

Transforming Problems Into The Dharma Path

by Thubten Gyatso



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Buddha Dharma Education Association Inc.

Transforming Problems

Into The Path

by

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DEDICATION

BY THE MERITS OF PRINTING OF THIS BOOK,

MAY ALL SPIRITUAL TEACHERS TEACHING TRUE PATHS TO ENLIGHTENMENT ESPECIALLY HIS HOLINESS THE FOURTEENTH DALAI LAMA, TENZIN GYATSO, LAMA RIBUR RINPOCHE, LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE AND LAMA OSEL RINPOCHE, HAVE LONG AND HEALTHY LIVES AND CONTINUE TO BENEFIT SENTIENT BEINGS.

MAY ALL THE WISHES AND ASPIRATIONS OF ALL OUR SPONSORS AND BENEFACTORS BE FULFILLED ACCORDING TO THE HOLY DHARMA.

MAY ALL SENTIENT BEINGS HAVE HAPPINESS AND ITS CAUSES
MAY ALL SENTIENT BEINGS BE FREE OF SUFFERING AND ITS CAUSES
MAY ALL SENTIENT BEINGS NOT BE SEPARATED FROM SORROWLESS BLISS
MAY ALL SENTIENT BEINGS ABIDE IN EQUANIMITY, BE FREE OF BIAS,
ATTACHMENT AND ANGER

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



THUBTEN GYATSO was born in Australia in 1943. He graduated from the University of Melbourne in 1968, and worked as a medical doctor in New Guinea, England and Australia. After studying with Tibetan monks at Kopan Monastery in Nepal, he established a clinic there and performed many retreats. In 1979 he gave a one-month course in Lam Rim at Kopan, and was appointed spiritual director at the Tara Institute. Gyatso was sent to France in 1981 to establish the Nalanda Monastery, where he remained for six years.

At the request of Lama Zopa Rinpoche, he was Spiritual Director at Valrayana Institute in Sydney, served at the Tara Institute, then as Spiritual Director at the Taipei Centre before travelling as a visiting teacher to Hong Kong, New Zealand and Australia. In 1995, he established the Thubten Shedrup Ling monastery near Melbourne. Gyatso will visit FPMT centres around the world as visiting teacher in 1999.

ILLUMINATING THE PATH...

Gyatso teaches in a refreshingly modern style how to turn everyday fears and problems into opportunities to learn and develop spiritually. In four talks given during the month of August 1997, he shared techniques such as:

- dealing with anger in ourselves and in others
- overcoming fear of problems
- taking control of our future
- cultivating compassion



TRANSFORMING
PROBLEMS

INTO THE PATH

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Transforming Problems

Into The Dharma Path

THese lessons will help us to understand how to transform both adverse and happy situations into the Dharma Path with skill, to make them worthwhile and beneficial to ourselves and others.

Traditionally, we begin the talk by cultivating pure motivation, since we are going to participate in the activity of discussing Dharma. So we prepare with recitations for generating pure motivation, of wishing to attain full Enlightenment, for the benefit of all beings, and also with the prayer of Taking Refuge. [Prayers and recitation]

Now, the teachings that we are going to discuss are considered to be very precious. The whole Path, all of the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha, leads towards the understanding of our situation in the world, by which I mean understanding how we relate to others.

Especially knowing we have a great connection with each other, that in previous lives we have been very close to each other. We have experienced kindness from all other living beings, in so many ways — when others have been our parents, our husbands and wives, our teachers. They have looked after us so much. Each individual is merely part of the great universal family of sentient beings — living beings with minds.

Last Thursday, there was a question, “What about the plants? What happens when plants die? Are they part of our sentient world as well?”

The Buddha explained that although plants live and die and reproduce, they do not possess mind or consciousness. So, what we possess as animals and humans is very unique. It is the phenomenon of consciousness or mind itself. And, within our minds, there is great potential.

