consider that the welfare of others is just as important as my own, and in light of the fact that there are more of others than of me, democratically, they become more important.
 - Decision #4: Make the firm decision to exchange yourself for others. Spend some time with this, really make this decision in your heart.
 - When we’ve meditated over and over again on the disadvantages of self-preoccupation and the advantages of cherishing others, we make a strong decision that we must devote ourselves one-pointedly to the practice of equalizing and exchanging self and others, and see it as the most important practice. From the Guru Puja: “Cherishing ourselves is the door to all torment, while cherishing our mothers is the foundation of all that is good. Inspire me to make my core practice the yoga of exchanging self and others.”
 - Consider that to really do this exchange, it has to include a deep understanding of the faults of cherishing the self and the benefits of cherishing others. Take time to do that now.
 - Decision #5: Resolve to really do this practice of exchanging self and other from your heart and make it a key element in your life. Spend some time with this, really make this decision in your heart.

75 The Gomchen Lamrim 01-20-17:

Disadvantages of self-centeredness

Before doing this meditation, Venerable Chodron says that it’s important to remember that self-centeredness is not who we are. It is added garbage on top of the pure nature of the mind. If we complete the meditation and we hate ourselves for being selfish, we’ve added something to the meditation that the Buddha did not intend. The meditation does bring a sobering effect to the mind, but you shouldn’t feel discouraged. We have to separate ourselves from the self-centered thought. If it helps, you can anthropomorphize

it, making it into a shape or character, pointing your finger at it, blaming it and accusing it.

1. Self-centeredness is very much mixed in with our afflictions. When we're attached,, who do we care most about? When we're arrogant, lazy, have no consideration for others, etc, what is fueling all these defilements? Can you identify the self-centered thought behind it? (I'm more important than others...) Think of specific examples in your life where your afflictions were particularly strong. What affliction was predominant? Was the self-centered thought lurking there in the background?
2. Consider the complaining mind. What kinds of things do you complain about? This too is the self-centered thought. Think of specific examples of complaints you have. Can you identify the self-centeredness? Consider: even if you got what you wanted, would you be everlastingly happy? What does your self-centeredness really get you?
3. Geshe Jampa Tegchok in his book *Transforming Adversity into Joy and Courage* accuses the self-centered thought in a number of ways. Consider how each is true and make examples from your own life:
 - Self-centeredness, you are a slaughterer!
 - Self-centeredness, you are a thief!
 - Self-centeredness, you are a trouble-maker, a terrorist!
 - Self-centeredness, you are a farmer of evil!
 - Self-centeredness, you are a lazy bum!
 - Self-centeredness, you are greedy!
 - Self-centeredness, you are full of false hopes and fears!
4. Self-centered thought wants us to think that everyone else is the problem; that our suffering and happiness come from outside of us. We have to keep reminding ourselves again and again of what we learn in meditation, how our wrong views have deceived us. Resolve to habituate your mind with the many disadvantages of the self-centered thought, how it harms yourself and others; watch for it in your daily life and apply the antidotes we've been studying (developing equanimity, the five decisions, generating bodhicitta, etc).

76 The Gomchen Lamrim 01-27-17:

Benefits of cherishing others

Disadvantages of self-centeredness

Before doing this mediation, Venerable Chodron says that it's important to remember that self-centeredness is not who we are. It is added garbage on top of the pure nature of the mind. If we complete the meditation and we hate ourselves for being selfish, we've added something to the meditation that the Buddha did not intend. The meditation does bring a sobering effect to the mind, but you shouldn't feel discouraged. We have to separate ourselves from the self-centered thought. If it helps, you can anthropomorphize

it, making it into a shape or character, pointing your finger at it, blaming it and accusing it....

1. Geshe Jampa Tegchok in his book *Transforming Adversity into Joy and Courage* accuses the self-centered thought in a number of ways. Consider how each is true and make examples from your own life:
 - Self-centeredness, you are a slaughterer!
 - Self-centeredness, you are a thief!
 - Self-centeredness, you are a trouble-maker, a terrorist!
 - Self-centeredness, you are a farmer of evil!
 - Self-centeredness, you are a lazy bum!
 - Self-centeredness, you are greedy!
 - Self-centeredness, you are full of false hopes and fears!
 - Self-centeredness, you have no integrity or consideration for others!
 - Self-centeredness, you are out of control!
 - Self-centeredness, you are self-defeating!
 - Self-centeredness, you are utterly blind!
2. Recognizing the disadvantages of the self-centered thought in your own life, generate a strong feeling that you have had enough and resolve to apply the antidotes in your daily life: cherishing others, exchanging self and others, and generating bodhicitta.

Benefits of Cherishing Others

1. Consider some of the benefits of cherishing others offered by the participants in the teaching:
 - It is the foundation for developing the great resolve, which leads to bodhicitta.
 - It gives us more opportunities to be happy.
 - It makes it easy for us to perform virtue that ripens in our own happiness.
 - We're more in accord with reality in the sense that we include everyone instead of having a biased mind.
 - We sleep better.
 - It brings both temporary and ultimate benefit to us.
 - It helps us recognize our interdependence with other living beings.
 - It achieves our spiritual goals (we need others to cultivate generosity, ethical discipline, fortitude, etc).
 - There are many others, of course. What are some of the benefits of cherishing others that you know from your own experience?
2. Venerable Chodron said that if we don't understand the disadvantages of self-centeredness and the advantages of cherishing others, our practice of exchanging self and others seems masochistic (like you're denying yourself happiness). Do you find this thought arises in your mind? What antidotes can you apply to counter the mistaken thought that taking care of others is suffering?

3. Recognizing the amazing benefits of cherishing others, resolve to cultivate the mind that cherishes others and to quickly apply antidotes to the self-centered thought in your daily life.

NOTE: Venerable Chodron said that the method side of the path isn't really so difficult to understand. These are our aspirations for how we want to be in the world, but that doesn't mean it's easy. To actually live our aspirations, we have to familiarize ourselves with this new way of being. So be sure to do these contemplations often, reminding yourself again and again of the disadvantages of self-centeredness and the great benefits of cherishing others.

77 The Gomchen Lamrim 02-03-17:

Taking-and-giving meditation

1. Start with yourself.
 - Imagine the dukkha you might experience tomorrow (dukkha of pain, dukkha of change, and the pervasive dukkha of conditioning).
 - Once you have a feel for it, take it on your present self so that the person you are tomorrow doesn't have to experience it. You can imagine the dukkha leaving your future self in the form of pollution or black light, or whatever is useful to you.
 - As you take on the dukkha in the form of pollution/black light, imagine it strikes at the self-centeredness at your own heart, like a thunderbolt, completely demolishing it (self-centeredness can appear as a black lump or dirt, etc).
 - Now think about your future self next month. You're future self as an old person and do the same exercise...
2. Then consider the dukkha of those you are close to using the same points as above.
3. Next, consider the dukkha of those towards whom you feel neutral.
4. Next, the dukkha of those you don't like or trust.
5. Finally, consider the dukkha of beings in all the different realms (hell, preta, animal, human, demi god, and god).
6. Having destroyed your own self-centeredness, you have a nice open space at your heart. From there, with love, imagine transforming, multiplying, and giving your body, possessions, and merit to these beings. Imagine them being satisfied and happy. Think that they have all the circumstances conducive to attaining awakening. Rejoice that you've been able to bring this about.
7. **Conclusion:** Feel you are strong enough to take on others' dukkha and give them your happiness. Rejoice that you can imagine doing this, practice it as you notice and experience suffering in your daily life, and offer prayers of aspiration to be able to actually do this.

78 The Gomchen Lamrim 02-10-17:

Taking on the suffering of others

While doing the “taking and giving” meditation below, consider some of the points Venerable Chodron taught this week:

1. It is vital to do one of the two meditations to generate bodhicitta before doing the taking and giving meditation. Why?
2. What kind of resistance comes up for you when doing this meditation? What can you do to start to overcome it?
3. Try, when you experience some kind of pain, to think “may this suffice for the pain of all beings who are going through this.” What does it do for your mind?
4. Also, when you experience some kind of pain or discomfort, consider the sufferings of the lower realms (where beings experience the dukkha and anger, craving, and confusion without relief). Does that help make your experience seem not so bad? Does it help you work through it?

Taking and giving meditation

1. Start with yourself.
 - Imagine the dukkha you might experience tomorrow (dukkha of pain, dukkha of change, and the pervasive dukkha of conditioning).
 - Once you have a feel for it, take it on your present self so that the person you are tomorrow doesn't have to experience it. You can imagine the dukkha leaving your future self in the form of pollution or black light, or whatever is useful to you.
 - As you take on the dukkha in the form of pollution/black light, imagine it strikes at the self-centeredness at your own heart, like a thunderbolt, completely demolishing it (self-centeredness can appear as a black lump or dirt, etc).
 - Now think about your future self next month. You're future self as an old person and do the same exercise...
2. Then consider the dukkha of those you are close to using the same points as above.
3. Next, consider the dukkha of those towards whom you feel neutral.
4. Next, the dukkha of those you don't like or trust.
5. Finally, consider the dukkha of beings in all the different realms (hell, preta, animal, human, demi god, and god).
6. Having destroyed your own self-centeredness, you have a nice open space at your heart. From there, with love, imagine transforming, multiplying, and giving your body, possessions, and merit to these beings. Imagine them being satisfied and happy. Think that they have all the circumstances conducive to attaining awakening. Rejoice that you've been able to bring this about.

7. **Conclusion:** Feel you are strong enough to take on others' dukkha and give them your happiness. Rejoice that you can imagine doing this, practice it as you notice and experience suffering in your daily life, and offer prayers of aspiration to be able to actually do this.

79 The Gomchen Lamrim 02-17-17:

Extensive giving

While doing the “taking and giving” meditation below, consider some of the points Venerable Chodron taught this week:

1. What are ways in which you coddle your self-centered thought? How might your experience be different if you heap all the sufferings of sentient beings onto the self-centered thought, keeping in mind that it is NOT who you are?
2. When you're doing the meditation, do you have resistance giving away your body, possessions, and virtue in general or to those you think will squander it? What antidotes can you apply to open up your mind?
3. Geshe Jampa Tegchok says this practice helps us habituate giving without miserliness or regret. How much do you struggle with these two afflictions? Make personal examples. What might it be like to give without any reservation? What can you do to counter miserliness and regret when they arise?
4. It can be helpful to imagine giving our bodies like we might give a branch of a tree. What does thinking of the body as a general object, without attachment, do for your mind?
5. Key to the meditation is to tune in to what others need and give them that. Spend some time imagining what individual beings really need and then imagine them receiving it and being completely satiated.

Taking and giving meditation

1. Start with yourself.
 - Imagine the dukkha you might experience tomorrow (dukkha of pain, dukkha of change, and the pervasive dukkha of conditioning).
 - Once you have a feel for it, take it on your present self so that the person you are tomorrow doesn't have to experience it. You can imagine the dukkha leaving your future self in the form of pollution or black light, or whatever is useful to you.
 - As you take on the dukkha in the form of pollution/black light, imagine it strikes at the self-centeredness at your own heart, like a thunderbolt, completely demolishing it (self-centeredness can appear as a black lump or dirt, etc).
 - Now think about your future self next month. You're future self as an old person and do the same exercise...

2. Then consider the dukkha of those you are close to using the same points as above.
3. Next, consider the dukkha of those towards whom you feel neutral.
4. Next, the dukkha of those you don't like or trust.
5. Finally, consider the dukkha of beings in all the different realms (hell, preta, animal, human, demi god, and god).
6. Having destroyed your own self-centeredness, you have a nice open space at your heart. From there, with love, imagine transforming, multiplying, and giving your body, possessions, and merit to these beings. Imagine them being satisfied and happy. Think that they have all the circumstances conducive to attaining awakening. Rejoice that you've been able to bring this about.
7. **Conclusion:** Feel you are strong enough to take on others' dukkha and give them your happiness. Rejoice that you can imagine doing this, practice it as you notice and experience suffering in your daily life, and offer prayers of aspiration to be able to actually do this.

80 The Gomchen Lamrim 02-24-17:

Offering our bodies to sentient beings

While doing the “taking and giving” meditation below, consider some of the points Venerable Chodron taught this week:

1. Consider the “poor quality view” that Venerable Chodron presented at the beginning of the teaching. What kinds of thoughts have arisen in your own mind that demonstrate a lack of self-confidence? How have these thoughts been an impediment to your practice in general? How are they an impediment to the taking and giving meditation specifically? What are steps you can take, antidotes you can apply, to counter feelings of inadequacy and cultivate self-confidence?
2. Key to the giving part of the meditation is to tune in to what others need. Really put some time and thought into imagining what individual beings really need and then imagine them receiving it and being completely satiated. Do this not just for humans, but for beings in the other realms as well. What might they want and need? You can even use current events to help (giving green cards and freedom from fear to immigrants, etc).
3. Remember that you start with giving them what they need in their present realm of existence, but don't stop there. Give them a precious human life, teach them the Dharma through each of the stages of the lamrim, give them the realizations that ripen their mind so that they attain liberation and awakening. Seeing their profound peace and happiness, rejoice.
4. Venerable mentioned four different ways of giving to others during the taking and giving meditation. Try each of these at some point during the week. Which do you most connect with?

- Your one body emanates what others need.
 - Your body multiplies, going to each sentient being and becoming what each being needs.
 - Your body becomes a wish fulfilling jewel which gives others what they need. Your body dissolves into the four elements which, when given to others, becomes the basis and support for their life and everything they need.
5. Try the supplemental meditation on beings who wish you harm:
 - Meditate on love, compassion, and the kindness of these beings, how they have been your mother, your best friend, your dear child, your protector again and again in many lives. Allow a feeling of wanting to repay their kindness to arise, despite their present form.
 - “Hook” them, bringing them in front of you – beings from this and past lives – in the form of angry spirits and/or humans.
 - Tell them how much you have appreciated their love and care and that you wish to repay that kindness. Give them the meat, blood, bones and skin from your own body. For others you can transform your body into sugar, molasses and honey.
 - Imagine them completely free of their hostility, their minds transformed and peaceful. Imagine giving them a precious human life, teaching them the Dharma, and leading them to awakening...
 6. This meditation helps to habituate our mind with generosity. Take some time to imagine what it would be like to give without hesitation, without miserliness. What would it be like to have a heart that didn’t hold back, that knew exactly what others need and provided it freely? Cultivate a feeling in your heart that this is possible.

Taking and giving meditation

1. Start with yourself.
 - Imagine the dukkha you might experience tomorrow (dukkha of pain, dukkha of change, and the pervasive dukkha of conditioning).
 - Once you have a feel for it, take it on your present self so that the person you are tomorrow doesn’t have to experience it. You can imagine the dukkha leaving your future self in the form of pollution or black light, or whatever is useful to you.
 - As you take on the dukkha in the form of pollution/black light, imagine it strikes at the self-centeredness at your own heart, like a thunderbolt, completely demolishing it (self-centeredness can appear as a black lump or dirt, etc).
 - Now think about your future self next month. You’re future self as an old person and do the same exercise...
2. Then consider the dukkha of those you are close to using the same points as above.
3. Next, consider the dukkha of those towards whom you feel neutral.

4. Next, the dukkha of those you don't like or trust.
5. Finally, consider the dukkha of beings in all the different realms (hell, preta, animal, human, demi god, and god).
6. Having destroyed your own self-centeredness, you have a nice open space at your heart. From there, with love, imagine transforming, multiplying, and giving your body, possessions, and merit to these beings. Imagine them being satisfied and happy. Think that they have all the circumstances conducive to attaining awakening. Rejoice that you've been able to bring this about.
7. **Conclusion:** Feel you are strong enough to take on others' dukkha and give them your happiness. Rejoice that you can imagine doing this, practice it as you notice and experience suffering in your daily life, and offer prayers of aspiration to be able to actually do this.

81 The Gomchen Lamrim 03-03-17:

Giving to all sentient beings

While doing the “taking and giving” meditation below, consider some of the points Venerable Chodron taught this week:

1. Consider the value of the taking and giving practice. Do you have resistance in your mind about its effectiveness in helping you generate good qualities? Do you tend to brush it off as just “pretending?” Explore that resistance. Can you give examples in your own life regarding how thinking about giving enabled you to be more generous in a situation? Also consider that by directing your mind in this way, it makes you closer to awakening where you will most certainly be of greater benefit to others. Does this help you work through the resistance? What other antidotes can you apply?
2. After giving to those who have not yet attained one of the paths (hearer, solitary realizer, and bodhisattva paths), we give our body to those who have. Consider what outer and inner conditions each needs on each level of their associated paths. Transform your body into what it is they need in a way they are able to receive it. You can even imagine creating your own pure land, giving them the perfect conditions for attaining liberation and awakening. Imagine they attain their spiritual goals, achieving peace and happiness...
3. Next, we give our body to the world environment, transforming all the faults caused by afflictions (faults like not caring for the environment because of our afflicted minds, as well as the destructive karma that ripens in our living in impure and/or inhospitable places). Imagine these places become pure lands, places free of afflictions and karma with all the conducive conditions for practicing the path. Remember, you can make your pure land any way you like, so spend some time on this.
4. After transforming the body, we can do the same with our possessions. Consider giving your possessions away and others being happy. Remember you can

transform them into anything they need, even wish fulfilling gems. Note: Doing this part of the practice can be helpful in showing us where we are still attached. Spend some time exploring and applying antidotes to attachment for your possessions if it become difficult to give certain things away, then continue offering your possessions to all beings.

5. Finally, we give away our merit. Venerable Chodron said this can be difficult to visualize, but do your best. We can give our past, present, and future merit, so think of virtue you have created in this life, in previous lives, as well as virtue you want to create. Offer it to all beings, enabling them to have not only temporal pleasures, but in particular, all the conditions to attain liberation and awakening.