THE NATURE OF MIND IS PURE

The essence of the mind of every living creature is pure. Even the most harmful human, or the most ugly and scary animals like scorpions and snakes have mind and the essence of their MINDS is pure. Which means that the causes of suffering — hatred and anger, selfishness, greed, miserliness and attachment — none of these disturbing emotions are inherently the nature of our minds. They are superficial. They are temporary. They can be eliminated. This is something precious, a fact which we really should rejoice about. When we truly comprehend that the nature of our mind is pure, and that the unhappiness and the causes of unhappiness are superficial, we can actually be free from them.

So many of us feel that our lives are hopeless. We feel caught up in situations where we have no control. This unhappiness increases and there become apparently fewer and fewer avenues for establishing peace and contentment in our minds. We become disenchanted with life — with our family, our work and even ourselves.

This happens because we believe that our minds are concrete, that the situation is solid and unchangeable. But that is not true. No matter what our situation is — how bad it is, what terrible thing has happened to us — we are not forced to suffer. We are not compelled to be unhappy. The only thing that maintains our unhappiness is confusion, a lack of understanding in our own minds, not knowing our full potential and the reality of the mind.

THE REAL CAUSES OF UNHAPPINESS

When we understand that the real causes of unhappiness exist within our minds — the way we see things — then, by changing the way we view ourselves and the way we view the world, we are able to transform our existence into happiness. It is possible.

So, in order to take advantage of and realize this pure nature of

our minds, we need to understand the causes of disturbance. How do they actually operate to generate unhappiness?

Perhaps I can start with the nature of the mind itself.

THE NATURE OF THE MIND

Mind and consciousness are synonyms. The underlying nature of mind is awareness — the phenomenon of being aware, of experiencing things, through our five senses. We can talk about five types of mind related to our senses.

With our eyes, we experience colours and shapes. A camera can record colours and shapes, but we cannot say that the camera is aware. The camera does not experience the colours and shapes like our mind does. It does not know. We are much more clever than cameras. When we see colours and shapes, we automatically understand with that awareness what it is that is appearing to our mind.

The physical eye organs and the brain are necessary as the basis of eye consciousness; there is no real difference between our eyes and our brains and the emulsion on a photographic film.

The electro-chemical change occurs both in the photographic film and in our retina, but that is not mind. The activity of the brain is not awareness, but it is directly related to awareness. Our awareness, our consciousness, is based on the activity of our nervous system and our sense organs.

If we see something pleasant, we feel happy. If we see something unpleasant, we feel unhappy. There are feelings associated with eye consciousness. These feelings of happiness and unhappiness are intangible, but they exist. However, they are in our mind, they are not in our brain, although the activity of the brain underlies them. Consciousness is a separate entity to the physical world. A camera does not feel happy when it records a pleasant scene.

BODY AND MIND

Each human being is a unit composed of two main energies: physical energy and the mental energy of awareness. This is a fundamental point in Buddhism — that we have these two qualities, our body and mind, which are inter-dependent, yet different.

The consciousness, awareness, feelings and knowledge are not the product of atoms or molecules. They are entirely different. Similarly, just with our mind, purely from consciousness itself, it is not possible to create a physical world, physical things. Because they are different, they are fundamentally different to consciousness.

Awareness or mind is what we describe, in Buddhist terms, as formless. But it clearly exists. We can describe our eye consciousness in great detail. Similarly, we have ear consciousness. When different sounds occur, we have different emotions, different feelings associated with the sounds that we hear. The same goes for our senses of smell, taste and touch.

The five senses are five separate types of awareness because they are associated with particular objects. The eyes do not hear sounds, the ears do not smell aromas. The objects are quite different, but they are all types of consciousness.

MENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS

There is a sixth type of consciousness, which we call mental consciousness. This is the realm of our thoughts, our ideas, our concepts — the thinking mind. This is actually the dominant consciousness. Usually, when we go about our daily life, our five senses are bringing experience of the world which is reported to the sixth sense, the mental consciousness. We contemplate, we think about what it is that we are experiencing and we make decisions in our mental consciousness. So it is very active, the thinking active aspect of our mind that is this mental consciousness. For ourselves, our mental consciousness

operates as thought patterns when we are awake, and at night it produces dreams. Dreams are experiences within the mental consciousness itself. Although we see things and touch things in dreams, it is not actually happening with the visual consciousness, because the eyes are closed and the senses have gone to sleep. Our mental consciousness is doing all of this. Mental consciousness has the capacity to act at a subtle level, in dreams. It acts on an even more subtle level when we experience dying.

There is a series of progressively more and more subtle consciousness which are part of the mental consciousness. Meditators, the Indian yogis and yoginis, meditate with their mental consciousness. That is the area of our mind that we work on when we follow the spiritual Path.

THE TWO TYPES OF MEDITATION

There are two types of meditation. The first is analytic meditation, where we think about the meanings of the teachings. It is as if we have heard some instructions and so we try and make things very quiet and still, and contemplate the meaning of what we have heard.

Then there is concentration meditation. This is when, through the power of mindfulness, we generate single-pointed concentration. This is done with the mental consciousness, which is able to focus and hold a mental object in an uninterrupted way. Traditionally, we generate concentration by meditating on an image of the Buddha. We look at a painting or a statue and we become very familiar with the appearance of Buddha. In our mind's eye, we establish the image and we hold that very still with our mental consciousness. Because it is a mental picture, we are still working in the sphere of thought. This mental image of the Buddha is an image established by our thought activity.

The idea of concentration meditation is to break through the

barrier of mental images and to see things directly. Direct perception is to see things as they are, without changing them through our concepts.

An example: Perhaps we have never been to London. We can study all about London, look at photographs, read the history, and learn a tremendous amount about London from books. Far more than the people in London know. We can be experts. But, when we take the plane and fly to London, there is a great difference when we experience London with our eyes, our ears, our senses. Then we understand so much more, do we not? Because we have the direct experience of our senses and not just the mental image of London, even though the latter is correct.

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

Our mental consciousness, which is pre-occupied with thinking, has the capacity to see things directly, just like our eye consciousness, and what we want to look at with our mental consciousness is the Buddha's teaching of the Four Noble Truths. That all phenomena, which arise from contaminated causes and conditions, are in the nature of suffering, or Dukkha.

That the cause of this suffering is contaminated karma and mental afflictions—ignorance, attachment, hatred, miserliness, jealousy and so on. That is the Second Noble Truth, the Cause.

The Third, that there can be true cessation of suffering, as demonstrated by the Buddha's own attainment.

And fourthly, the True Path which leads to that cessation, which is the Path of wisdom—the opposite to the confusion of not knowing reality.

This wisdom sees that conditioned things are impermanent, that they change moment by moment. Since birth, we have in our minds the misconception that we are permanent, that we will last forever.

And the people around us and the objects we enjoy will last forever.

We also have the opposite conception regarding suffering. We have the misconception that things are intrinsically pleasurable. That our bodies are intrinsically agents of happiness, and people and friends intrinsically give us happiness. That the objects of sensory desire, the colours and shapes, the things we experience through our five senses, are intrinsically pleasant.

We also have the misconception that we exist in our own right, which means that each of us is an individual unto ourselves. Now, Buddha explained selflessness, which means that if we check why in reality, we are empty of existing from our own side, existing from our own nature.

There are three points with regard to the First Noble Truth, True Suffering. All things which arise from contaminated karma and afflictions are in the nature of suffering. Our bodies are in the nature of suffering. The people to whom we become attached are in the nature of suffering. Attachment itself, which we call love, in a worldly sense, is suffering. Some people might not agree with that.

Also, these things are impermanent. They change—they will never last, but the mind grasps at permanence. Also, these things do not exist in their own right. But we grasp at them, to be existing in their own right.