Taking and giving meditation

1. Start with yourself.
 - Imagine the dukkha you might experience tomorrow (dukkha of pain, dukkha of change, and the pervasive dukkha of conditioning).
 - Once you have a feel for it, take it on your present self so that the person you are tomorrow doesn't have to experience it. You can imagine the dukkha leaving your future self in the form of pollution or black light, or whatever is useful to you.
 - As you take on the dukkha in the form of pollution/black light, imagine it strikes at the self-centeredness at your own heart, like a thunderbolt, completely demolishing it (self-centeredness can appear as a black lump or dirt, etc).
 - Now think about your future self next month. You're future self as an old person and do the same exercise...
2. Then consider the dukkha of those you are close to using the same points as above.
3. Next, consider the dukkha of those towards whom you feel neutral.
4. Next, the dukkha of those you don't like or trust.
5. Finally, consider the dukkha of beings in all the different realms (hell, preta, animal, human, demi god, and god).
6. Having destroyed your own self-centeredness, you have a nice open space at your heart. From there, with love, imagine transforming, multiplying, and giving your body, possessions, and merit to these beings. Imagine them being satisfied and happy. Think that they have all the circumstances conducive to attaining awakening. Rejoice that you've been able to bring this about.
7. Conclusion: Feel you are strong enough to take on others' dukkha and give them your happiness. Rejoice that you can imagine doing this, practice it as you notice and experience suffering in your daily life, and offer prayers of aspiration to be able to actually do this.

82 The Gomchen Lamrim 03-10-17:

Aspiring bodhicitta

Using the things we've given away in our visualizations

When we've genuinely done the Taking and Giving Meditation, Venerable says that a natural question arises: Having now given away our body, possessions, and virtue, can we use the things we've given away? Consider:

1. When we're doing the meditation, we really want to cultivate the feeling that we've given these things away; we've relinquished our attachment and clinging to them and that they now belong to others. As you've been doing the Taking and Giving Meditation over these past weeks, has this thought come up and, if so, have you experienced resistance to thinking in this way? What are the antidotes to the mind that still clings to objects?
2. Consider the disadvantages of craving and clinging, and the advantages of relating to your body, possessions, and virtue without craving and clinging. Be sure to make this personal.
3. Of course, we still need to use the objects we've given away: our bed, food, our body, etc, but it IS possible to use them in a healthy way, a way that benefits others. Venerable said that having dedicated them for the benefit of others, we should use them in that way. Think about some of the specific things you gave away during the meditation. Then consider how you might use them in a way that is beneficial to others.
4. How might thinking in this way make you happier? How does it make you more mindful of what you're doing and why? How does it benefit others?
5. Resolve to cultivate this thought: that everything you have, even your body, now belongs to others; that you are simply a steward. Come back to it throughout the day, habituating this new practice of utilizing your body, possessions, and virtue for the benefit of others.

Aspiring bodhicitta

Before taking the bodhisattva precepts, we prepare our mind by taking the aspirational code in the presence of our spiritual mentor. Venerable Chodron went through the first seven of the guidelines for keeping our aspiring bodhicitta. Spend some time on each.

How to protect bodhicitta from degenerating in this life:

1. Remember the advantages of bodhicitta repeatedly.
 - What are the advantages of bodhicitta?
 - How might remembering the advantages protect your bodhicitta from degenerating?
2. To strengthen bodhicitta, generate the aspiration three times in the morning and three times in the evening.

- How might reciting the refuge and bodhicitta prayers in the morning and evening help protect your bodhicitta?
 - If you are already doing this, how has it benefitted your mind and practice?
 - How does it protect your bodhicitta from degenerating in this life?
3. Do not give up working for sentient beings, even when they are harmful.
 - When you're having a difficult time with others, what thoughts can you generate to counter the desire you have to give up on them?
 - Why is this point so important to the bodhisattva practice?
 - Why does it protect your bodhicitta from degenerating in this life?
 4. To enhance your bodhicitta, accumulate both merit and wisdom continuously.
 - Why does accumulating merit protect bodhicitta from degenerating in this life?
 - Why does accumulating wisdom protect bodhicitta from degenerating in this life?

How to keep from being separated from bodhicitta in future lives:

1. Abandon deceiving your guru/abbot/holy beings.
 - Why is lying to your teachers and the holy beings a problem?
 - How does being honest with them help you from being separated from bodhicitta in future lives?
2. Abandon causing others to regret virtuous actions they have done.
 - Think of personal examples in your own life where you've caused others to regret their virtue. Why is this harmful to you? To them?
 - Why does abandoning this help you from being separated from bodhicitta in future lives?
3. Abandon abusing or criticizing bodhisattvas or the Mahayana.
 - What does it mean to criticize the Mahayana? What does it mean to criticize bodhisattvas.
 - Venerable made it a point to say that this doesn't mean that seeing everyone as a potential bodhisattva, we say and do nothing when we see harm in the world. Consider how to live practically in the world, how to keep this aspiration while still working for change to benefit sentient beings.
 - Why does abandoning this help you from being separated from bodhicitta in future lives?

Conclusion: If you have already taken the bodhisattva vows or aspiring bodhicitta with a spiritual mentor, allow this contemplation to reinforce your virtuous goals and aspirations as you move throughout your day, resolving to continuously cultivate and never abandon bodhicitta. If you have not yet taken aspiring bodhicitta, consider the benefits of doing so. Even if you are not ready at this time, cultivate a feeling of appreciation for those who

have, consider the benefits of doing so, and generate a wish to take and follow these guidelines at some time in the future.

83 The Gomchen Lamrim 03-17-17:

The precepts for aspiring and engaging bodhicitta

Precepts of aspiring bodhicitta

Before taking the bodhisattva precepts, we prepare our mind by taking the aspirational code in the presence of our spiritual mentor. Venerable Chodron went through the precepts for keeping our aspiring bodhicitta. Spend some time on each.

Note: Some of these are really difficult because we're so used to doing them, we don't even realize it. But you can practice, start to habituate, these precepts through these contemplations, imagining difficult situations, what you have said and done in the past, and how you might act differently in the future. In this way, you start to build up new, more beneficial habits and create the causes to generate and sustain bodhicitta.

How to protect bodhicitta from degenerating in this life

1. Remember the advantages of bodhicitta repeatedly.
 - What are the advantages of bodhicitta?
 - How might remembering the advantages protect your bodhicitta from degenerating?
2. To strengthen bodhicitta, generate the aspiration three times in the morning and three times in the evening.
 - How might reciting the refuge and bodhicitta prayers in the morning and evening help protect your bodhicitta?
 - If you are already doing this, how has it benefitted your mind and practice?
 - How does it protect your bodhicitta from degenerating in this life?
3. Do not give up working for sentient beings, even when they are harmful.
 - When you're having a difficult time with others, what thoughts can you generate to counter the desire you have to give up on them?
 - Why is this point so important to the bodhisattva practice?
 - Why does it protect your bodhicitta from degenerating in this life?
4. To enhance your bodhicitta, accumulate both merit and wisdom continuously.
 - Why does accumulating merit protect bodhicitta from degenerating in this life?
 - Why does accumulating wisdom protect bodhicitta from generating in this life?

How to keep from being separated from bodhicitta in future lives

1. Abandon deceiving your guru/abbot/holy beings.

- Take some time to think about lies and deception you have done in the past. What were the driving thoughts behind your deception? Why did you do it? Consider the mind that wants to look good and cover up mistakes. How does it harm you? How does it harm others? Why can being honest be so difficult sometimes?
 - Why is lying, in particular, to your teachers and the holy beings a problem?
 - How does being honest with them help you from being separated from bodhicitta in future lives?
2. Abandon causing others to regret virtuous actions they have done.
 - Think of personal examples in your own life where you've caused others to regret their virtue or they have caused you to regret yours. Why is this harmful to you? To them?
 - Why does abandoning this help you from being separated from bodhicitta in future lives?
 3. Abandon abusing or criticizing bodhisattvas or the Mahayana. What does it mean to criticize the Mahayana?
 - What does it mean to criticize bodhisattvas.
 - Venerable Chodron made it a point to say that this doesn't mean that seeing everyone as a possible bodhisattva, we say and do nothing when we see harm in the world. Consider how to live practically in the world, how to keep this aspiration while still working for change to benefit sentient beings. Be specific, thinking of harm you see in the world today.
 - How does seeing others as possibly being bodhisattvas lessen the proliferation of anger and judgment in your OWN mind? Why is this so important?
 - Why does abandoning this help you from being separated from bodhicitta in future lives?
 4. Abandon not acting with a pure, selfless wish, but with pretension and deceit.
 - Venerable Chodron said this one is easy to do. Think of situations in your own experience where you acted with pretension (pretending to have good qualities you don't) and/or deceit (pretending that you don't have faults that you do). Why is this so harmful to yourself and others? What can you do to begin to habituate a sense of transparency, of being straightforward with others?
 - Why does abandoning this help you from being separated from bodhicitta in future lives?
 5. Practice abandoning deliberately lying to and deceiving gurus, abbots, and so forth.
 - This is the companion to #1. How is being honest with your teachers and the holy beings beneficial to yourself and others?
 - Why does practicing this help you from being separated from bodhicitta in future lives?
 6. Practice being straightforward without pretension and deceit.

- This is the companion to #4. How is being straightforward with others beneficial for yourself and others?
 - What does being straightforward mean? There is a kind way to do this and an unkind way. Consider how you have communicated in the past with others. Has your honesty been harsh at times? What was your motivation? What motivation is this precept steering you towards and how would that translate into straightforward speech?
 - Why does practicing this help you from being separated from bodhicitta in future lives?
7. Generate recognition of bodhisattvas as your teachers and praise them (or Recognize people you respect as your teachers and praise their good qualities).
- Why is this beneficial to yourself and others? What is it about praising the qualities of your teachers that creates virtue in your own mind?
 - Take some time now to think about what it is you appreciate in your teachers, mentors, and others you respect.
 - Venerable Chodron said that there are different ways of praising others. We can do it in a way that is non-specific (You're wonderful!) or specific (I really appreciated it when you did ____ because it gave me _____ that I needed). How has specific feedback made a difference in your own life in shaping how you move forward? Consider developing the habit of praising others in this way?
 - Why does practicing this help you from being separated from bodhicitta in future lives?
8. Assume the responsibility yourself to lead all sentient beings to awakening.
- This can feel really BIG, but why is it so important to have this thought even at the stage of aspiring bodhicitta?
 - Why does practicing this help you from being separated from bodhicitta in future lives?

Conclusion: If you have already taken the bodhisattva vows or aspiring bodhicitta with a spiritual mentor, allow this contemplation to reinforce your virtuous goals and aspirations as you move throughout your day, resolving to continuously cultivate and never abandon bodhicitta. If you have not yet taken aspiring bodhicitta, consider the benefits of doing so. Even if you are not ready at this time, cultivate a feeling of appreciation for those who have, consider the benefits of doing so, and generate a wish to take and follow these guidelines at some time in the future.

Engaging bodhisattva precepts

Venerable Chodron started giving commentary on the bodhisattva ethical code, which are the guidelines you follow when you “take the bodhisattva precepts.” Consider them one by one, in light of the commentary she gave. For each, consider the following:

1. In what situations have you seen yourself act this way in the past or under what conditions might it be easy to act this way in the future (it might help to consider how you've seen this negativity in the world)?

2. Which of the ten non-virtues is the precept keeping you from committing?
3. What are the antidotes that can be applied when you are tempted to act contrary to the precept?
4. Why is this precept so important to the bodhisattva path? How does keeping it benefit yourself and others?
5. Resolve to be mindful of the precept in your daily life.

Precepts covered this week:

Root Precept #1: a) Praising yourself or b) belittling others because of attachment to receiving material offerings, praise, and respect.

Root Precept #2: a) Not giving material aid or b) not teaching the Dharma to those who are suffering and without a protector, because of miserliness.

Root Precept #3: a) Not listening although another declares his/her offense or b) with anger blaming him/her and retaliating.

Root Precept #4: a) Abandoning the Mahayana by saying that Mahayana texts are not the words of Buddha or b) teaching what appears to be the Dharma but is not.

84 The Gomchen Lamrim 03-24-17:

Bodhisattva ethical restraints 5-10

Venerable Chodron continued giving commentary on the bodhisattva ethical code, which are the guidelines you follow when you “take the bodhisattva precepts.” Consider them one by one, in light of the commentary given. For each, consider the following:

1. In what situations have you seen yourself act this way in the past or under what conditions might it be easy to act this way in the future (it might help to consider how you’ve seen this negativity in the world)?
2. Which of the ten non-virtues is the precept keeping you from committing?
3. What are the antidotes that can be applied when you are tempted to act contrary to the precept?
4. Why is this precept so important to the bodhisattva path? How does breaking it harm yourself and others? How does keeping it benefit yourself and others?
5. Resolve to be mindful of the precept in your daily life.

Precepts covered this week:

Root Precept #5: Taking things belonging to a) Buddha, b) Dharma or c) Sangha.

Root Precept #6: Abandoning the holy Dharma by saying that texts which teach the three vehicles are not the Buddha’s word.

Root Precept #7: With anger a) depriving ordained ones of their robes, beating and imprisoning them, or b) causing them to lose their ordination even if they have impure morality, for example, by saying that being ordained is useless.

Root Precept #8: Committing any of the five extremely destructive actions: a) killing your mother, b) killing your father, c) killing an arhat, d) intentionally drawing blood from a Buddha, or e) causing schism in the Sangha community by supporting and spreading sectarian views.

Root Precept #9: Holding distorted views (which are contrary to the teachings of Buddha, such as denying the existence of the Three Jewels or the law of cause and effect, etc.)

Root Precept #10: Destroying a) town, b) village, c) city, or d) large area by means such as fire, bombs, pollution, or black magic.

85 The Gomchen Lamrim 03-31-17:

Bodhisattva ethical restraints 11-18

Venerable Chodron continued giving commentary on the bodhisattva ethical code, which are the guidelines you follow when you “take the bodhisattva precepts.” Consider them one by one, in light of the commentary given. For each, consider the following:

1. In what situations have you seen yourself act this way in the past or under what conditions might it be easy to act this way in the future (it might help to consider how you’ve seen this negativity in the world)?
2. Which of the ten non-virtues is the precept keeping you from committing?
3. What are the antidotes that can be applied when you are tempted to act contrary to the precept?
4. Why is this precept so important to the bodhisattva path? How does breaking it harm yourself and others? How does keeping it benefit yourself and others?
5. Resolve to be mindful of the precept in your daily life.

Precepts covered this week:

Root Precept #11: Teaching emptiness to those whose minds are unprepared.

Root Precept #12: Causing those who have entered the Mahayana to turn away from working for the full awakening of Buddhahood and encouraging them to work merely for their own liberation from suffering.

Root Precept #13: Causing others to abandon completely their precepts of self-liberation and to embrace the Mahayana.

Root Precept #14: Holding and causing others to hold the view that the Fundamental Vehicle does not abandon attachment and other delusions.

Root Precept #15: Falsely saying that you have realized profound emptiness and that if others meditate as you have, they will realize emptiness and become as great and as highly realized as you.

Root Precept #16: Taking gifts from others who were encouraged to give you things originally intended as offerings to the Three Jewels. Not giving things to the Three

Jewels that others have given you to give to them, or accepting property stolen from the Three Jewels.

Root Precept #17: a) Causing those engaged in serenity meditation to give it up by giving their belongings to those who are merely reciting texts or b) making bad disciplinary rules which cause a spiritual community not to be harmonious.

Root Precept #18: Abandoning the two bodhicittas (aspiring and engaging).

86 The Gomchen Lamrim 04-07-17:

Gomchen Lamrim review: Seven-point cause and effect instruction

Equanimity

1. Call to mind a dear friend, someone who is easy to be around, someone whose company you enjoy. Think of someone specific. See their face.
 - Think, just as I want happiness (take moment to feel that)
 - ...just as I want to be free of suffering (take a moment to feel that),
 - ...the same is true of my dear friend _____. He/She also wants happiness and doesn't want suffering. Try to feel that this is also true for your dear friend.
2. Let's extend this to someone we think of as a stranger. Someone you see regularly – at the grocery store, in the neighborhood. Think of someone specific.
 - Think, just as I want happiness (take moment to feel that),
 - ...just as I want to be free of suffering (take a moment to feel that),
 - ...the same is true of this person who appears as a stranger. He/She equally, with the same intensity as I, wants happiness and to be free of suffering. Really feel that as true.
3. Likewise, we can extend this to someone we currently find difficult, who pushes our buttons. Think of someone specific. Make an effort to feel their desire for happiness and freedom from suffering.
 - Think, just as I want happiness (take moment to feel that),
 - ..just as I want to be free of suffering (take a moment to feel that),
 - ...the same is true of this person who I currently find challenging. He/She wants nothing more than happiness and to be free of every kind of suffering. Really feel that this is true.
4. **Conclusion:** This is a powerful mental training that we can do with every waking moment of our lives. Resolve to train your mind to see others in this way.

All beings have been our mother

1. Consider: What you are doing with your mind now influences your mind tomorrow and who you will be as a person. There is continuity. Similarly, yesterday's mind was influenced by the day before. You can trace back and back and understand that each day's mind is the result of the mind of the previous day.

Going back in this way, we come to a strong conclusion that our mind is a continuity, changing moment by moment and each moment influencing the next.

2. Now, think back to thoughts and experiences you had a year ago. What were you doing in April 2016? Reflect on how all the thoughts and experiences from then have contributed to the person you are today, based on this continuity of mind.
3. Next, think back to your thoughts and experiences from 10 years ago (2007). What were you doing in 2007: All the thoughts and experiences, entertainment and conversations... Get a sense of the continuity of the mind over 10 years and how it influences the body and mind and who you are today.
4. If you take a bigger leap, you can think back to your childhood. Again notice the continuity. How did your childhood influence who you are as a person and how you see the world?
5. Going back further, science tells us that even in the womb there is conscious experience. All your experience as a fetus and embryo, those have contributed to who you are today.
6. If you can imagine, continue to trace back and arrive at the first moment of consciousness. Think of that first moment and reflect on how the consciousness is impermanent and how it requires a previous and compatible cause. That first moment of mind can't come from sperm and egg (because that is physical and the mind is not), so what we can infer is that that first moment of mind must have had a previous moment of mind from another life in some form. We'd find another first moment of mind connected to some previous life. Spend some time considering this.
7. In this way, we can infer (based on logic) that the continuity of the mind is beginningless. We can't point to any moment of mind as being the first. As we think about this, naturally, we conclude that our mind is beginningless. And if that is so, then our rebirths must also be beginningless. Just as we've had beginningless rebirths, we must have had countless mothers to support those rebirths. Spend some time with this.
8. Think of the people around you. Imagine that in some life they have been your mother.

Allow softening for others to arise in your heart.

- Take time to think about each person in your family. Imagine that in some life they have been your mother. Allow a softening for them to arise in your heart.
 - Now think about strangers in your life. Imagine that in some life they have been your mother.
 - Finally, think about people you have some difficulty with. Imagine that in some life they have been your mother countless times.
9. How might thinking of others in this way change the way you interact with them?

10. **Conclusion:** Resolve to use that awareness of all beings as your mother to inform the way you interact with them throughout the day, living with greater kindness, love, and compassion.

Kindness of our mother

1. Reflect on how your mother cared for you in the womb when you were just a mass of cells. Think about it, 9 months is a long time. She fed you with her own flesh and blood for all that time as you developed. She experienced discomfort, embarrassment, and was willing to experience the suffering of childbirth to bring you into the world.
2. At birth, you arrived with nothing, but she showered you with unconditional love. You were helpless for months and years and she took care of your every need. She loved and cherished you more than her own self. She kept you clean and dry, safe and warm. Think of how many diapers were changed. She spent countless hours cleaning, feeding, smiling, cooing, teaching you your first words, Chances are good she was there to help you take your first steps. She protected you from so many harms. She made sure you didn't get sick and cared for you when you needed it. Due to her kindness you are alive. The fact that you can use a fork and spoon, talk, use the toilet, etc is because of her kindness. From your own direct experience, you can see that the kindness of your mother is unparalleled. Reflect on this.
3. You could likely make a long list of sacrifices she made for your welfare. Reflect for a moment that she's done that not just in this life, but in many other lives too.
4. Now reflect how the father of this life has also been your mother in past lives and has shown the same magnitude of kindness.
5. The same is true of sisters and brothers, dear friends, in fact, every person you meet has been this kind to you when they've played the role of your mother in countless rebirths. Take a moment to reflect on this.
6. How does thinking in this way change the way you see others? How might it change the way you interact with them?
7. Conclusion: When we've really thought about these points, a wish to repay their kindness naturally arises. Resolve to use this contemplation to inform the way you view others in your daily life, to repay their great kindness through generosity, kindness, and through developing your own spiritual practice so that you can be of even greater benefit to them in the future.

87 The Gomchen Lamrim 04-14-17:

Gomchen Lamrim review: Seven-point cause and effect instruction continued

Generating compassion requires us to reflect not just on the dukkha of pain, but to have a full picture of all three types of dukkha (dukkha of change and of pervasive conditioning). Reflect on the dukkha of pervasive conditions by considering some of the verses from Tsong Khapa's *Three Principal Aspects of the Path*:

1. “Swept by the current of the four powerful rivers.”
 - The first of these four powerful rivers is sensual desire. Reflect on how, throughout the day, you are swept by the river of sensual desire.
 - The second is craving for rebirth, craving for existence in samsara. How do you see this type of craving in your life?
 - The third is craving for a self. Craving for a self to be born in samsara, we want a body. Craving and clinging come so strongly at the time of death and we feel that we need our body. Consider this type of craving in your life.
 - The fourth river is wrong views. We are swept away by our wrong view and we won’t listen to anyone. We are certain our wrong view is correct. We think we are right and don’t listen to those wiser than we are. Consider this type of craving in your life.
2. “Tied by the strong bonds of karma which are so hard to undo.”
 - We’ve created so much karma in the past and that karma has a lot of energy and power, especially if it is something we do repeatedly or the action is done with a strong motivation. Consider the power of habituation and motivation and how it propels you to act.
 - We may want happiness but our karma is pushing us towards the results of whatever actions we’ve done. Karma is this powerful force. If we look at the uncontrolled nature of our mind right now, is it reasonable to think that we will be able to control it when we die?
3. “Caught in the iron net of self-grasping egoism.”
 - Spend some time thinking about how self-grasping ignorance manifests in your daily life. How does it drive you to act? What harm do you cause yourself and others under its influence?
 - When we get a sense of what self-grasping ignorance is, we can see how we’re trapped. Get a feeling for this.
4. “Completely enveloped by the darkness of ignorance.”

Really get a feel for the visual here... You are pushed by the four powerful currents. You can’t move because your arms and legs are tied in a way you can’t undo them. In addition, you’re wrapped in an iron net and its pitch black. You are totally bound and these four rivers keep pushing you down. How does this feel? Do you have much choice?
5. **Conclusion:** Understanding more deeply that this is the situation that we and others are in, feel that it is unendurable and resolve to do something about it through developing your spiritual practice.

88 The Gomchen Lamrim 04-21-17:

Gomchen Lamrim review: Equanimity and equalizing self and others

Generating equanimity for the 7 Point Cause and Effect Method

1. Bring to mind in the space in front of you, a friend, an enemy (someone you might shrink away from), and a stranger. With these three in front of you, ask yourself:
 - Why do I feel attachment to my friend?
 - Why do I have aversion towards the person I find difficult?
 - Why am I apathetic towards the stranger?
2. As you watch these reasons pop up, look a bit deeper: On what basis does your mind consider someone good, bad or neutral? Are qualities coming from the side of the person or are we making judgments from MY perspective?
3. Now reflect on how these categories of friend, enemy and stranger are not as fixed as we think they might be. You can think about how one person might be difficult in the morning and then a friend in the afternoon, and then a stranger the next day. Think of an example of this in your personal life and ask yourself, “Who is that friend/enemy/stranger?”
4. From doing this meditation, even briefly, we can see that it’s our mind, our personal judgments that are creating these categories and putting people into them. Actually, that blocks us from relating to each and every sentient being in an open-hearted way. Try and imagine what it might be like to stop discriminating these groups of beings based on your own opinions, wants, and needs. How would they appear and how would it feel in your own heart?
5. Let yourself just rest in the feeling of open-hearted concern for all beings.

Generating equanimity for the Equalizing and Exchanging Self and Other Method

1. We start by looking at reasons for equalizing self and other from our own perspective:
 - All sentient beings have been kind to us in the past, present, and future. Think about today. The fact that you can be here or that you woke up in a warm bed and had food to eat. All that came from the kindness of sentient beings. Even if they didn’t do it specifically for you, we are benefitting every moment from their kindness. Take a moment to connect with that feeling of being surrounded by kindness.
 - The harm that others have done to us is so much less than the amount of benefit that they’ve given to us. If our mind starts to find fault or resist the idea that beings have been kind, we can check up with our experience. Have more beings been kind or harmed us? And this is just one day. Look in your own experience to see if others have been kinder or caused you more harm.

- We're all equal in that we're all going to die. It doesn't make any sense to hold grudges. It doesn't make us or them happy. There's no need to discriminate.
 - Others have been more kind to us than even the kindness we have shown ourselves. Often kindness towards ourselves is self-indulgence or has created negative karma, unlike the kindness we've received from all sentient beings.
2. Next we look at reasons for equalizing self and other from others' perspective:
- Not only have others been kind, they all just want to be happy and not to suffer. Make specific example from your personal life of how we are all the same in this way.
 - Imagine if ten beggars came up to you, all reaching out to you for help and support. Would it make any sense for you to discriminate between these ten or can we see that all these beggars are equal in their wish for happiness and to avoid suffering? Develop that sincere wish to benefit them equally.
 - We can also bring to mind before us ten patients, all suffering from different ailments. Again, do we want to discriminate between these ten? Or can we again connect with the sense that they are equal in needing help, wanting to be free from suffering?
 - Here we can come to the conclusion that we're really just the same as everyone else. Our happiness and suffering are not any more important than theirs.
3. We can expand our minds further and try to see things in the perspective of the Buddha:
- Imagine how the Buddha would look at the people we label friend, enemy, and stranger. Would the Buddha see them in the same way or would he look at all of them with the same open-hearted concern and love?
 - If the Buddha doesn't see them that way, perhaps they are not friend, enemy or stranger from their own side. What if things were the way we think they are: friends were always friends, enemies always enemies, etc. Is that a realistic point of view? From reflecting on this, we can see that just as there is no inherent friend, enemy, and stranger out there, we are also not inherently me or you. Self and other are mutually dependent. We are not extra special in the Buddha's eyes. When we see that this is just coming from our habit to label me vs. you and relate to each other in that way, we can see clearly that our happiness and suffering is not more important than that of other beings. We are all the same in that.

89 The Gomchen Lamrim 04-28-17:

Gomchen Lamrim review: Cultivating compassion

1. How does seeing yourself as a sick person, afflicted by the three poisons of ignorance, anger, and attachment, help you to understand the source of dukkha in your life?
2. Now spend some time thinking about how others are in this very same situation, experiencing this very same illness. Does compassion for them arise in your mind? Does it arise easier for some than for others? If so, why? What obstacles prevent you from having open-hearted compassion for all beings and what can you do to remove those obstacles?
3. Consider that compassion isn't what we do. It's an internal attitude, although it can motivate behavior. It is the intention, the wish that others be free of suffering and the causes of suffering. Make some examples of the difference between the two. It's important to have this clear in your mind because if we focus on the idea that we have to physically help every living being (which is just not realistic with our present level of study and practice, our physical limitations), it's easy to get overwhelmed. Along those same lines, how can you tell the difference between compassion (which is to be cultivated) and personal distress (which is to be abandoned)?
4. Consider what it is that we are wishing beings to be free of by looking at all three types of dukkha (dukkha of pain, of change, and the pervasive dukkha of conditioning).
5. It can be helpful to think about the benefits of cultivating compassion. Venerable Chonyi listed many of them like our sense of alienation, despair and helplessness vanish, the people around us are happy, we create great merit, our minds will be happy and well. What others can you think of? What does it do for your mind to actively think about the benefits of cultivating compassion?
6. Our greatest obstacle to cultivating compassion is our self-centered thought. Spend some time doing a life review. What mistakes have you made in your life? Were your decisions coming from a mind of love and compassion or a mind that saw your own happiness more important than others' happiness? Although the self-centered thought masquerades as our friend, it is actually the source of all our problems. Do you find this true? Make some examples in your life and really work through your thought process.
7. With all the harm we are now seeing in the world, an obvious question is: What can we do to help ourselves, the people around us, and the world? The answer is to cultivate compassion! This benefits everyone. Why is this the case? How can just cultivating compassion in your own mind make a difference in your life? In the lives of those around you? In the world?

The conclusion to each of these contemplations is that seeing the incredible value of compassion, how it transforms our own mind and the lives of those around us, we determine to make the effort to cultivate it in our daily lives.

90 The Gomchen Lamrim 05-05-17:

Gomchen Lamrim review: Exchanging self for others

Self-centered attitude

Investigate the self-centered attitude using examples from your own life.

1. We often think we're all equal... but "I'm more important." Look at that self-centered attitude. Is it realistic? Is it beneficial?
2. Is this attitude your friend? Has it caused you harm? Has your self-centered attitude made you harm others?
3. It is the basis of all our fear and makes up stories about how others can harm us in the future. It causes us to suffer from fear. Have you found this true in your life?
4. Consider: All of the problems that we currently face are the result of our self-centered attitude. Blame the self-centered mind. There is no reason to blame others. (Be sure to keep in mind that we are NOT our self-centered attitude. It's just an attitude that clouds the pure nature of our mind).

Cherishing others

Consider some of the benefits of cherishing others.

1. The more we consider the advantages of cherishing others, the easier it becomes to open our heart to them and care for them in a genuine way. We care for them simply because they exist, not because they do something for ME.
2. When we hold in our hearts the thought that cherishes others, what we say and do will make others happy. This attitude creates the causes for happiness for self and others.
3. We respect and value others and our lives become meaningful because we act in ways that benefit others. This attitude propels us along the path to Buddhahood.
4. Cherishing others pulls us out of our self-centered ways that make us so miserable.
5. When we really care for others equally, we can be happy anywhere at any time.
6. When we have the attitude that cherishes others, our relationships are better and it increases harmony.
7. The heart that cherishes others is the root of all past, present, and future happiness for ourselves and others.
8. Resolve to let the mind that cherishes others influence your life and those around you. This will make the world a better place.

Taking and giving

1. Pick someone or a group of beings, maybe even beings in the hell realm. Take from them the very things you don't want, the very things that make them suffer. Visualize them – really think about what it is like to be them. Be as specific as possible.

2. Now let compassion arise. Imagine that their suffering leaves them in the form of pollution, black light, whatever works for you. Take it into yourself. Welcome it so that they can be free of suffering.
3. Using your imagination, turn it into whatever helps you destroy your self-centered thought, like a dark mass at your heart which is your own disturbing attitudes and self-centeredness. It blows your self-centeredness up. All that is left is an incredible open space, freedom. Now stay in that space.
4. Allow your love to arise. Think how wonderful it is that others are free of their suffering.
5. Now imagine a brilliant white light coming from your heart. You send it out towards them. Transform and multiply your body, possessions and merit into whatever they need in this life and whatever will lead them on the path to awakening (teacher, teachings, all the conducive circumstances to produce realizations). Imagine that they become Buddhas.
6. Take on the responsibility to eliminate all suffering and give happiness to all beings. This is the great resolve. This is the bodhicitta that allows us to achieve the skillful means that helps us work for the benefit of all beings. Resolve to never give up this intention.

91 The Gomchen Lamrim 05-12-17:

Auxiliary bodhisattva ethical restraints 1-6

Venerable Chodron continued giving commentary on the bodhisattva ethical code, which are the guidelines you follow when you “take the bodhisattva precepts.” Consider them one by one, in light of the commentary given. For each, consider the following:

1. In what situations have you seen yourself act this way in the past or under what conditions might it be easy to act this way in the future (it might help to consider how you’ve seen this negativity in the world)?
2. From which of the ten non-virtues is the precept helping you to restrain?
3. What are the antidotes that can be applied when you are tempted to act contrary to the precept?
4. Why is this precept so important to the bodhisattva path? How does breaking it harm yourself and others? How does keeping it benefit yourself and others?
5. Resolve to be mindful of the precept in your daily life.

Precepts covered this week:

To eliminate obstacles to the far-reaching practice of generosity and obstacles to the ethical conduct of gathering virtuous actions, abandon:

- **Auxiliary Precept #1:** Not making offerings to the Three Jewels every day with your body, speech, and mind. **Auxiliary Precept #2:** Acting out selfish thoughts of desire to gain material possessions or reputation.

- **Auxiliary Precept #3:** Not respecting your elders (those who have taken the bodhisattva precepts before you have or who have more experience than you do). Auxiliary Precept #4: Not answering sincerely asked questions that you are capable of answering.
- **Auxiliary Precept #5:** Not accepting invitations from others out of anger, pride, or other negative thoughts.
- **Auxiliary Precept #6:** Not accepting gifts of money, gold, or other precious substances that others offer to you.

92 The Gomchen Lamrim 05-19-17:

Auxiliary bodhisattva ethical restraints 7-12

Venerable Chodron continued giving commentary on the bodhisattva ethical code, which are the guidelines you follow when you “take the bodhisattva precepts.” Consider them one by one, in light of the commentary given. For each, consider the following.

1. In what situations have you seen yourself act this way in the past or under what conditions might it be easy to act this way in the future (it might help to consider how you’ve seen this negativity in the world)?
2. From which of the ten non-virtues is the precept helping you to restrain?
3. What are some of the exceptions to the precept and why?
4. Which of the six perfections is the precept eliminating obstacles to and how?
5. What are the antidotes that can be applied when you are tempted to act contrary to the precept?
6. Why is this precept so important to the bodhisattva path? How does breaking it harm yourself and others? How does keeping it benefit yourself and others?
7. Resolve to be mindful of the precept in your daily life.

Precepts covered this week:

To eliminate obstacles to the far-reaching practice of generosity and obstacles to the ethical conduct of gathering virtuous actions, abandon:

- **Auxiliary Precept #7:** Not giving the Dharma to those who desire it.

To eliminate obstacles to the far-reaching practice of ethical conduct, abandon:

- **Auxiliary Precept #8:** Forsaking those who have broken their ethical conduct: not giving them advice or not relieving their guilt.
- **Auxiliary Precept #9:** Not acting in accord with your pratimoksa precepts.
- **Auxiliary Precept #10:** Doing only limited actions to benefit sentient beings, such as strictly keeping the Vinaya rules in situations when not doing so would be of greater benefit to others.

- **Auxiliary Precept #11:** Not doing non-virtuous actions of body and speech with loving-compassion when circumstances deem it necessary in order to benefit others.
- **Auxiliary Precept #12:** Willingly accepting things that either you or others have obtained by any of the wrong livelihoods of hypocrisy, hinting, flattery, coercion or bribery.

93 The Gomchen Lamrim 05-26-17:

Auxiliary bodhisattva ethical restraints 13-18

Venerable Chodron continued the commentary on the bodhisattva ethical code. Consider them one by one, in light of the commentary given. For each, consider the following.

1. In what situations have you seen yourself act this way in the past or under what conditions might it be easy to act this way in the future (it might help to consider how you've seen this negativity in the world)? Consider some of the examples Venerable Chodron shared.
2. From which of the ten non-virtues is the precept helping you to restrain?
3. What are some of the exceptions to the precept and why?
4. Which of the six perfections is the precept eliminating obstacles to and how?
5. What are the antidotes that can be applied when you are tempted to act contrary to the precept?
6. Why is this precept so important to the bodhisattva path? How does breaking it harm yourself and others? How does keeping it benefit yourself and others?
7. Resolve to be mindful of the precept in your daily life.

Precepts covered this week:

To eliminate obstacles to the far-reaching practice of ethical conduct, abandon:

- **Auxiliary Precept #13:** Being distracted by and having a strong attachment to amusement, or without any beneficial purpose leading others to join in distracting activities.
- **Auxiliary Precept #14:** Believing and saying that followers of the Mahayana should remain in cyclic existence and not try to attain liberation from afflictions
- **Auxiliary Precept #15:** Not abandoning destructive actions which cause you to have a bad reputation.
- **Auxiliary Precept #16:** Not correcting your own deluded actions or not helping others to correct theirs.

To eliminate obstacles to the far-reaching practice of fortitude, abandon:

- **Auxiliary Precept #17:** Returning insults, anger, beating, or criticism with insults and the like.

- **Auxiliary Precept #18:** Neglecting those who are angry with you by not trying to pacify their anger.