So, we have conceptions already. We are born with fundamentally wrong conceptions about ourselves and the world. Why are we born with them? Because we died with them in previous lives.

Mind came from the previous life, as did the minds of all beings within the Wheel of Life. So in our meditative concentration, when we gain single-pointed concentration on the image of the Buddha, the mind is very powerful. We now turn that concentrated mind towards these aspects of the First Noble Truth.

We turn our mind, in meditation, into understanding of suffering, into understanding of impermanence, and into understanding

of selflessness. The correct understanding is generated by analyzing and thinking about the teachings of Buddha.

BREAKING THROUGH MENTAL PICTURES

Still, this misunderstanding is just a belief, still an idea. We have an idea of what selflessness means, an idea of true suffering, an idea of impermanence. What the meditator does now, in this powerful meditation, is to break through these mental pictures into direct perception. We have an idea of London, which is useful and good. But when we go to London, our understanding is greatly increased by our direct experience of London.

So, now we are going to London in our meditation, we're going to impermanence, we're going to selflessness, to true suffering. And we see it directly with our mental consciousness.

Do you understand the difference? That is mental direct perception, the mental consciousness directly seeing reality. The aim of the Buddhist Path is to retain such clear direct awareness, until with further and further meditation, eventually all our thinking stops. Even when we are not in meditation, our mental consciousness sees reality. We see each other as relative beings, but we understand that we are all empty, we are all impermanent and that things arising from contaminated karma and afflictions are in the nature of suffering.

When we have that, we have a different name. We are now called Buddha. (Laughter). So, each of us has the potential to become Buddha. By following the process that I have just outlined we remove the confusion, wrong ideas, wrong conception of ourselves and the world.

And secondly, we break through even our correct conceptions, by seeing beings as they are, purely and directly. And so our minds can never ever be troubled, because troubles begin in the mind. They begin by wrongly thinking about ourselves and others, by mistaken

views of ourselves and others. But the process that I have just explained completely breaks through these wrong ideas. Therefore, suffering does not occur at all. We have achieved the Third Noble Truth, the true cessation of suffering. So important.

BUDDHA NATURE

I explain this, in order to emphasize that we all possess what is called the Buddha Nature, the potential to become enlightened. This is how we can become enlightened. It is a jewel that we all possess. That alone should remove all troubles, just knowing that, knowing that there is a way out.

We have this beautiful mind that, at the moment may not be as happy as we would like to be, may not be as peaceful as we want to be. But it can be peaceful.

So we can throw out the misconception that our lives are useless. "I cannot do this, it is useless." Such thoughts are paralyzing. Such thoughts prevent us from growing internally, from activating and manifesting our true potential. And they are incorrect. We should never abandon the thought that we can improve our situation, even though the external world is not so much in our control.

We might live with disturbing people, work may not be so pleasant, family life not what we want, jobs not what we want, the house we live in is not quite right, you know, the car is not good enough. We do not have the five Cs. (Laughter) I guarantee, even if we get the five Cs, we will not be happy. They are external!

CHANGE AND GRASPING AT IMPERMANENCE

The external world takes so much effort to maintain. And things are constantly changing. There is no guarantee that our loved ones can stay with us, that we can maintain relationships, that our dear parents are

not going to get old and die, that we are not going to be separated.

Nothing can guarantee that. Nothing can guarantee that our jobs, our material possessions can stay forever. They are always impermanent. Coming, going. Everything is coming, going. Because we grasp at them to be permanent, we suffer so much.

WE ARE LIKE CHILDREN

We know, intellectually, of course, that we are going to die. Of course, our parents are going to die. But when it happens, we are shattered. It is so painful, because we had the false perception of grasping at permanence. Like children, really, so much like children.

When children are playing outside and Mother calls them to wash and come in for dinner, the laughter and joy of playing in the yard suddenly turn into tears. “No, we do not want to come inside, we want to play forever and ever!”