94 The Gomchen Lamrim 06-02-17:

Gomchen Lamrim review: Aspiring Bodhicitta

Venerable Tarpa reviewed the first four of the aspirational precepts, which help us to protect bodhicitta from degenerating in this life. Spend some time reflecting on each:

1. Remember the advantages of bodhicitta repeatedly.
 - What are some of the advantages of bodhicitta? What does thinking about them do for your mind?
 - How might remembering the advantages protect your bodhicitta from degenerating?
2. To strengthen bodhicitta, generate the aspiration three times in the morning and three times in the evening.
 - How might reciting the refuge and bodhicitta prayers in the morning and evening help protect your bodhicitta?
 - If you are already doing this, how has it benefitted your mind and practice?
3. Do not give up working for sentient beings, even when they are harmful.
 - When you're having a difficult time with others, what thoughts can you generate to counter the desire you have to give up on them?
 - Why is this point so important to the bodhisattva practice?
 - Venerable Tarpa clarified that if someone is pushing your buttons, it's ok to stay away from them, but you can still hold them in your heart, remembering that they won't always be like that. Think of people in your life that fall into this category. How can you create healthy boundaries while supporting and growing your bodhicitta?
 - Why does it protect your bodhicitta from degenerating in this life?
4. To enhance your bodhicitta, accumulate both merit and wisdom continuously. Why does accumulating merit protect bodhicitta from degenerating in this life? Why does accumulating wisdom protect bodhicitta from degenerating in this life?

95 The Gomchen Lamrim 06-09-17:

Auxiliary bodhisattva ethical restraints 19-20

Venerable Chodron continued the commentary on the bodhisattva ethical code. Spend time on each in light of the commentary given.

1. In what situations have you seen yourself act this way in the past or under what conditions might it be easy to act this way in the future (it might help to consider

how you've seen this negativity in the world)? Consider some of the examples shared.

2. From which of the ten non-virtues is the precept helping you to restrain?
3. What are some of the exceptions to the precept and why?
4. Which of the six perfections is the precept eliminating obstacles to and how?
5. What are the antidotes that can be applied when you are tempted to act contrary to the precept?
6. Why is this precept so important to the bodhisattva path? How does breaking it harm yourself and others? How does keeping it benefit yourself and others?
7. Resolve to be mindful of the precept in your daily life.

Precepts covered this week:

To eliminate obstacles to the far-reaching practice of fortitude, abandon:

- **Auxiliary Precept #19:** Refusing to accept the apologies of others.
- **Auxiliary Precept #20:** Acting out thoughts of anger.

96 The Gomchen Lamrim 06-30-17:

Auxiliary bodhisattva ethical restraints 21-24

Venerable Chodron continued the commentary on the bodhisattva ethical code. Consider them one by one, in light of the commentary given. For each, consider the following:

1. In what situations have you seen yourself act this way in the past or under what conditions might it be easy to act this way in the future (it might help to consider how you've seen this negativity in the world)? Consider some of the examples Venerable shared.
2. Which of the ten non-virtues is the precept helping you to restrain from committing?
3. What are some of the exceptions to the precept and why?
4. Which of the six perfections is the precept eliminating obstacles to and how?
5. What are the antidotes that can be applied when you are tempted to act contrary to the precept?
6. Why is this precept so important to the bodhisattva path? How does breaking it harm yourself and others? How does keeping it benefit yourself and others?
7. Resolve to be mindful of the precept in your daily life.

Precepts covered this week:

To eliminate obstacles to the far-reaching practice of joyous effort, abandon:

- **Auxiliary Precept #21:** Gathering a circle of friends or disciples because of your desire for respect or profit.

- **Auxiliary Precept #22:** Not dispelling the three types of laziness (sloth, attraction to destructive actions, and self-pity and discouragement).
- **Auxiliary Precept #23:** With attachment, spending time idly talking and joking.

To eliminate obstacles to the far-reaching practice of meditative stabilization, abandon:

- **Auxiliary Precept #24:** Not seeking the means to develop concentration, such as proper instructions and the right conditions necessary to do so. Not practicing the instructions once you have received them.
- **Auxiliary Precept #25:** Not abandoning the five obscurations which hinder meditative stabilization: excitement and regret, harmful thought, sleep and dullness, desire, and doubt.

97 The Gomchen Lamrim 07-07-17:

Auxiliary bodhisattva ethical restraints 25-34

Venerable Chodron continued the commentary on the bodhisattva ethical code. Consider them one by one, in light of the commentary given. For each, consider:

1. What happens if you let your mind go in the direction that the precept is guiding you to avoid? What are the disadvantages and problems of NOT keeping this precept?
2. What are the antidotes that can be applied when you are tempted to act or think contrary to the precept?
3. Why is this precept so important to the bodhisattva path? How does breaking it harm yourself and others? How does keeping it benefit yourself and others?
4. Resolve to be mindful of the precept in your daily life.

Precepts covered this week:

To eliminate obstacles to the far-reaching practice of meditative stabilization, abandon:

- **Auxiliary Precept #25:** Not abandoning the five obscurations which hinder meditative stabilization: excitement and regret, harmful thought, sleep and dullness, desire, and doubt.
- **Auxiliary Precept #26:** Seeing the good qualities of the taste of meditative stabilization and becoming attached to it.

To eliminate obstacles to the far-reaching practice of wisdom, abandon:

- **Auxiliary Precept #27:** Abandoning the scriptures or paths of the Fundamental Vehicle as unnecessary for one following the Mahayana.
- **Auxiliary Precept #28:** Exerting effort principally in another system of practice while neglecting the one you already have, the Mahayana.
- **Auxiliary Precept #29:** Without a good reason, exerting effort to learn or practice the treatises of non-Buddhists which are not proper objects of your endeavor.

- **Auxiliary Precept #30:** Beginning to favor and take delight in the treatises of non- Buddhists although studying them for a good reason.
- **Auxiliary Precept #31:** Abandoning any part of the Mahayana by thinking it is uninteresting or unpleasant.
- **Auxiliary Precept #32:** Praising yourself or belittling others because of pride, anger, and so on.
- **Auxiliary Precept #33:** Not going to Dharma gatherings or teachings.
- **Auxiliary Precept #34:** Despising the Spiritual Mentor or the meaning of the teachings and relying instead on their mere words; that is, if a teacher does not express him/herself well, not trying to understand the meaning of what he/she says, but criticizing.

98 The Gomchen Lamrim 07-14-17:

Auxiliary bodhisattva ethical restraints 35-39

Venerable Chodron continued the commentary on the bodhisattva ethical code. Consider them one by one, in light of the commentary given. For each, consider the following:

1. Consider specific situations that have occurred in your own life in light of the precept. What holds you back from benefitting others in this way? What antidote(s) can you apply in the future to overcome this?
2. Why is this precept so important to the bodhisattva path? How does breaking it harm yourself and others? How does keeping it benefit yourself and others?
3. What are exceptions to the precept and why?
4. Resolve to be mindful of the precept in your daily life.

Precepts covered this week:

To eliminate obstacles to the morality of benefiting others, abandon:

- **Auxiliary Precept #35:** Not helping those who are in need.
- **Auxiliary Precept #36:** Avoiding taking care of the sick.
- **Auxiliary Precept #37:** Not alleviating the sufferings of others.
- **Auxiliary Precept #38:** Not explaining what is proper conduct to those who are reckless.
- **Auxiliary Precept #39:** Not benefiting in return those who have benefited you.

99 The Gomchen Lamrim 07-28-17:

Auxiliary bodhisattva ethical restraints 40-46

Venerable Chodron continued the commentary on the bodhisattva ethical code. Consider them one by one, in light of the commentary given. For each, consider the following:

1. Consider specific situations that have occurred in your own life in light of the precept. What holds you back from benefitting others in this way? What antidote(s) can you apply in the future to overcome this?
2. Why is this precept so important to the bodhisattva path? How does breaking it harm yourself and others? How does keeping it benefit yourself and others?
3. What are exceptions to the precept and why?
4. Resolve to be mindful of the precept in your daily life.

Precepts covered this week

To eliminate obstacles to the morality of benefitting others, abandon:

- **Auxiliary Precept #40:** Not relieving the sorrow of others.
- **Auxiliary Precept #41:** Not giving material possessions to those in need.
- **Auxiliary Precept #42:** Not working for the welfare of your circle of friends, disciples, servants, etc.
- **Auxiliary Precept #43:** Not acting in accordance with the wishes of others if doing so does not bring harm to yourself or others.
- **Auxiliary Precept #44:** Not praising those with good qualities.
- **Auxiliary Precept #45:** Not acting with whatever means are necessary according to the circumstances to stop someone who is doing harmful actions.
- **Auxiliary Precept #46:** Not using miraculous powers, if you possess this ability, in order to stop others from doing destructive actions.

100 The Gomchen Lamrim 08-04-17:

The six far-reaching practices

1. Bodhicitta is beneficial at the beginning of the path because it gets us going, in the middle of the path because it keeps us going when things get tough or we get discouraged, and at the end of the path because it is what enables us to actually do the work of benefitting others. Go through each of these in your mind. Think of what it is like at each stage in the path. How does this mind of bodhicitta help you to progress on the path at each stage? Use specific examples from your own life or in the lives of others spiritual practitioners (Dharma friends and teachers).
2. Consider how the method and wisdom sides of the path compliment each other on the bodhisattva path. Venerable Semkye said that before going into meditative equipoise on emptiness, the bodhisattvas generate bodhicitta, and when they come out of meditative equipoise, everything they do is informed by the wisdom cultivated in meditation. Imagine holding method and wisdom in your mind in this way. How might your life and your choices be different? Does thinking in this way inspire your mind? Why?
3. The six far-reaching practices eliminate the many obstacles to our spiritual practice. Consider some:

- Eliminates obstacles to renunciation – We have little interest in looking past the happiness of this life and so we are not called towards renunciation. Bodhicitta helps us work on our attachment to our wealth, family, home, etc and see them as distractions unless we put them in the proper perspective. Examine how the things of this life are distractions for you. What is a proper way to view these things from the perspective of a spiritual practitioner? How do the six far-reaching practices eliminate this obstacle?
 - Eliminates obstacles to benefitting others – It is easy to get angry or disheartened when others won't cooperate with our efforts to help them. We have to be able to withstand hardship in this regard. How do the six far-reaching practices eliminate this obstacle?
 - Eliminates the inclination to waste time in distraction – Concentration is what allows us to stay clear and focused in meditation; it allows us to cultivate wisdom of both the conventional and ultimate natures of all things. Distractions in meditation are a real hindrance to this. How do the six far-reaching practices eliminate this obstacle?
4. If we want to attain awakening, we need a series of precious human lives. One of the causes for a precious human life is to practice the six-far reaching practices, which are generosity, ethical discipline, fortitude, joyous effort, concentration, and wisdom. Think about the results of each practice, why do these results come from cultivating those specific practices? Why are these results necessary to have to progress on the bodhisattva path?
- Training in generosity results in having what we need; we're not struggling for requisites; we have all the conditions that allow us to train.
 - Training in ethical conduct results in having a beautiful human body; long life.
 - Training in fortitude results in having environments like the Abbey; having helpful companions; having others feel comfortable around you.
 - Training in joyous effort results in accomplishing any goals you undertake.
 - Training in concentration results in a stable, focused, clear mind; makes the mind ready and receptive to teachings.
 - Training in wisdom results in understanding emptiness and attaining liberation and awakening.
 - The six far-reaching practices are taught in a specific order: generosity, ethical discipline, fortitude, joyous effort, meditative stabilization, and wisdom. The preceding supports the next. Spend some time thinking about why this is the case. Try to make specific examples.
 - The Buddha taught the four ways of gathering disciples to aid bodhisattvas in benefitting others. Even if you are not a teacher or bodhisattva now, these are all practices that you can cultivate in your life right now. Consider the importance of each. What can you do in your life right now to cultivate them?
Be generous Speak kindly and teach the Dharma Encourage others in virtue Practice what you preach

101 The Gomchen Lamrim 08-11-17:

The perfection of generosity

1. Venerable Tsepal said that with worldly generosity, it's often more like a business transaction whereas with Dharma generosity, we think and act without any expectation of receiving in return. Think about how different these types of giving are. What is the flavor in your mind when you give with expectations? What is it like when you give without expectations?
2. There are four types of generosity (the Dharma, freedom from fear, material gifts, and love). Think of examples of ways that you've given these in your own life as well as times you've been a recipient of them. Rejoice in these. Now think about what holds you back from giving in these ways? What can you do to overcome your hesitation?
3. Consider the faults of stinginess/miserliness and how they cause suffering in yours and others' lives. Some of the examples given were that we have attachment in the mind at the time of death, it makes us anxious, we can't focus because we're consumed with accumulating more, people are miserly with us, it breeds loneliness and isolation, it is the root of dispute with others, etc.
4. Consider the benefits of giving body, possessions, and virtue. Some of the benefits given were that they are part of the causes for awakening, we are more peaceful at the time of death, it breaks down the concept of "I" and mine, we don't get burdened with caring for things, it brings great joy to the mind, it is what allows us to connect with others, it increases our ability to love others, it is the basis for a good reputation, it enhances our self-confidence and courage etc.
5. Conclusion: Generate a strong aspiration to engage in generosity through your study, reflection, and meditation. Allow a deeper understanding of generosity to influence the way you interact with others in your daily life.

102 The Gomchen Lamrim 08-18-17:

The perfection of ethical conduct

1. Going through each of the ten pathways of non-virtue, consider:
 - What are some socially acceptable, contemporary activities that actually create negativity through this pathway of non-virtue?
 - Have you engaged in the activity?
 - What afflictions were working behind the scenes that made non-virtue seem like a good thing to do?
 - What resources does the Buddha make available to you to overcome the wish to engage in this activity in your own life?
 - What can you do to bring love, compassion, and wisdom to the situation when you see this activity in the world?
 - What virtuous pathway directly opposes this non-virtue? What can you do to cultivate this in your life?

2. Generate a strong aspiration to abandon negative actions and cultivate positive ones through your study, reflection, and meditation. Make the determination to allow a deeper understanding of keeping good ethical conduct to influence the way you interact with others in your daily life.

103 The Gomchen Lamrim 08-25-17:

The ten paths of nonvirtue today

1. Some modern forms of killing can include assisted suicide/euthanasia, terrorism, capital punishment, and violent video games. Spend some time thinking about each of these, if and why it is considered killing according the lamrim, whether it is a complete karma, etc. Are there others not mentioned in the teaching that apply?
2. Some modern forms of stealing can include not paying taxes, hacking people's accounts, identity theft, etc. Spend some time thinking about each of these, if and why it is considered stealing according to the lamrim, whether it is a complete karma, etc. Are there others not mentioned in the teaching that apply?
3. Some modern forms of unwise and unkind sexual behavior can include prostitution, genital mutilation, pornography, date rape, and sexual harassment in the workplace. Spend some time thinking about each of these, if and why it is considered unwise and unkind sexual behavior according to the lamrim, whether it is a complete karma, etc. Are there others not mentioned in the teaching that apply?
4. More aware of how non-virtue is practiced in our modern society, resolve to abandon negativity in your own life.

104 The Gomchen Lamrim 09-01-17:

More on the ten paths of nonvirtue today

1. Some modern forms of unwise and unkind sexual behavior might include prostitution, genital mutilation, pornography, date rape, sexual harassment, transferring STDs, polyamorous relationships, etc. Spend some time thinking about each of these, if and why it is considered unwise and unkind sexual behavior according to the lamrim, whether it is a complete karma, etc. Are there others not mentioned in the teaching that apply?
2. Some modern forms of lying might include identity theft, lying on taxes, on job/college applications, on dating websites, etc. Spend some time thinking about each of these, if and why it is considered lying according to the lamrim, whether it is a complete karma, etc. Are there others not mentioned in the teaching that apply?
3. Some modern forms of divisive speech might include on-line forums/chat rooms (trolling), cyber-bullying, certain types of protesting, etc. Spend some time thinking about each of these, if and why it is considered divisive speech according

to the lamrim, whether it is a complete karma, etc. Are there others not mentioned in the teaching that apply?

4. Some modern forms of harsh speech might include on-line forums/chat rooms (trolling), cyber-bullying, certain types of protesting, etc. Spend some time thinking about each of these, if and why it is considered harsh speech according to the lamrim, whether it is a complete karma, etc. Are there others not mentioned in the teaching that apply?
5. Venerable Chodron also pointed out that we have to get clear about what is legal and what is ethical, and how we as a society can get into trouble when we try to legislate ethics. Think of some examples of this in our society. Are there things you've done where you acted legally, but not ethically? What harm did you cause yourself? Others? What can you do to ensure that you are acting ethically and not just legally. For things that can't be legislated, how do we as a society encourage others to act ethically?
6. More aware of how non-virtue is practiced in our modern society and in your own life, resolve to abandon negativity.

105 The Gomchen Lamrim 09-08-17:

The perfection of fortitude

Modern non-virtuous pathways of mind

1. Some modern forms of covetousness might include allowing ourselves to be inundated with ads through the mail, internet, billboards, etc (even for Dharma events), shopping/the need to buy/the mind that wants more and better (everything is so accessible these days), the resume-building culture (coveting status or opportunities), constantly planning for sales, coveting fame (desiring “likes” on social media), planning the next, most exotic vacation, etc. Spend some time thinking about each of these, if and why it is considered covetousness (which is a mental action) according to the lamrim, whether it is a complete karma, etc. Are there others not mentioned in the teaching that apply?
2. Some modern forms of malice might include ruminating about modern politics, righteous anger, ruminating about shaming/trolling on-line, generating malice towards characters in movies/on TV/in games, thoughts evoked when listening to particular types of music, etc. Spend some time thinking about each of these, if and why it is considered malice (remember, this is a mental action, though it can lead to physical and verbal actions) according to the lamrim, whether it is a complete karma, etc. Are there others not mentioned in the teaching that apply?
3. Some modern forms of wrong views might include how wrong views are proliferated via modern technology, how fake news/propaganda encourages wrong views, materialist view (there is nothing after death), jihadi websites, etc. Spend some time thinking about each of these, if and why it is considered wrong views according to the lamrim, whether it is a complete karma, etc. Are there others not mentioned in the teaching that apply?

4. More aware of how non-virtue is practiced in our modern society and in your own life, resolve to abandon negativity.

Fortitude

1. Venerable Chodron said she uses the word fortitude because it doesn't imply the same passive tone as patience. Fortitude is active. It's internal strength. Think about this definition. How have you seen fortitude operate in your own life? In the world? What makes fortitude a virtue?
2. The first type of fortitude is fortitude when we're angry. Why is it important to have internal strength when we're overwhelmed by anger? Venerable Chodron said often, we have trouble even identifying our own anger because we're so wrapped up in what the other person did. What can you do to better identify your own anger so that you can work with your experience?
3. The second type of fortitude is the fortitude of bearing harm from others. It's more than just buckling down and bearing others' abuse, though. It's actually processing our experience in a very different way. What tools does the Dharma give us to begin processing our experience in a way that is healthy? How does this enhance internal strength/fortitude?
4. Resolve to cultivate internal strength in your life by being mindful of your own anger and applying the appropriate antidotes. Start with small experiences of upset, disappointment, etc. Be sure to rejoice each time you recognize fortitude in your life or in the world around you.