Then things go from bad to worse. Mother comes down with a rolling pin (Laughter) and inflicts punishment. So, the joyful situation of playing together, simply by believing that it cannot stop, turns into great misery for the kids. Really we are still children.

We are just children, in that we are playing. So many of our activities are just children’s games in more of a so-called ‘mature’ sense. Like children, we like to believe that our relationships and hobbies are always going to bring us happiness. But they do not.

To remain in that stage of grasping at permanence all our lives is disastrous. Unfortunately, most of us do exactly that, because we do not know differently.

RELYING ON THE EXTERNAL WORLD

Society pressures us to indulge in the external world. But the external world will never bring peace of mind, because we are relying on

things that are intangible. They are coming and going. We cannot maintain the external world in a stable way, to continually bring us peace and happiness. Impossible.

INNER GROWTH OF OUR MIND

But what we can do is work with our minds so that we can maintain happiness from life to life. To turn inward, to build a beautiful house of wisdom, compassion and love, in our own hearts—this is, symbolically, a celestial mansion. The symbolic mansions in our meditation— are actually constructed through wisdom and the bliss of love and compassion. And they are unshakable.

The inner growth of our mind is something which, although changing from moment to moment, is something from which we cannot be separated. Because, even when we die, it is our mind which carries on in our next life, carrying with it all the positive and negative qualities developed in this life. So, within Buddhism, our main focus is to mature and cultivate our psychological potential. This allows us to approach the transcendental wisdom, seeing reality that annihilates our misconceptions of self and others which bring so much pain and unhappiness.

LOVING KINDNESS AND COMPASSION

The supreme method, the supreme activity of training our inner potential, is the thought of universal loving kindness and compassion. This is the state of mind which sees all sentient beings equally, and does not discriminate between them as being bad, or very good, or strangers.

Loving kindness sees beings equally and identifies with their happiness and their unhappiness. It has great compassion to remove their unhappiness, and great love to bring more happiness.

Just as our love for our family and friends wants to see them happy, and our compassion wants to see them free from harm, this mind embraces all beings.

It is not a mind that is confused or disturbed, even though unhappiness is very widespread. Others come to us, they tell us a story, they are so sad, they cry... and we would do anything we could do to make them happy. As much as we want to make people happy, it can be distressing in everyday life.

COMPASSION, BALANCED WITH WISDOM

To not be distressed, we support our love and compassion with wisdom, the wisdom of seeing reality, especially the wisdom understanding Emptiness. It hurts us when we see our children crying and unhappy. We cry, we are unhappy because we see them as self-existing, existing in their own right.

We feel, “It is a terrible shame that this person, this unique individual, my child, or my mother and my father, is unhappy.” So our own heart hurts. But if we see reality, if our love and compassion are supported by the wisdom understanding impermanence and Emptiness, then our heart will not shake. It will not be torn with pain. Our mind will be stable and calm.

This does not mean that we become distant from others. It does not mean we become detached, and non-reactive. It means that we stay close—because we see the reality, we know the situation, we know that the person is not suffering forever, and that the situation will change.

UNHAPPINESS IS IMPERMANENT

Even unhappiness is impermanent, and unhappiness becomes happiness. Think of a mother looking after her children. Children’s

emotions go up and down a lot, and they cry at very little things. Maybe their doll or toy car assumes a huge importance in their lives. It is their special toy. If another kid comes along and threatens to play with my toy, you know, wow... there is tremendous unhappiness, and anger is expressed.

Mother sees that the child is really upset, and says a few words with kindness. "Why do you not lend your car to Tommy? He only wants to play for a little while, and then he will give it back." So her son says, "Okay, play with my car, as long as I will get it back."

Mother is showing great wisdom. She has defused anger and misery in her child's mind by pointing out a different view. Tommy is not going to take the car forever, he will give it back after he's played with it. The problem was in her child's mind, but it was a big problem for her child. So she used wisdom to calm the situation, and her mind stays calm.