106 The Gomchen Lamrim 09-15-17:

The three types of fortitude

1. Venerable Chodron said she uses the word fortitude because it doesn't imply the same passive tone as patience. Fortitude is active. It's internal strength. Think about the definition: an undisturbed mind that can bear harm inflicted by others, suffering, and difficulties that we encounter to practice. How have you seen fortitude operate in your own life? In the world? What makes fortitude a virtue? In other words, why is this a quality you'd like to cultivate in your own life?
2. The first type of fortitude is fortitude of non-retaliation.
 - Were you taught as a child that when others harm, you're entitled to harm them back? How do you see this philosophy operate in our world? How do you see it operate in your own life?
 - This type of fortitude is more than just buckling down and bearing others' abuse. It's not about stuffing our anger down, pretending it's not there, and being the world's doormat. It's actually processing your experience in a very different way. What tools does the Dharma give you to overcome anger and process your experience in a way that is more realistic and beneficial?
 - Cultivating wisdom takes practice. Often, we're so convinced that the story-line we're telling ourselves is 100% true that it feels like we're white-washing

- our experience if we try to think of it in another way. What is your experience? Have you felt like you were white-washing? Have there been times when you were convinced you were right and once the anger subsided, you were able to see things differently? How can this awareness better prepare you for the next time you are overwhelmed with an affliction? How might practice seeing things in different ways be of benefit?
3. The second type of fortitude is the fortitude of enduring suffering such as illness, injury, etc.
 - Think of times where you were sick or injured and rejected the experience, getting angry at yourself or others. What are the disadvantages of not using the thought training techniques?
 - Venerable Chodron suggested a number of techniques for working with illness and injury (i.e. seeing it as an opportunity to practice, seeing it as a ripening of karma, taking and giving meditation, etc). Have you employed any of these in the past? What was the result?
 - How might the fortitude of enduring suffering benefit you? How might it benefit others around you? How might it benefit the world?
 4. The third type of fortitude is the fortitude to practice the Dharma.
 - What are some different kinds of suffering that come up for you in practicing the Dharma?
 - What tools do the teachings provide to help you overcome suffering that leads to this kind of fortitude. Have you employed any of these in the past? What were the results?
 5. Resolve to cultivate internal strength in your life by being mindful of your own anger and applying the appropriate antidotes. Start with small experiences of upset, disappointment, illness, etc. Be sure to rejoice each time you recognize fortitude in your life or in the world around you.

107 The Gomchen Lamrim 09-22-17:

Fortitude and religious intolerance

1. Venerable Chodron gave examples of many groups around the U.S. who act in harmful ways while thinking what they are doing is virtuous; thinking they are living with wisdom and compassion. Have you ever subscribed to any of the kinds of ideas that these groups believe or been close with someone who did? What part did the afflicted mind (anger, attachment, fear, confusion, etc) play in clinging to these beliefs and in the acts of body, speech and mind done under their influence?
2. Venerable Chodron said that it's very important to remember that we're not saying that other religions are bad or that the people who practice them are bad. Rather we're trying to see the pain and confusion that is in the world and what we are capable of when we are under the influence of afflictions. Spend some time thinking about the difference between saying that someone is bad or evil vs. recognizing that they are speaking and acting out of pain and confusion. What

- flavor does each leave in your mind? How might you respond to someone holding these kinds of beliefs if you saw them as bad vs. recognizing that they are acting through pain and confusion?
3. What other tools (like some of the thought training techniques) can you use to bring wisdom to a situation in which you are engaging with another person holding especially harmful wrong views?
 4. It's important to recognize that we have the same afflictions within our own mind. Given the right conditions, we might well say and do the same kinds of things. What can you do to protect yourself in this and in future lives from adhering to these kinds of wrong views, from being susceptible to these kinds of leaders, and from acting in harmful ways while thinking it is virtue? What tools does the Buddha teach you to do this very thing?
 5. With a deeper understanding, and a feeling of compassion for yourself and others who are under the influence of ignorance, afflictions, and karma, resolve to work with your own mind, counter your own afflictions, develop compassion for those in the world who are overwhelmed by their confusion, and cultivate wisdom in knowing how best to interact with others with whom you disagree.

108 The Gomchen Lamrim 09-29-17:

Joyous effort

1. Joyous effort, also translated as enthusiastic perseverance, is an attitude that takes joy in acting constructively/creating virtue. Imagine having that kind of mind. How might it change the way you approach situations in your life? How might it change how you interact with others?
2. What are some benefits of cultivating joyous effort? What are some disadvantages of not cultivating that kind of mind?
3. Venerable Jigme said that part of our practice is figuring out how to be more present with the positive things we do throughout the day. How does recognizing positive acts in the world, as well as in our own thoughts and actions, lead to joyous effort?
4. Consider the first kind of joyous effort: armor-like joyous effort:
 - It takes on a challenge with courage and interest, enthusiasm. Think of someone in your life, or that you've seen in the world, that embodies this kind of joyous effort, that jumps right in when others are in need. What kind of energy do they bring to life and to the people around them?
 - What keeps you from having this kind of joyous effort? What holds you back? Where do you experience resistance? Venerable Jigme said often, it is one of the three types of laziness (laziness of procrastination, laziness of busyness, laziness of discouragement). Think about each form of laziness. How do they operate in your life (make specific examples in your own life). What antidotes can you apply to overcome these hindrance to practicing and cultivating joyous effort?

5. Inspired by the energy and benefit of cultivating joyous effort, make a determination to overcome your hindrances to this perfection and dedicate your energy to living virtue with great joy.

109 The Gomchen Lamrim 10-06-17:

More on joyous effort

1. Why its beneficial to practice joyous effort:
 - Consider each of the three kinds of joyous effort: armor-like, joyous effort of gathering virtue, joyous effort of benefitting others.
 - What are some benefits of cultivating these three?
 - What does embodying these qualities do for you? What are the benefits to others?
2. Identifying the obstacles:
 - Consider some of the hindrances to cultivating joyous effort.
 - What keeps you from having the three kinds of joyous effort? What holds you back? Where do you experience resistance?
 - Consider the three types of laziness as obstacles (laziness of procrastination, laziness of busyness, laziness of discouragement). Think about each form. How do they operate in your life (make specific examples in your own life).
3. How to overcome the obstacles:
 - What are some antidotes to the obstacles you identified in the previous point?
 - Have you tried some of them in the past? If so, what do you find most works for your mind?
 - If you tend to have resistance to apply antidotes, why do you think that might be?
4. Positive factors that encourage our joyous effort to grow:
 - Consider the four forces that keep our joyous effort growing: the power of aspiration, the power of steadfastness, the power of joy, and the power of relinquishment.
 - Really spend some time thinking about how each of these can work to grow your joyous effort.
 - Think of specific things you can do to use these four to support your practice.
5. Inspired by the energy and benefit of cultivating joyous effort, make a determination to overcome your hindrances to this perfection and dedicate your energy to living with great joy.

110 The Gomchen Lamrim 10-13-17:

Meditative stability

1. As important as having concentration is in our daily life, meditative stability is different in that the goal is to single-pointedly put the mind on an object without going to another object. Consider how that is different from having concentration in your everyday life and why being able to concentrate single-pointedly is vital to the spiritual path.
2. Consider some of the benefits of meditative stability that Venerable Chodron listed. How do these benefit you personally? How does it allow you to benefit others?
 - Our virtuous activities become more focused.
 - We can understand the teachings on a deeper level.
 - It is necessary to having a direct perception of emptiness.
 - It is essential for generating the superknowledges.
3. Consider some of the precautions that Venerable Chodron listed. Why is it important to be aware of these early in our spiritual growth?
 1. Be cautious of becoming attached to the bliss of concentration.
 2. Be cautious of confusing serenity with liberation.
 3. Be cautious to maintain a Dharma motivation.
 4. Be cautious to always follow the guidance of a spiritual mentor and to check your experiences with them.
4. With all the wonderful benefits of generating meditative stability, why is it that our teachers don't encourage us to make it our principal practice at the beginning of the path?
5. There are six conditions necessary for generating serenity. Consider why each is important and what you can do now to help to set up these conditions in your life:
 - Living in a favorable place
 - Having a clear and correct understanding of all the methods to developing serenity before going into retreat
 - Being free from coarse desires, having few desires
 - Being satisfied and content
 - Being free of involvement in worldly activities and commotion
 - Living in pure ethical conduct
6. Remember, even if we don't have these six conditions to do retreat, we can still cultivate some level of meditative stability that is helpful to our spiritual progress. What are ways you can cultivate meditative stability in your current practice, both on and off the cushion?
7. Inspired by the benefits of cultivating meditative stability, make a determination to take steps to develop it both on and off the cushion now, as well as begin to

accumulate the causes and conditions necessary to do serenity retreat in the future.

111 The Gomchen Lamrim 10-20-17:

Objects of meditation

1. Venerable Chodron taught a variety of meditation objects. Why are there so many different objects upon which we can develop serenity?
2. Spend some time considering some of the advantages of meditating on a conceptual image of the Buddha: it helps us to remember the Buddha's qualities, we remember the Buddha at the time of death, it deepens our refuge and inspires our mind, it creates merit and contributes to the attainment of the Buddha's form body, doing other practices involving visualizing the Buddha becomes easier, we aren't lonely when we can simply imagine the Buddha with us all the time.
3. Why is it so important to receive instructions on how to meditate before we begin?
4. What is the importance of your motivation in meditating? What was your motivation when you first began? Examine how your motivation has changed as you have received teachings and continued to practice.
5. Do the serenity meditation on the Buddha as Venerable Chodron described. How might meditating consistently on the Buddha as an object of serenity meditation influence the way you practice on and off the cushion?

112 The Gomchen Lamrim 10-27-17:

Objects of meditation: Pali tradition

1. What similarities and differences between the development of meditative stability in the Pali tradition (from this week) and the Sanskrit tradition (from last week) stood out for you and why? What inspiration and/or confidence in the path can you draw from this?
2. Consider the preliminary steps to cultivating meditative stability: fully dedicating your life to the Buddha, going to your meditation place, setting a good motivation, asking your mentor to select a meditation object for you, reviewing the disadvantages of sensual desire and cultivating renunciation and the determination to be free. Why is each step important? How does it benefit your practice and facilitate the cultivation of meditative stability?
3. Consider the gradual progression of the 3 signs (preliminary work sign to learning sign to counterpart sign). Imagine reaching each step. How might each step aid your own practice? How might it allow you to benefit others? Why is it so important to remember your motivation at this point and not mistake the peace that is the suppression of the manifest affiliations with liberation?
4. Consider the first of the five hindrances: sensual desire. Venerable Chodron quoted a text that describes being attached to it as a "burning heat that dries up all

bliss,” like “a bird snared in a net,” like “one who licks a honey-smearred blade.” Why is this the case? Think of specific examples in which it has been a hindrance to your own meditation practice in these ways. Why is the thought that “if I don’t follow my sensual desire, I won’t be happy” not true? What can you do to counter sensual desire (what are some antidotes you can apply when you notice it arise in your mind)?

5. Consider the second of the five hindrances: malice. Venerable Chodron said this is the mind that perpetually finds faults in the world around us. It makes us totally miserable and yet we hold onto our malice. It steals our virtue, leads to unfortunate rebirths, and makes us lose the Dharma. How have you seen malice operate in your own life, both on and off the cushion? Why is this such a hindrance to concentration? What are the antidotes you can apply to counter the mind of malice?

113 The Gomchen Lamrim 11-03-17:

The five faults and eight antidotes

1. Consider the third of the five hindrances: lethargy and sleepiness. There are both mental and physical aspects to these. How have you seen lethargy and sleepiness operate in your own life, both on and off the cushion? Why is this such a hindrance to concentration? What are the antidotes you can apply to counter the mind of lethargy and sleepiness?
2. Consider the fourth of the five hindrances: agitation and regret. What kinds of things do you feel anxious about or regret? What story do you tell yourself about events in your life that leads to anxiety or regret? Why are these such a hindrance to concentration? Nagarjuna implores us to put down what we have regretted and purified, to let it go. Why does making ourselves suffer from guilt not help us to grow and change? Do you find it difficult to put things down? What can you do to cultivate this skill? What other antidotes can you apply to counter this hindrance?
3. Consider the fifth of the five hindrances: deluded doubt. Nagarjuna states that its like standing at a fork in the road and being so paralyzed by the decision, that we go nowhere. He says that it is the worst of the mental factors. Why do you think this is so? Venerable Chodron said that in choosing the path that is most beneficial, she asks herself how she can best keep her ethical conduct and to contemplate bodhicitta. Consider a decision you have made, or are in the process of making, in this light. Does shifting your mind in this way change the way you think about the choice? How might your decisions be different if you favor good ethical conduct and bodhicitta over what might bring you the most worldly happiness?
4. Go over each of the five ways to oppose the hindrances: contemplate the opposite of what is distracting you, examine the disadvantage of that particular hindrance, don’t give attention to the thought, give attention to stilling the thought formation (investigate WHY you are thinking that thought, what conditions led up to having

the thought, watch the thoughts from a detached viewpoint, etc), crush the non-virtuous mental state with a virtuous one. Spend some time on each of these. Have you employed these in your practice? If so, in what situations were they useful? What can you do to cultivate and strengthen them, using them more readily to overcome the hindrances both on and off the cushion?

114 The Gomchen Lamrim 11-24-17:

Meditation session outline

1. Venerable Tarpa said that our day can be divided into 2: our time on and off the cushion. Consider how what you do in between meditation sessions (as you go about your daily life) influences your meditation as well as how your meditation session influences how you go about your daily life.
2. The meditation session itself can be divided into three categories: setting your motivation, doing the meditation, and dedication. Why is your motivation so important? Consider times you were clean-clear in your motivation for something you did vs. living on automatic. Were the outcomes different? How did you feel doing the actions?
3. Consider the six preparatory practices: cleaning the room and arranging the altar, making offerings, sitting in the proper position, calming the mind and setting your motivation, visualizing the merit field, reciting the seven limb prayer, and offering the mandala and requesting inspiration. Why are each of these so important to a complete meditation practice? What does each offer that prepares the mind to contemplate the teachings?
4. Venerable Tarpa said that we sustain our meditation using mindfulness and vigilance. What does that mean both in and out of your meditation sessions? What can you do to increase mindfulness and vigilance in your life, sustaining your awareness of and focus on virtue in all you do?

115 The Gomchen Lamrim 12-01-17:

Perfection of generosity

Venerable Jigme defined generosity as an attitude where we are willing to give whatever is needed by others. With that in mind, contemplate the following:

1. Using examples from the teaching and from your own experience: What are some of the benefits of generosity just in this life? What are the benefits of generosity in future lives?
2. Imagine the qualities of true generosity: giving without hesitation, without obstacle, having the discriminating wisdom to know what to give when. What would it be like to live these qualities. Spend time considering each. What can you do to begin cultivating these qualities now?
3. Venerables Tsepel and Tarpa suggested that approaching the world with a heart of generosity directly opposes the complaining, critical mind. Consider how that

process works. How you can overcome your own negativity, complaint, and criticism through the attitude of generosity?

4. Consider your motivation when giving. Are you usually aware of it? Reflect on acts of generosity you have done in the past. What has motivated you (true generosity, obligation, pride, reputation)? What can you do to get more clear about your motivation and transform it into the true wish to benefit?
5. Consider the three types of generosity: giving material aid, freedom from fear, and giving the Dharma. Give examples of each (big and small) that you have witnessed in your own life and in the world. Looking at each type of generosity, in what situations do you find giving quite natural? Rejoice!
6. Again, looking at each type of generosity, in what situations do you find you struggle in being generous? What arises in your own mind that prevents you from giving in any of the three ways? What can you do, what antidotes can you apply, to begin to overcome these obstacles? Consider specific things you can do for each of these three types of giving to help build the habit of generosity (smiling at a stranger, holding the door for someone, not lashing out in anger, encouraging a friend, taking the time to visit with an elderly neighbor, etc).
7. Go through how to practice generosity coupled with each of the other far-reaching practices: the ethics of generosity, the fortitude of generosity, the joyous effort of generosity, the meditative stability of generosity, the wisdom of generosity. How might thinking in this way influence the power of your generosity and the way you interact with others?
8. Remembering that cultivating generosity happens both on and off the cushion, resolve to cultivate this attitude in your meditation time, transform your motivations, and be mindful of interacting with others in your daily life with an increasingly generous heart.

116 The Gomchen Lamrim 12-08-17:

Ethical conduct review

1. Reflect on the last 5 destructive pathways of action with regard to how they manifest in the world today:
 - **Wrong views:** What kinds of wrong views are referred to in this pathway of non-virtue? Consider: Do we as a society have more opportunity to find and cultivate wrong views today than we did at the Buddha's time? What kinds of wrong views do you see in the world today? In your own life (can be past or present)? What are some of the results you've seen from wrong views, both in the world and in your life? What can you do, what antidotes can you apply, to counter wrong views in your life?
 - **Malice:** Where do you see malice in the world? Under what conditions do you see it come up in your own mind? What are the disadvantages of malice in your own life? In the world? How can you, as a practitioner, guard yourself against malicious thought?

- **Covetousness:** Where do you see covetousness operate in the world today? Under what conditions do you see it operate in your own life? What are the disadvantages of covetousness in your own life? In the world? What tools does the Buddha provide to counter the mind of covetousness?
 - **Idle Talk:** Where do you see idle talk in the world today? Where do you struggle with it in your own life? What harm does idle talk cause in the world? In your life? What can you do to begin to counter idle talk in your own life?
 - **Harsh Speech:** What forms of harsh speech do you see in the world today? In your own life? What are the results of harsh speech? What harm do you see in the world and in your life as a result of harsh speech? What can you do to counter harsh speech?
2. What does keeping good ethical conduct mean? What is far-reaching ethical conduct?
 3. What are some of the benefits of practicing far-reaching ethical conduct?
 4. How does ethical conduct help to establish trust in relationships?
 5. What does it mean to be living in “degenerate times?” Are we living in one or is there more kindness in the world than ever?
 6. What happens when someone tries to legislate their version of ethics? How do we balance our own ethical code with outreach (volunteering, political activism, etc), considering the wide range of religion traditions in society?
 7. Should anyone have the right or moral obligation to censor harsh or divisive speech either in public or on the internet?
 8. How does living an ethical life help you in this life? How does it impact the people with whom you come into contact?
 9. Seeing the disadvantages of non-virtue and the many benefits of keeping good ethical conduct, resolve to abandon negativity and cultivate the actions of body, speech, and mind that create peace and harmony in your life and in the world.