WISDOM REALIZING EMPTINESS

When we generate the wisdom realizing selflessness, we are like super-mothers, we are the best mother, because we can treat all our children equally. We can give skilful advice to the people around us to help them resolve their particular hurt. We can guide them out of it with love, with compassion,

This is something we are all capable of. It is our duty in life to each other, really. Because these children, these suffering people around us, have been our mothers in our previous lives. When we were selfish little kids, they looked after us. They were kind and compassionate. They comforted us when we were crying, and helped us to enjoy our senses, to be happy.

Every person around us has been our mother, in previous lives—not once, but countless times. This is a great reason, a logical reason, to work on our own minds, to develop the wisdom seeing Emptiness,

and to generate loving kindness and compassion. And anyway, what else is there to do in life?

Once we have heard this teaching, should we invest all our time and energy in the external world? Is it of any value? Or should we start investing a bit more energy in the internal world, cultivating the wisdom and love that already exist, but need to be brought to their full status? There is no comparison, is there? We have got to work on our minds. Actually, it is such an exciting thing to learn.

LIFE'S TRIVIALITIES

Many of us are bored. We look around, we have a lot of things, we wonder what we can do next. We are bored. The tourism trade is so huge because people all round the world are getting bored. The Americans come to Singapore, and Singaporeans go to America. The Australians go here, the Chinese go there. Everybody is visiting each other's country, because basically they are bored.

There is so much to do in our minds. So instead of creating negative karma and wasting all our good karma by being tourists (laughter) or having hobbies, we can start a new hobby. A very good friend of mine whom I met in Penang used to be manager of the Franklin Mint. They make things which entice people to collect. They make limited editions of pretty objects—dolls, cars and all sorts of other things. People see them and think, “I want that. It is a Limited Edition. It is Special.” And people pay a lot of money to collect these bottles and things to have around their houses. He has left the mint now. He's no longer exploiting people's boredom.

It illustrates how there is no end to indulging in trinkets in the outside world. There is always somebody who is going to make something new and pretty, and entice us to give some money for it. To place artificial value on it, through skilful advertising—to exploit people's weakness to spend.

Actually, it is really sad because people are driven not just by boredom, but by unhappiness and the conviction, the mistaken belief, that happiness is out there. “It is going to be when my collection is complete, then I will be so happy.”

Then finally when our collection is complete, it is so valuable we have to put it in a bank vault. You know, like people with the Old Masters’ paintings. There are many people with paintings worth millions and millions of dollars, which are so valuable that they cannot look at them. So they have to pay somebody to paint a copy. They put a copy on the wall and the real one has to stay in the bank. (Laughter) It is true. Really, and we think we are intelligent.

MISCONCEPTION OF WHAT IS VALUABLE IN LIFE

This is the sad reality of our misconception of what is valuable in life. The people in India two and a half thousand years ago, when the Buddha appeared, were no different from the way we are today. It is the same in every generation. And from the Buddha’s point of view, people have been degenerating; we are on a downward slide. We are actually more materialistic than the people of India two and a half thousand years ago, who were quite spiritually well-developed. They had the same wrong conceptions we have today, but ours are more strongly developed.

FUTILITY OF INDULGING IN EXTERNAL WORLD

So, the Buddha explained, “Look, this is futile, just indulging in the external world. This is why the wrong conceptions grow internally. Mature your mind, develop wisdom and love and compassion. This is the meaning of spiritual growth.”

SPREAD AND RELEVANCE OF BUDDHISM

The words the Buddha spoke then have been repeated and transmitted down the centuries, traveling through many different lands. North to Tibet, China, Korea, Japan. East, to Sri Lanka, South East Asia, Thailand, and Burma. Now there are Buddhists all round the world. In this century—in the last few decades—Buddha’s teachings are rapidly spreading, especially in the Western world. People are sitting up and listening, because it has meaning. It has common sense. The teachings are effective in helping people to actually change their minds, to work on their inner minds.