117 The Gomchen Lamrim 12-15-17:

Fortitude review

1. Venerable Chodron prefers the term “fortitude” to “patience” because it has more of a feel of internal strength, of a strong mind. What does it mean to have a strong mind and internal strength? Does that have a different flavor in your own mind than does patience?
2. Venerable Jampa defined fortitude as an undisturbed mind that can bear harm inflicted by others, suffering such as illness, and difficulties that we encounter when we practice the Dharma. From whom can you draw inspiration on how to embody fortitude? What are examples of this quality in stories of the Buddhas life? In people living in the world today?
3. To cultivate fortitude, the first step is to consider the benefits of it:

- Some of the benefits discussed in the teaching were that you won't harm others, you will have more peace and happiness, you will get a lot more accomplished, you'll have no enemies in the world, you will not be plagued by irritation, you will have more enthusiasm, and you will have a peaceful death. What other benefits might have not been mentioned in the teaching? What is the connection between cultivating fortitude and experiencing these results?
 - What is your experience? How has practicing fortitude benefitted you in your life? Be specific.
4. Also consider the disadvantages of NOT cultivating fortitude.
- Some disadvantages mentioned in the review were: you're in a bad mood all the time, no one wants to be around you, it destroys your merit and slows down your spiritual progress, you make impulsive decisions without wisdom, you don't sleep well, and the happiness you experience will be difficult to regain. Are there other disadvantages you've seen in your own life or in the world? What is the connection between not cultivating fortitude and these results?
 - What is your experience? How has not cultivating fortitude harmed you? Be specific.
5. Regarding the fortitude of not retaliating when others harm you, consider some conditions that might contribute to you wanting to harm others?
- Were you taught growing up to retaliate when harmed? What in society, even as an adult, encourages this?
 - Do you have trouble identifying anger in its many forms and thus struggle with applying antidotes?
 - Are there certain situations in which refraining from retaliation is more difficult for you than in other situations?
 - What antidotes and thought transformation techniques does the Dharma offer to help you overcome anger and the wish to retaliate when you are harmed?
6. Regarding the fortitude of willingly bearing suffering like physical illness, injury, etc.:
- How do you often react when you are suffering in this way?
 - How does reacting in your usual way harm yourself and others?
 - Consider specific situations in which you were suffering. What would you like to have done differently?
 - What antidotes and thought transformation techniques does the Dharma offer to help you overcome the wish to reject the experience of mental and physical suffering?
7. Regarding the fortitude to practice the Dharma:
- What obstacles arise in your own practice that keep you from practicing the Dharma?
 - What problems have arisen because of these obstacles?

- What antidotes and thought transformation techniques does the Dharma offer to help you work through these obstacles?
8. Resolve to think about the benefits of practicing fortitude and the disadvantage of not practicing, as well as to apply antidotes and thought transformation techniques to help you work with your experience in a beneficial way.

118 The Gomchen Lamrim 12-22-17:

Joyous effort review

1. What are some of the advantages of practicing joyous perseverance/effort?
2. What worldly activities have you done that were infused with joyous effort-what difficulties did you overcome with a joyful determined mind?
3. What dharma activities have you done that were infused with joyous effort-what difficulties did you overcome with a joyful determined mind?
4. How do we kick this joyous perseverance into gear?
5. What are the obstacles to joyous perseverance in your own life? Be specific.
6. Which of the three types of laziness get in the way of cultivating joyous perseverance for you: procrastination, being distracted by temporary happiness, or self-contempt? What antidotes do you apply?
7. Which of the three steps in the meditation on death (death is definite, the time of death is indefinite, and at the time of death nothing helps but Dharma practice) inspire you to push through procrastination. Explain why that particular one gets you motivated?
8. How do you work with discouragement about attaining the goal of full awakening?
9. Consider examples of joyous perseverance that you have seen in others that inspire you. What does this do for your mind?

119 The Gomchen Lamrim 12-29-17:

The five hindrances and eight antidotes to meditative stabilization

1. The first of the five faults is laziness, of which there are three types: sleeping and laying around, being busy doing things that don't contribute to or actually create obstacles to spiritual practice, and discouragement.
 - Which type of laziness do you struggle with most?
 - What are the disadvantages of that type of laziness from your own experience? How does it cause problems for you?
 - In the context of laziness with regards to your meditation practice, what are the antidotes that counter it when it arises in your mind? Work through each

of the four given in the teaching – what about these antidotes make them particularly potent for helping you get to the meditation cushion?

2. The second of the five faults is forgetting the instruction (the object of meditation).
 - The antidote to this fault is mindfulness, but it's important to be clear-clear about what is meant by mindfulness in this context. What is the difference between secular mindfulness and the mindfulness of Buddhist practice?
 - What is it about Buddhist mindfulness that leads to meditative concentration that secular mindfulness cannot achieve?
 - What is the role of ethics and wisdom in cultivating mindfulness?
 - How can keeping silence facilitate mindfulness?
3. The third of the five faults is agitation and laxity.
 - Coarse agitation is scattering, distraction, wandering, the proliferating mind, restlessness that interferes with the stability of the mind in meditation. How have you seen this operate in your own practice?
 - Coarse laxity is where the mind is foggy and the meditation object lacks energy, force, clarity. How have you seen this operate in your own practice?
 - Although it isn't the actual antidote, what is the role of Introspective awareness in meditation? How does it allow you to bring your mind back to the meditation object?
 - Once introspective awareness has identified agitation and laxity, what are the actual antidotes to each?
4. The fourth of the five faults is non-application of the antidote.
 - How have you seen this in your practice? Have you been so engaged in a daydream, memory, or mental proliferation that you knew you should bring your mind back to the object but didn't?
 - What problems has this caused in your practice?
 - Of course, the remedy is simply applying the antidote. What can you do to reinforce the importance of and build energy for applying the antidote in your meditation?
5. The fifth of the five faults is over application of the antidote.
 - Have you experienced this fault in your meditation session? What problems has this caused?
 - The remedy to this fault is to remain equanimous, or as Venerable Chodron said, "to chill out." Imagine applying this antidote in your session. How does it facilitate meditative concentration?
6. Recognizing how these faults hinder your spiritual practice, resolve to watch your mind for these faults and quickly apply the appropriate antidotes.

120 The Gomchen Lamrim 01-05-18:

Six conditions for serenity

1. In the motivation, Venerable Tarpa said that because all our dukkha arises from the misperception of how things exist, the wisdom that realizes emptiness is the direct antidote. As a result, *all* the teachings of the Buddha prepare and lead us into attaining a realization of emptiness. Spend some time thinking about teachings at different stages of the path and consider how they lead to this wisdom.
2. With that in mind, how does meditative stabilization facilitate wisdom?
3. Even though you may not be able to attain serenity in this life, you can begin to build this skill. As Venerable Tarpa said, the drops in the bucket add up. How might cultivating the ability to concentrate in meditation, to whatever level you are able, benefit your practice now, on and off the cushion? How does it lead to having meditative stability at some point in the future?
4. Consider the first of the six conditions to develop serenity: dwelling in an appropriate place.
 - Why is this condition beneficial for cultivating serenity? What benefit does it provide?
 - How do ease of access, good companionship, being able to attain supplies easily, etc. help to create an appropriate place for serenity meditation?
 - To what extent have you already started setting up these kinds of conditions in your life? What has been the benefit of doing so?
 - What obstacles arise keeping you from further cultivating this condition and what can you do to overcome them?
5. Consider the second and third of the six conditions to develop serenity: having little desire and being content.
 - Why are these conditions beneficial for cultivating serenity?
 - Venerable Tarpa said this is about totally dedicating yourself to the spirit of attaining full awakening instead of sitting on the cushion daydreaming about how things could be better. To what extent do you see this kind of distraction in your meditation practice? What are the disadvantages of that?
 - To what extent have you already started countering desire and cultivating contentment in your life and what benefits have you experienced as a result?
 - What obstacles arise keeping you from further cultivating these conditions and what can you do to overcome them?
6. Consider the fourth of the six conditions to develop serenity: completely giving up many activities.
 - Venerable Tarpa said this is about abandoning certain activities while in retreat, like email, taking care of family, shopping, socializing, etc. Why is this condition beneficial for cultivating serenity? What benefit does it provide?

- To what extent have you already started abandoning or reducing certain activities in your life and what benefits have you experienced as a result?
 - What obstacles arise keeping you from further cultivating this condition and what can you do to overcome them?
7. Consider the fifth of the six conditions to develop serenity: pure ethical discipline.
 - Why is this condition beneficial for cultivating serenity? What benefit does it provide?
 - To what extent have you already started cultivating good ethical discipline in your life and what benefits have you experienced as a result?
 - What obstacles arise keeping you from further cultivating this condition and what can you do to overcome them?
 8. Consider the sixth of the six conditions to develop serenity: completely getting rid of thoughts of desire.
 - Why is this condition beneficial for cultivating serenity? What benefit does it provide?
 - How does meditating on impermanence help to cultivate this condition?
 - Venerable Tarpa said that because what we're trying to do is progress through the form and formless realms (abandoning the desire realm), any worldly desire we cling to directly counters that goal, so it must be abandoned. Take some time to really consider this point.
 - What obstacles arise keeping you from cultivating this condition and what can you do to overcome them?
 9. Why is it so important to be realistic about what you can achieve right now, remembering that even small efforts you make matter and contribute to getting you to your goal?
 10. Seeing the many benefits of cultivating meditative concentration, resolve to strengthen these six supportive conditions in your life.

121 Gomchen Lamrim 01-12-2018:

Nine stages of sustained attention

1. Venerable Chodron began the class with explaining what “training” means in Buddhist practice. More than just reading a book and passing a test, training is character building. It is transforming our own mind. It is changing how we respond under stress so that we are flexible and can respond to situations in a way that benefits self and others. With this understanding of training, she offered many tools with which to examine our own experience. Take some time to investigate them:
 - What is the nature of samsara? Where in samsara do we have predictability and stability?

- If there is no creator and no inherently existent self, just beings who are under the influence of afflictions and karma, who is responsible for making things stable?
 - When you consider all the causes and conditions that must come together for situations to arise, is it reasonable to think that you or anyone else should be able to control them?
 - Remember that the only predictably to be had in samsara is that things are changing in each moment, that we can't find any lasting happiness in samsara, and that there is no inherently existent self.
 - Consider that if you are rigid and inflexible, it is not because of your environment and the people it in, but because of your own afflictions and false expectations.
 - When you're uncomfortable with how things change on a dime, watch your clinging to permanence and stability. Instead of letting your mind go to "Why are things like this? They shouldn't be like this," go inside... "What do wrong beliefs in permanence and stability make me do? How do they make me think? Is the problem that things change or that I had the expectation that things would go according to my plan? What is really causing my discomfort?"
 - Investigate how fear-based samsara is, how despite the insecurity of samsara, you are trying to make everything secure.
 - When you're uncomfortable with certain people, instead of listing their bad qualities, check up to see if your own opinion factory is working overtime.
 - When you can't stand others' suggestions, ideas, and ways of doing things, look at what you are grasping at – permanence? True existence? Look at your own arrogance. Is your way the only way to do things?
2. Consider the six powers: hearing, reflection, mindfulness, introspective awareness, effort, and complete familiarity. How do each of these support the development of concentration?
 3. Consider the four types of attention: tight focus, interrupted focus, uninterrupted focus, and spontaneous focus. In your own mind, walk through how one leads to the next as a meditator cultivates meditative stability.
 4. Consider the nine stages of sustained attention: placing the mind, continual placement, repeated placement, close placement, taming, pacifying, thoroughly pacifying, making single-pointed, and placement in equipoise. In your own mind, walk through how one leads to the next as a meditator cultivates meditative stability.
 5. Regarding the first of the nine stages (placing the mind), Venerable Chodron said that in this stage the appearance of the object isn't very clear and the mind is plagued with discursive thoughts. To get the mind to stay, we have to learn to withdraw the mind from external objects and generate mindfulness on it. We can start this process now, in the break times (when we're not on the cushion):
 - Consider: if you are compelled to look every time someone moves in a room or makes noise, how is that going to affect your meditation session? What can

you do to start to work on your mindfulness off the cushion so that it benefits your meditation sessions? Be specific?

- Consider: if you suffer from worry and anxiety, how is that going to affect your meditation session? Are there particularly anxieties that come up repeatedly? What are they? When you're not in meditation, begin to practice identifying these thoughts simply as "anxious thoughts" instead of feeding them.
6. After the nine stages, we cultivate mental and physical pliancy, followed by the bliss of mental and physical pliancy. Consider what this kind of serviceability of the body and mind might be like. How might it make a difference in your practice on and off the cushion?
 7. Finally, as meditative stability continues to increase, the meditator attains serenity. Consider some of the benefits of serenity:
 - The body and mind are flexible and serviceable
 - The mind is very spacious
 - The mind can abide firmly on the meditation object
 - There is sense of great clarity
 - In post meditation time, afflictions don't arise as strongly or as frequently, and craving for sense pleasure decreases significantly
 - Sleep can be transformed into meditation
 8. Better understanding the process of cultivating meditative stability and the many benefits of doing so, resolve to begin cultivating this perfection in your meditation sessions.

122 The Gomchen Lamrim 01-19-18:

From serenity to the jhanas

1. Consider some of the advantages of developing serenity: the body and mind become very flexible and serviceable, physical and mental pliancy arise quickly making the body and mind cooperative, the mind is spacious and can abide firmly and steadily on the meditation object so that even a loud sound doesn't distract you, you have a feeling of great clarity and although afflictions arise in post meditation time they are not as strong, sleep can easily be transformed into meditation, and meditation can be used as a form of protection. What might it mean for your practice on and off the cushion to experience these advantages? How might these advantages help you to benefit others?
2. Consider the four afflictions that can interfere with serenity: attachment, arrogance, ignorance, and wrong views. What is meant by attachment in this context? Why are each of these afflictions in particular considered such a hindrance to serenity?
3. Consider the five super-knowledges: supernormal powers, the divine ear, understanding the minds of others, recollection of past lives, the divine eye, and

the destruction of pollutants. In Buddhism, these are not ends in and of themselves, but attained in order to benefit sentient beings. How might each of these super-knowledges be of use to a practitioner on the bodhisattva path?

4. Imagine being able to remember all your past lives. Why would that lead to feelings of deep renunciation and the determination to be free from samsara? Why would seeing *others'* past lives lead to compassion?
5. Better understanding the many benefits of cultivating meditative stability, resolve to begin cultivating this perfection in your meditation sessions.

123 The Gomchen Lamrim 02-09-18:

Serenity and insight

1. Venerable Chodron said that to have serenity, we have to eliminate the distractions towards external objects of the senses. Why is this such an important step in cultivating serenity? What are distractions you face in your own meditation? What antidotes can you apply to begin cultivating focus on your object of meditation?
2. Venerable Chodron said that countering mental chatter, a big hindrance on the path, is about shutting off our “opinion factory.” We think our opinions are *who we are*. In what ways do you find this true in your own life?
3. Clarity and stability are two qualities we want to develop in serenity meditation. What are they and how do they contribute to serenity?
4. Why is it so important to have the proper conditions to do serenity meditation (having few desires, cultivating contentment, having few activities, practicing pure ethical conduct, and rejecting thoughts of desire)? How do each of these contribute to attaining serenity?
5. Consider each of the benefits of serenity: the body is comfortable and satisfied, the mind is happy and peaceful, the mind can easily be directed towards virtue, we don't create as much negativity, our virtue is potent, using it to realize insight, we overcome rebirth in samsara. What does thinking of these benefits do for your mind? How might having them transform your interactions with others and the world? How might having them transform your own confidence and joyous effort?
6. How do mindfulness and introspective awareness work to help the mind counter laxity (which hinders clarity) and restlessness (which hinders stability)?

124 The Gomchen Lamrim 02-16-18:

Attaining serenity

1. It's all about practice! Venerable Chodron said that like telling someone how to eat to be healthy where we have to practice by trial and error to see what it is like for our own bodies, so we must practice to understand what it is to attain the right level of looseness or tightness in our minds as we meditate. Why is it so important to develop personal experience in meditating to develop serenity and not just understand the teachings?
2. Why is it so important to keep concentration meditations short when you first start meditating? What might a healthy meditation session to develop serenity look like in your own practice?
3. The text explains that excitement arises due to attachment and laxity does not tightly apprehend the object of meditation. Where do you see these arise in your practice? What disadvantages of these two do you experience personally?
4. Mindfulness and introspective awareness work together in our meditation sessions to help us stay on the object. Consider why the stronger our mindfulness is, the stronger our introspective awareness will be. With that in mind, what can you do, both on and off the cushion, to increase your mindfulness?
5. Why is it so important to apply the appropriate antidotes to laxity and excitement? What are some of the antidotes you can apply to each?
6. Consider the common factors which cause laxity and excitement to arise: not guarding the senses, not eating with measure, sleeping, lacking effort, and not applying introspective awareness. With which of these do you most struggle? What can you do, on and off the cushion, to begin to counter these factors?
7. Consider the specific factors which cause laxity to arise: sleep, making your sessions too long, and not enjoying or caring about meditation. Also consider the specific factors that cause restlessness to arise: not having meditated enough on the disadvantages of samsara, holding the object too tightly, and attachment to loved ones. With which of these do you most struggle? What can you do, on and off the cushion, to begin to counter these factors?
8. Consider some of the benefits of having access concentration: the ability to suppress afflictions temporarily, pliancy arises quickly and is partially maintained after the session, the five hindrances hardly ever occur, the afflictions are weak, and stability and clarity are great. What does thinking about these benefits do for your mind? What might it be like to experience these benefits in your life? How might it transform the way you interact with the world?
9. Better understanding the process of cultivating meditative stability and the many benefits of doing so, resolve to begin cultivating this perfection in your meditation sessions.

125 The Gomchen Lamrim 02-23-18:

Identifying afflictive ignorance

1. In the introduction, and in response to a Washington Post piece, Venerable Chodron taught that one way we influence the world around us is through our attitudes. Consider this point:
 - If you are surrounded by people who are discouraged and bitter, how does that influence the way you live your life, your ideas and actions?
 - Conversely, if you are surrounded by people who are hopeful, happy, and are practicing the path, how does that influence the way you live your life, your ideas and actions?
 - Consider that you have the same potential for influence over others. Venerable Chodron said that it is not the act that is so crucial, but the attitude, and that if we work hard in our practice, then just how we live our lives influences others in a beneficial way.
 - Identify particular attitudes and situations in which you'd like to shift your mind from discouraged and bitter to hopeful and encouraging. Resolve to transform your own mind as a means of influencing the world and the people around you in a beneficial way.
2. Why is it so important to cultivate the correct view before meditating to develop insight into emptiness?
3. Consider the process of grasping at true existence: First we have the basis, either of persons or phenomena. Upon that basis, our ignorant mind looks at that thing or person and it appears to us as being truly existent, as existing *out there*, independent of causes and conditions. Finally, our mind assents to that appearance. Make examples of this.
4. Consider that the object of negation does not exist at all. The basis exists on the conventional level, but the truly existent object that appears to us, and that we believe in, does not exist. If it helps, use Venerable Chodron's example of being born with sunglasses to distinguish between what exists and what does not exist.
5. The text asserts, from the view of the Prasangika, that the mere "I" is neither a storehouse consciousness, nor the mind itself. Why can the mere "I" be neither of these things? What is the mere "I"?
6. What is the difference between grasping at a permanent, unitary, and independent self vs. grasping at a truly existent self? Which is more subtle and why?

126 The Gomchen Lamrim 03-02-18:

Realizing selflessness

1. Investigate 1) how when an object doesn't coincide with your way of thinking anger arises, and 2) how when an object *does* coincide with your way of thinking, attachment arises. Make some personal examples from your own life. Consider that both these responses (anger and attachment) are the result of ignorance grasping at true existence being present in the mind.
2. If ignorance is the root of samsara, why do you need to realize emptiness to overcome that ignorance?
3. Consider the analogy of the knapweed that Venerable Chodron used in the teaching. How is picking a weed like eliminating the root of samsara in your mind?
4. Consider the causal chain that fuels samsara: grasping at true existence gives rise to distorted attention which exaggerates the good or bad qualities of an object, which gives rise to afflictions, which gives rise to action/karma, which leads to all the results of the dukkha of samsara. Think through each step and why one leads to another. Why, when ignorance is removed does the entire chain crumble?
5. Consider the analogy of seeing a face in the mirror. How is seeing the appearance of a face in a mirror similar to seeing the appearance of an inherently existent person? How does each appear? What is each dependent on? How can you use this analogy to start chipping away at ignorance in your own mind?

127 The Gomchen Lamrim 03-09-18:

Identifying the person

1. Venerable Chodron said in the teaching that we just assume that the way things appear to us is how they exist, and we never really investigate how they actually appear.
 - Take some time to consider the world around you? How does it appear?
 - Does it seem like objects have their own nature, from their own side? Do they seem objective, unrelated to your mind, something that makes them what they are? Do they seem independent of being designated by your own mind?
 - Consider yourself. Do you ever think of yourself as dependent, as being a result of causes and conditions, or do you just have the feeling that you exist and will always exist as you are?
2. Consider the four key points of establishing the lack of inherent existence of the "I":
 - The first step is investigating the question that if an inherently existent "I" existed, how would it have to exist? You're not looking for an inherently existent "I" because that doesn't exist. You're establishing that if one DID exist, it would logically have to exist in a certain way. Venerable Chodron

said we have to see how the self-grasping ignorance grasps the object, why and how we grasp things as inherently existent. Why is this such an important first step?

- The second step is getting clear that the only two options are that an inherently existent “I” would have to be 1) one and the same with its aggregates or 2) separate and unrelated to them. Why is it so important to be convinced that there is no third alternative here?
 - In the third step, we refute these two options, establishing for ourselves that the “I” cannot exist in either of these two ways by using reasoning. Why is this alone not the realization of emptiness?
 - Finally, in the fourth step, we understand that because the “I” is neither identical to nor separate and unrelated to the aggregates, it absolutely cannot be inherently existent. Venerable Chodron said that often we can go through these points and not feel any different at the end. Why do we have to meditate on these points again and again, investigating them deeply before they begin to impact the way we interact with the world?
3. If the self existed in this truly existent way, as it appears, some problems would arise. Take some time to consider each:
- If the self were the same as the aggregates, asserting a self would be redundant. You could say “My mind is walking” or “My body is thinking,” because “I” and “my body” or “my mind” would be synonymous. We often feel we are our body and mind. Consider what would happen if that were really the case, if you were your body or your mind inherently.
 - If the self were the same as the aggregates, the person would be many or the aggregates would be one. If the self and the aggregates are one and the same, why is there one “I” and five aggregates? Are there five “I”s? One aggregate?
 - If the self were the same as the aggregates, the agent and the object would be the same. Normally, we would say that at the time of death, the person grasps at another body and is reborn, but if the agent (the person) and the object (the aggregates the person takes) are identical, then which is the agent and which is the object? They are the same.
 - If the self were the same as the aggregates, the person would inherently arise and disintegrate. An inherent “I” is not dependent on causes and conditions. If it arises, it cannot be coming from a previous continuity and if it ceases, it must cease entirely, because it is separate and unrelated to anything else. With inherent existence, your 1 year old body, your 10 year old body, your 20 year old body, etc would all be totally unrelated to each other. Look at some old pictures of yourself. Are you the same/identical as the person in the picture? Are you different, separate and unrelated?
 - If the self were separate and unrelated to the aggregates, recalling previous lives would be impossible because there would be no relationship between them. As was addressed in the Q&A, you also couldn’t remember anything in this life. You couldn’t study for an exam and pass it because the person who studied and the person who took the test would be completely unrelated.

- If the self were separate and unrelated to the aggregates, actions wouldn't bring results. If our current life was separate and unrelated from the previous life, we could not experience results of karma that we created in previous lives.
 - If the self were separate and unrelated to the aggregates, results we do experience could have been created by someone else. Yet, we do experience the result of our own actions, not those of others. There is a continuity and cause and effect does work.
4. Why is it that if something is inherently existent, it can only exist as inherently one (identical) or inherently different (separate and unrelated)? Why does conventional existence not have these same requirements? This is an important point, so take some time to really think about it. Why are these the only two options with inherent existence?
 5. Venerable Chodron said that when we look at these refutations, it seems laughable, but the idea is that if things really existed the way they appear to us, we would have to have these kinds of results. We have to look at the consequences in order to prove to ourselves that the way things appear are not the way they exist. How might seeing things as empty of inherent existence change the way you view and interact with the world?
 6. With a greater conviction that things do not exist in the way they appear, resolve to continue investigating these points both on the cushion and in your daily life as you interact with the world.

128 The Gomchen Lamrim 03-16-18:

Identifying inherent existence

1. Why is it that when we truly understand that others do not exist as they appear, our opinions and judgments about them disappear? Why does that understanding lead to having compassion for others?
2. What is meant by inherent existence in these teachings, and why does that leave only two options for the way a person relates to their aggregates (identical or separate and unrelated)? Why is there not this same limitation with conventional (dependent) existence?
3. Venerable Chodron said that the first point of the four point analysis is really the hardest. It's about becoming aware of how we perceive things to exist. Until we truly investigate this point deeply, the meditation is very intellectual and its hard for it to begin changing the way we think and interact with the world. Take some time now to reflect. Bring to mind a moment of strong emotion. How does the "I" appear to you in that moment? How are you holding yourself to exist in that moment?
4. Consider the example of the cake and how it comes into being: first you have the ingredients, which don't resemble the batter, which don't resemble the cake. Each seems distinct and if you didn't know better, you would think they are completely

unrelated. There is no findable cake in the ingredients, nor in the batter, and yet after putting together a collection of non-cake objects in a particular way, you can say you have a cake. After taking some time investigating the emptiness of inherent existence of the cake from the teaching, shift your mind to how the self also does not exist in this way, and yet it appears and functions.

5. Why doesn't a lack of inherent existence mean that things don't exist at all? If things don't exist inherently, how do they exist?

129 The Gomchen Lamrim 03-23-18:

Illusion-like appearances

1. Consider some of the things you say to yourself (i.e. I'm lazy. I contribute so much and no one appreciates me. I'm worthless. I'm so exhausted.). Take some time to really investigate the kinds of thoughts that go through your own mind. Notice how it all revolves around a big "I." Going through the exercises we've been learning in these teachings on emptiness, what is it that feels so solid? What can you point to that is a real self?
2. Once we have a strong "I," "mine" quickly follows (i.e. MY hoodie, MY child, etc). Reflect on this sense of "mine." When something becomes yours, does the object seem to change from its own side? What afflictions arise for you in relation to "mine" and how does that cause difficulty in your life?
3. In meditative equipoise on emptiness, a practitioner does not see conventional objects, only emptiness. When a practitioner comes *out* of meditation on emptiness, things appear to the mental consciousness as "illusion-like." The eye consciousness sees the conventional object, but the mental consciousness knows it doesn't exist in the way it appears. That does NOT mean that the object does not exist. Why? What is the danger of adhering to this wrong view of nihilism?
4. If we can recognize that a reflection in a mirror is like an illusion, why does that not mean we have realized the emptiness of inherent existence? How does studying the illusion-like appearance of a face in a mirror help us realize emptiness?
5. We often think the self arises from physical causes and conditions, our bodies the result of sperm and egg, all the food we've eaten, etc. The text, however, states that we arise from afflictions, karma, and so forth. Consider this point, how and why the true causes for this life are afflictions and karma.

130 The Gomchen Lamrim 03-30-18:

Dependent arising

1. Consider the point that the designated object and the basis of designation are not the same. Identify an object in your environment, then identify its basis of designation. Spend some time with this exercise both on and off the cushion.

2. Similarly, think about what your body is, what your mind is. What is the basis of designation for you? What is the body and mind composed of? What is it exactly that makes those things you? Really spend some time looking at how the basis of designation (your body and mind) is not the same as the designated object (you).
3. Why can't permanent phenomena like space, nirvana, and emptiness exist inherently? Spend some time going through a variety of implications if they did exist independent from everything else. Upon what are each of these (space, nirvana, and emptiness) dependent?
4. What is the difference in the terms "come into being" and "produced" in the context of this teaching? How it is that true cessations "come into being," but are not produced?
5. What are the three types of cause and effect? To which type of phenomena (permanent or impermanent) do they apply and why?
6. Venerable Chodron said that a correct understanding of emptiness and a complete one are not the same thing. Why is it that the analysis of emptiness doesn't give us the complete realization? What part does dependent arising play in the complete realization of emptiness?

131 The Gomchen Lamrim 04-06-18:

The correct view

- Consider the story that Venerable Chodron shared at the beginning of the teaching:
 - We are constantly striving for predictability, stability and permanence. We need this as children. In fact studies show that children who do not receive these don't do well later in life. Think about your childhood. Did your parents provide these? If you are a parent, do you strive to provide these for your children?
 - As adults, we never grow out of that need for predictability, stability, and permanence. Take some time to think about how this is true in your own life, how you strive for permanence, stability and predictability in your life. How much energy do you put into attaining these? In what kinds of things are you searching for these qualities and are these expectations realistic?
 - Consider that life in samsara is by its very nature impermanent, insecure, and unstable, and yet we continue to strive for these. What kinds of problems has striving for something unattainable brought you?
 - Finally, consider that the Dharma (truth, knowledge and wisdom) can be our security and reliability. Although sometimes the Dharma truths we study can make us uncomfortable, when we familiarize our minds with the Dharma (which is the way things truly exist), we can attain the very reliability and stability that we seek.
2. What is the difference between having the "correct view" and having the wisdom realizing emptiness? What is the order in which they are attained and why?

3. Venerable Chodron taught that on the basis of an object, it is both empty and a dependent arising. These two facts about a single object are not contradictory. In fact, the intent of the Buddha is for us to see these two as inseparable. Spend some time considering this, and why emptiness and dependent arising are complimentary.
4. What is the meaning of “when the analysis of the profound view is complete?” Of what two parts does the profound view consist that makes it complete?
5. Usually, we are taught that understanding appearances prevents nihilism and understanding emptiness prevents absolutism. In the *Three Principal Aspects of the Path*, however, the opposite is presented (dependent arising prevents absolutism and emptiness prevents nihilism). Why? What is Tsong Khapa helping us to understand?

132 The Gomchen Lamrim 04-13-18:

Review of serenity

1. What are the benefits of developing concentration, both in and out of meditation? How is concentration different from one-pointedness? Which is required for cultivating meditative stability and why?
2. How does abandoning sensual desires and cultivating contentment support the process of attaining meditative concentration? What can you begin to do in your own personal life, right now, to start the process of abandoning sensual desire and cultivating contentment?
3. Why is it important to cultivate the Buddhist worldview before we do in-depth meditation on serenity.
4. Spend time thinking about some of the benefits of developing serenity below. How might experiencing these benefits help you? How might they allow you to benefit others?
 - Our virtuous activities are more focused and have a stronger effect on our mind.
 - It is the foundation upon which we develop insight.
 - It helps us attain the super-knowledges (supernormal powers, divine ear, understand others’ minds, recollect past lives, divine eye, destruction of the pollutants).
5. What is the danger in having the super-knowledges if not properly grounded in the Buddhist worldview?
6. Although the Buddha suggested different objects of meditation to different people according to their dispositions, there are distinct advantages to meditating on the image of the Buddha himself. Consider them. How might these advantages help you in your own life?
 - Helps us create merit.

- Helps us learn about the qualities of the Buddha's body, speech, and mind.
- We are more able to call the Buddha's image to mind at the time of death, allowing us to take refuge and have a calm mind.
- Inspires the mind in refuge.
- Contributes to other practices we do.

133 The Gomchen Lamrim 04-20-18:

Review: Nine stages of sustained attention

1. The first stage of sustained attention (placing the mind) is about identifying the object of meditation and keeping the mind there. With that in mind, spend some time considering the imagery used to represent this first stage: the monk represents the meditator, the rope represents mindfulness, the hook represents introspective awareness, the elephant represents the mind itself, the monkey represents scattering, the flame (seen throughout the graphic) represents energy, the dark color of the elephant represents laxity, and the dark color of the monkey represents agitation. What does this imagery say about the state of our mind and the antidotes we need to employ to cultivate this level of concentration?
2. In the second stage of sustained attention (continual placement) we're able to keep the mind on the object a little longer, and begin to notice when we're on the object and when we're distracted. With that in mind, spend some time considering the imagery used to represent this second stage: the white spots on the heads of the monkey and elephant, the fruit represents objects of taste, the cloth represents object of tactile sensation, the fire (which is still quite big at this time) represents energy. What does this imagery say about the state of our mind at this stage, what we have attained, and the obstacles we are still working to overcome?
3. In the third stage of sustained attention (repeated placement) we recognize distraction when it happens and can put the mind back on the object. With that in mind, spend some time considering the imagery used to represent this third stage: the meditator has the rope around the elephants neck, the cymbals represent attachment to objects of sound and yet the animals are looking away from them towards the meditator, the fire is smaller, the rabbit appears (representing subtle laxity). What does this imagery say about the state of our mind at this stage, what we have attained, and the obstacles we are still working to overcome?
4. In the fourth stage of sustained attention (close placement), we are familiar with the object and can set our mind on it; the mind is very stable on the object and we no longer lose it. With that in mind, spend some time considering the imagery used to represent this stage: the monk is much closer to the elephant now, the animals are half light and half dark, there's a perfume conch representing attachment to objects of smell. What does this imagery say about the state of our mind at this stage, what we have attained, and the obstacles we are still working to overcome?

5. In the fifth stage of sustained attention (taming), the mind is tame and can stay on the object almost continuously. With that in mind, spend some time considering the imagery used to represent this stage: for the first time, the monk is in front of the elephant and the monkey is behind the elephant, the animals are all looking at the monk, the monk has a hook on the elephant's head (representing that the meditator has generated introspective awareness). What does this imagery say about the state of our mind at this stage, what we have attained, and the obstacles we are still working to overcome?
6. In the sixth stage of sustained attention (pacifying), all dislike for meditative stabilization is overcome and the meditator is completely certain that distractions should be eliminated. With that in mind, spend some time considering the imagery used to represent this stage: the monk no longer has to look at the animals to lead them, a mirror is above that represents attachment to objects of sight, the rabbit is gone, and the monk still has the hook but it is no longer on the elephant. What does this imagery say about the state of our mind at this stage, what we have attained, and the obstacles we are still working to overcome?
7. In the seventh stage of sustained attention (thoroughly pacifying), the mind is completely pacified, no effort is needed to stay on the object, and it is easy for the meditator to suppress any affliction that arises both on and off the cushion. With that in mind, spend some time considering the imagery used to represent this stage: the monk is empty handed (no longer has rope or hook in hand), the monk is once again behind the elephant, there is no fire, the monkey is still there, and the legs of the elephant are still dark. What does this imagery say about the state of our mind at this stage, what we have attained, and the obstacles we are still working to overcome?
8. In the eighth stage of sustained attention (making single-pointed), the mind stays on the object without interruption with only a little effort at the beginning of the session. With that in mind, spend some time considering the imagery used to represent this stage: the monk is in front and pointing gently to the elephant, the elephant is completely white, and the monkey has disappeared. What does this imagery say about the state of our mind at this stage, what we have attained, and the obstacles we are still working to overcome?
9. In the ninth stage of sustained attention (placement in equipoise), meditation flows quite naturally, just the wish to meditate is sufficient, and the senses no longer respond to stimuli. With that in mind, spend some time considering the imagery used to represent this stage: the monk meditates, the elephant is sleeping, and there is a line coming out of the monk's chest leading to further attainments after stage 9. What does this imagery say about the state of our mind at this stage, what we have attained, and the obstacles we are still working to overcome?
10. The final image represents what happens after we complete the ninth stage: special pliancy that comes with supreme joy and bliss, followed by the attainment of serenity. Spend some time considering the imagery here: the flying monk, the monk riding on the back of the elephant, the monk holding a sword (representing insight), reaching out to cut the two rainbows (representing afflictive obscurations)

and mental distortions), and the fire reappears. What does this say about the state of our mind at this stage and what we are trying to achieve?

11. Venerable Damcho said that when we meditate repeatedly on the benefits of doing something, our mind naturally goes in that direction. Consider the benefits of concentration at each of these levels, how they would benefit you and others, and resolve to meditate on these benefits in order to guide your mind towards cultivating concentration in your own life.

134 The Gomchen Lamrim 05-04-18:

Review of five faults and eight antidotes

1. At the beginning of the review, Venerable Samten shared two pictures from Aleppo Syria and led a reflection likening the dire situation in Syria to our own dire situation in samsara. Do you often get lulled into complacency, forgetting that samsara is a place from which you're trying to escape? What conditions do you have in your life that make it seem like samsara is pleasant? What would it take for you to be as desperate to get out of samsara as the Syrians are to escape the war zone that is their country?
2. Consider: Lama Tsong Khapa said that an uncontrolled mind cannot serve as a foundation for wisdom. In other words, cultivating serenity is the basis on which we develop insight and attain the path. Why is this so?
3. Why is it important not to jump into serenity practice without training?
4. Venerable Samten said that if you don't know the benefits of a practice, you won't put energy into it. Consider some of the benefits of cultivating serenity. Which are you most drawn to and why?
 - You will have the desire and ability to engage in virtue and avoid non-virtue.
 - It is the basis for a peaceful and enlightened mind.
 - You will be happy, content, and full of delight.
 - Your body will be blissful.
 - On the basis of serenity, you can cultivate insight into the nature of reality.
 - You attain supernormal powers that assist you in benefitting others.
5. In cultivating serenity, we face five obstacles. It is important to know these, as well as their antidotes, in advance so that we're ready when they arise. Consider each:
 - **Laziness** – there are three types of laziness (procrastination, the laziness of busyness, discouragement). Consider how each of these plays a part in keeping you from your meditation practice. How might you use each of the four antidotes to laziness to overcome it (faith and confidence, aspiration, joyous effort, pliancy)? Be specific with examples from your own life.
 - **Forgetting the object of meditation** – You get to the cushion, put your mind on the object and then you're off, imagining something else. Do you find this often is the case in your meditation sessions? The antidote is mindfulness, a

mental factor cultivated through practice. What can you do to practice mindfulness both on and off the cushion?

- **Laxity** (like being spaced out) and **excitement** (not being able to take the mind off attachment). Consider some of the conditions that allow these to arise and disturb your meditation session: not guarding the senses, eating too much, sleeping too much, lacking effort, not enjoying or caring about meditation. Which of these are most problematic for you? Why is that time off the cushion interferes with time on the cushion? The antidote is introspective awareness, like a little spy that is always there watching for laxity and excitement to arise. What can you do to strengthen this factor of introspective awareness?
 - **Not applying the antidote** – You notice your mind is going off the object and you just don't apply the antidote. Have you noticed this resistance in your own mind? The antidote is to apply the correct antidote. What can you do in your own life to reinforce the importance and benefit of applying antidotes when one of the faults arises?
 - **Over-applying the antidote** – You've removed the fault, but continue to apply the antidote (like continuing to reprimand a child even after they are behaving). The antidote is to stop applying the antidote. How have you seen this fault in your life?
6. Recognizing that these faults are holding you back, keeping you stuck in samsara, resolve to make great effort to identify them in your life and apply the antidotes quickly.

135 The Gomchen Lamrim 05-11-18:

Three kinds of dependent arising

1. What are some ways that a strong sense of "I" is triggered in your own mind? Why is challenging the appearance of that "I" such an important part of the path?
2. Spend some time thinking of your afflictions and karma as like clouds, dreams, illusions, and emanations. What does thinking about them in this way do for your mind? How might actually seeing things as illusion-like change the way you interact with the world?
3. Consider the sequence of understanding dependent arising and emptiness: understanding causal dependence, then mutual dependence, then dependent designation, then emptiness, and finally that things do not appear in the way they exist. Why do our realizations unfold in this way? Why is it so important to understand that these realizations develop slowly and gradually over time?
4. Why does Tsong Khapa stress the importance of first studying conventional reality before emptiness? What is the danger in not following this advice?
5. Causal dependence is the first level of understanding dependent arising and is common to all the Buddhist traditions, as well as all the schools and vehicles. Why is it so important to avoid skipping over causal dependence to focus on the

more subtle levels of dependent arising? How might spending time cultivating it in your mind help transform the way you relate to things?

6. With dependent designation of mutual establishment (relational dependence) we're talking about how things become what they are in relation to something else. Venerable Chodron said it can be very interesting to meditate on this using the identities you hold for yourself, the things that you *think* you are. Take some time to do this – select some of the identities you hold (race, gender, religion, educational level, social status, nationality, etc) and examine how they are all established in relationship to something else; that none of them exist in and of themselves. How does it change your feeling for who you think you are?

136 The Gomchen Lamrim 05-18-18:

Examples of mutual dependence

1. Venerable Chodron began the teaching inviting us to examine our refuge, which is taken on the basis of having concern about being reborn in the lower realms, recognizing the qualities of the Three Jewels, and (for Mahayana practitioners) compassion. Consider:
 - We take refuge at the beginning of all the teachings and sadhanas, but do you take the time to think about these three factors?
 - Are you thinking about avoiding only the suffering of this life or do you have the perspective of future lives as well?
 - When you have a problem, do you turn to the Three Jewels for a remedy or do you turn to the worldly distraction (refrigerator, entertainment, shopping)?
 - Resolve to take time to think about the causes of refuge in your reflections as well as when you recite the verses before the teachings and in your meditation sessions.
2. The first type of dependence is “causal dependence,” how effects depend on their causes. This is something we just accept in life – that you have to create the causes in order to have the effect – however, we don't always act in a way that accords with this understanding. Venerable Chodron said that taking the time to meditate on causal dependence can be quite powerful. Consider:
 - Why do you think there is a disconnect in what we know intellectually about causal dependence and how we act?
 - Do a life review. Are there experiences in your life where you desired something without recognizing that you had to create the causes for it?
 - What aspirations do you have about the future? What causes need to be created in order to experience those results?
 - How does a deeper understanding of the emptiness of inherent existence help us better understand causal dependence?
3. The second type of dependence is “dependent designation of mutual establishment,” that things are posited in relationship to other things (i.e. there is short because there is long). Think of some of the identities that you hold

strongly. These might include your race, gender, ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, position in a family or in a job, etc. For each identity, consider:

- You only hold that identity in relationship to other factors. What are some of those other factors?
 - When an identity is challenged, what afflictions arise in your own mind? What negativities do these afflictions lead you to create?
 - How does it make you feel that who you think you are is dependent on things that aren't you? Does it change the way you relate to that identity?
4. The third types of dependence is “dependent designation of mere designation by term and concept in dependence on a basis of designation.” This is the subtlest type of dependent arising. Reflect:
- Identify an object in your surroundings and examine it. Differentiate the basis of designation (the various parts that are put together in a certain way for the object to exist) from the designated object (what we are calling the object). For instance, the example in the teaching was a thermos. The designated object is “thermos” and the basis of designation consists of all the parts that make up the object we call “thermos.”
 - Consider how the designated object does not exist from its own side but only in dependence on its parts, upon which we call it that name (which society has previously agreed on as the name and function). For instance “thermos” exists because we have collectively agreed to call anything that has those particular parts in that particular order and keeps liquids at a certain temperature a “thermos.”
 - Begin to mentally dissect the object, removing the parts one by one. At what point does it cease being the object? Where did the object go when the parts are disassembled? How can it be that an object is made up of many parts that are not the object itself?
 - If things existed inherently, it would have that name and only that name. It couldn't change or be affected by other things. You could find the object in its parts. You could find exactly what that name refers to and draw a line around it. But when we start searching for what a name actually refers to, we can't find it. Take some time with this, investigating things in your environment.
 - Practice this exercise both on and off the cushion. How might habituating your mind to this way of thinking change the way you relate to the world around you?

137 The Gomchen Lamrim 05-25-18:

Review of three kinds of dependent arising

1. Spend some time differentiating between direct perception (perceiving the raw data of objects with your visual, auditory, gustatory, olfactory, and tactile consciousnesses) and perception through the conceptual mind (what you are thinking or remembering about those objects). Reflect on your experience:

- Does the conceptual image you have match the detail of the direct perception? For instance, when you're eating, pay attention to what you think about the food, what your expectations are. Then compare that with the actual experience of the taste.
 - While the conceptual mind is good for learning, it can trap us into doing things we don't want to do. What afflictions arise due to your conceptual thought about an object or experience? How might those afflictions prompt you to act contrary to your aspirations?
 - Resolve to make space in your mind for this kind of investigation on a regular basis.
2. Causal dependence addresses how effects depend on causes. Even though we know about causal dependence and live our lives more or less in alignment with it, we're still surprised when things change. Why do you think this is so? What can you do to deepen your awareness of causal dependence?
 3. Mutual dependence addresses how everything we see is designated and comes into existence dependent on other things (long and short, big and small, parent and child, car and car parts...). Reflect on some other examples of this in your life, perhaps some identities that you hold.
 4. Mere dependent designation addresses how things don't have any essence that makes them what they are; that they become what they are because the conceptual mind puts the parts together, gives them a name, and assigns a function. Reflect:
 - Things appear to us as if they have an essence that makes them what they are. Using some of the examples from the teaching, or some of your own, take some time to consider how there is nothing inside the object or person that makes them that thing, that in dependence on its parts being together in a particular way, we label them.
 - Expand your investigation now to investigate your sense of "I." "I" came about simply because there is a body and mind, and on the basis of having some particular arrangement and relationship, we give the name "I." But when we look through the basis of designation for the "I," we can't find anything that is "I." Take some time with this.
 - Someone else wouldn't call you "I." They would call you "YOU." So you can see how the object depends on how we conceptualize and label, but nowhere IN that basis of designation is the object we are designating. Again, take some time with this.
 - Consider: The point of this exercise is to recognize that there is a mistaken appearance. We, like everything else we perceive, appear to exist from our own side, but do not.
 - Resolve to spend some time differentiating between the basis of designation and the designated object. Does this make you experience the object or think about yourself in a different way than before?

138 The Gomchen Lamrim 06-01-18:

The two truths

1. Venerable Chodron taught that it's important for us to have awareness of both truths: ultimate and veiled. Veiled truths, though they do not exist the way they appear to us, are necessary to function in daily life, interact with others, and learn the Dharma. Ultimate truth on the other hand shows us the ultimate mode of how things exist. Take some time to think about the differences between these two truths and why we are taught to cultivate awareness of both.
2. In the context of these teachings, what do "false" and "true" mean?
3. Consider that veiled truths are called such because they are perceived by a mind that is veiled by ignorance. The veil does not exist in the object, but rather is an obscuration on our own mind. What does this veil of ignorance compel the mind to perceive that does not exist?
4. What is a conventional reliable cognizer? Make some examples. Why can they not perceive the ultimate mode of existence? Why is it important to have them even though they cannot perceive ultimate truth?
5. What is the only existent that is not a veiled truth? Why?
6. What is the difference in how an arya perceives a veiled truth and how we as ordinary beings do?
7. What does it mean that ultimate truths do not exist ultimately. What are ultimate truths dependent on? Why is it that even though emptiness exists conventionally, it is not a conventional truth?
8. Consider that just because something appears to a veiled knower doesn't make it a veiled truth. Venerable Chodron used the example of a lamp: a truly existent lamp may appear true to a consciousness grasping at true existence, but it is not a veiled truth because a truly existent lamp does not exist. The lamp, however, *does* exist and is a veiled truth. Make more examples of this. Practice differentiating between what does exist (veiled truths) and what does not exist (your perception of truly existent objects). Why is it so important to make this distinction?

139 The Gomchen Lamrim 06-08-18:

Review of cultivating insight into emptiness

1. Why is it that the wisdom realizing emptiness is the only thing that overcomes samsara?
2. Venerable Semkye said that it's important for us to understand that because of our self-grasping ignorance, we create suffering for ourselves. What is self-grasping ignorance and what are some examples from your own life of ways that it has led to problems?

3. What does it mean that things appear truly existent? Why is this appearance false? If it is helpful, use the example of being born with sunglasses on that Venerable Semkye discussed in the teaching.
4. How do the views of the mere “I” differ between the Cittamatra, the Svatantrika Madhyamaka, and the Prasangika Madhyamaka tenet systems? Refute the first two.
5. Consider the analogy of the knapweed that Venerable Semkye used in the review. How is picking a weed like eliminating the root of samsara in your mind?
6. Consider the causal chain that fuels samsara: grasping at true existence gives rise to distorted attention which exaggerates the good or bad qualities of an object, which gives rise to afflictions, which gives rise to action/karma, which leads to all the results of the dukkha of samsara. Think through each step and why one leads to another. Why, when ignorance is removed, does the entire chain stop?
7. Consider the analogy of seeing a face in the mirror. How is seeing the appearance of a face in a mirror similar to seeing the appearance of an inherently existent person? How does each appear? What is each dependent on? How can you use this analogy to start chipping away at ignorance in your own mind?

140 The Gomchen Lamrim 06-15-18:

Real and unreal

1. What do the terms “real” and “unreal” mean in the context of veiled truths? How does the Svatantrika and Prasangika tenet systems differ in how they describe phenomena using these terms?
2. Spend some time contemplating that from the Prasangika view, *all* veiled truths are unreal/false. What does thinking about things in this way do for your mind?
3. Why is it that a conventional reliable cognizer can refute both a permanent, partless, independent self and a self-sufficient, substantially existent self, but cannot refute an inherently existent self?
4. An ultimate truth exists the way it appears. It is an object found by a reliable cognizer in the wisdom of meditative equipoise and is the final mode of existence of all phenomena. What phenomena exists in this way?
5. What contradictions arise for those who say emptiness is non-existent? What contradictions arise for those who say emptiness is inherently existent? To which of the two extremes do these views fall?
6. What does it mean that, although an object cannot be found by an arya’s wisdom of meditative equipoise, this doesn’t mean the object doesn’t exist at all? What is in the purview of conventional and ultimate consciousnesses?

141 The Gomchen Lamrim 06-22-18:

The relationship between the two truths

1. How do the Svatantrikas divide truths into “real” and “unreal?” Refute this from the Prasangika view. How would Prasangikas then divide truths into “real” and “unreal” *in relation to the world*? Why is the distinction “in relation to the world” important?
2. What does it mean that the two truths are one nature, but nominally different? Think of some examples of objects that are one nature, but nominally different, and those that are not of one nature. What is the difference between being identical and being of one nature?
3. The two truths are established by two different types of minds. What type of mind establishes conventional existence and what establishes its emptiness?
4. What does it mean that something can’t bear ultimate analysis?
5. Why is it so important to study conventional truths before ultimate truths? How does that prepare the mind and prevent us from falling to the extreme of nihilism?
6. Why is it that although we study conventional truths first, we only know them as veiled *after* we realize emptiness?
7. What is the purpose of learning about so many different types of emptiness if, when you have a direct realization of emptiness, you perceive the emptiness of all things without being able to differentiate between them?

142 The Gomchen Lamrim 06-29-18:

The object of negation

1. In the four point analysis, the first point is ascertaining the object of negation. Consider:
 - What is a negation? Recall some of the examples from the teaching and then come up with some of your own. In this analysis, what is it that we’re negating?
 - Why is it that if we don’t correctly identify the object of negation, the rest of the analysis can’t follow?
 - What is the result of negating too much or too little?
 - Venerable Tarpa said that whatever appears to us is mixed together with the object of negation, that we can’t separate them because the ignorance from our own minds pollutes our perception. Then, on the basis of that mistaken perception, we cling to these distorted appearances, relating to them as existing inherently. Spend some time thinking through this process. What problems has viewing the world in this way caused for you in your life?
 - At the same time, it’s important to understand that things do exist, but they only exist as a combination of the basis of designation and the mind that

imputes it as a designated object. Spend some time thinking about this. Does it seem strange to think about the world and yourself in this way? How might this change the way you relate to others and your experience in the world?

2. The second point in the four point analysis is ascertaining the pervasion. In other words, we have to reach a conclusion about where this object of negation is.
 - If the self exists, it has to be identical to the aggregates or separate and unrelated to them. Why is there no third possibility?
 - Why with inherent existence do we only have these two choices?
3. The third point in the four point analysis is to ascertain freedom from being one, determining if the object of negation is identical to the object.
 - Consider some of the contradictions that arise if the self was one with (identical to) the aggregates: since there are five aggregates, there would be five selves; all the individual parts of the body and mind, since they are not the same, would be individual selves; with some parts of our mind wholesome and some not, some selves would need to be extinguished and others nurtured. Spend some time thinking of other natural contradictions.
 - Why is it so important to do this analysis, mentally dissecting the body and mind, determining that the self isn't there in the aggregates?
4. The fourth point in the four point analysis is to ascertain freedom from being many, determining if the object of negation is completely unrelated to the object.

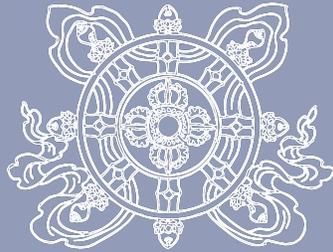
Consider that if the self had nothing to do with the body and mind, you could email it to someone, you could identify it apart from the body and mind, we should be able to find it. Spend some time thinking of other natural contradictions.

5. When searching for glasses in a two room cabin, once you realize they aren't there, you are left with the "absence" of the glasses. Similarly, when we search for, and cannot find, the inherently existing self either in or apart from the aggregates, we are left with the absence of inherent existence of the self.
 - Why can we only come to this conclusion through mediation and not simply from listening to teachings?
 - What is the importance of serenity in our meditation on emptiness?
 - How might you relate to the world differently with the realization of emptiness? What benefits come with this realization?

143 The Gomchen Lamrim 07-13-18:

How to meditate on insight

1. What does it mean to be the same and different in this context? Use the example of having one and then multiple thermoses to help define these terms. Now make up some of your own examples.
2. What does it mean to be “one nature” with an object? Describe why veiled and ultimate truths are not one, but they are one nature. Are the seed and the sprout one? Are they one nature? Permanent and uncompounded? Make other examples to better investigate these terms.
3. Investigate the difference between truths and existents:
 - What does it mean to be conventionally or ultimately existent? What exists conventionally? Ultimately? Does emptiness exist conventionally or ultimately, and why?
 - By contrast, what does it mean to be a conventional or ultimate truth? Make examples of each kind of truth.
4. Why does an object’s not being able to bear ultimate analysis NOT mean that it is negated by that same reasoning? What is in the purview of ultimate analysis and why? Explain how the object and the ultimate nature of the object are one nature, but perceived by different cognizers.
5. What is meant by saying that emptiness is beyond comprehension? Why is thinking about emptiness conceptually an important part of realizing it?
6. Why is it that serenity and insight are often practiced separately? How do we combine these two to bring them into union?



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Creating Peace in a Chaotic World