In Tibet, as in many Buddhist countries, the practise has been around for a very long time. So it tends to have fallen into ritualized ways of doing things, and have less importance in actual life. The religion has more to do with the monks and nuns in the monastery. We think, “If I go along once a month to light some incense and put some offerings on the altar, that is good enough.” Unfortunately, people tend not to see the direct relationship between Buddhist teaching and everyday life.

Of course, as it happens when we become habituated to something, we tend not to see how valuable it is. It is very fortunate that people are reminded, if we can be reminded, of the real value of the teachings and how important it is put them into practise in our own mind.

PUTTING TEACHINGS INTO PRACTICE

I think what I began talking about today, our Buddha nature, our Buddha potential, means that the real temple is in our own minds. The growth has to happen internally.

We have to work on our minds and to change our minds. Otherwise, just superficial devotion will not be of very much benefit. It does create positive karma, the karma to meet the teachings again.

But that is not enough, just to meet the teachings—we have to put them into practise. This Sunday and on subsequent Sundays, I want to emphasize how to put the teachings into practise.

The actual teaching that I am going to talk about now is from a text written by a lama in Tibet. His name was Tenbel Nyima and he lived from 1865 to 1926—not that long ago. He wrote a concise explanation of how to practise, condensed the information from various texts that can be traced back to the Indian masters, all the way to the Buddha’s sutras. It is an excellent text. My own teacher, Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, uses this outline when he teaches this subject.

HOW TO CULTIVATE LOVING KINDNESS AND COMPASSION

Tenbel Nyima begins with a verse of homage to Avalokiteshvara, what we call the Compassionate Buddha. He appears in different forms—with a thousand arms, with four arms, in male form, in female form, as Kuan Yin, who is actually the Buddha of Compassion, or Avalokiteshvara. So, he pays homage particularly to Avalokiteshvara, because the text explains how to cultivate loving kindness and compassion.

He has a short quotation, “He who will ever be made happy by the happiness of others, and who feels extreme distress when suffering comes to others, having fully attained the quality of Great Compassion, he will renounce his own happiness and suffering.”

This means that when we spontaneously feel great joy at the happiness of others, that is the perfection of love. That is the meaning of love.

And when we spontaneously feel unable to bear the distress, the suffering of others, that is the fulfillment of the perfection of Great Compassion. When we have that, when we have such great love and compassion, we renounce and abandon our neurotic desperation for “My Happiness,” and are free from “My Problem, My Pain.”

It is the preoccupation with “Me,” “I am,” which is the barrier to love and compassion, even in a relative sense. When we meet our partner in life and get married, we swear a vow of loving each other, and having compassion, of looking after each other, until death do us part. But it does not always work out like that.

HOW ATTACHMENT ARISES

First of all, we see somebody and we feel he or she is so wonderful. This person is super, this person is the best, most perfect. In our attachment, we exaggerate that person’s qualities. We think that everything they do... the way they walk, the sound of their voice, everything they do, the way they eat is so special, so beautiful. (Laughter) We see no wrong. Our mind paints this picture and we believe in it. And probably they do the same to us—in their eyes, we achieve a god-like status. (Laughter)

When we get together and start doing things and sharing things together, we want our partner to conform to our selfish and incorrect projections that we have put on them. We begin to feel that they are not perfect, they do not behave in the way we would like them to behave, from our point of view.

So we start to impose ourselves upon them, to try and force them to act in a way more suitable to our preconception about how they should be. And they are doing the same to us—we are no longer a wonderful person in their eyes either.

Through familiarity, they are beginning to see our faults. They are getting a bit edgy, and trying to get us to change our ways so that we will conform to their image of how they think their partner should be.

You can see the recipe for disaster now. We start to feel that we are being constrained, this person is suffocating us. “Let me do what I want!” And so the small arguments start. And bigger arguments follow.

SELF-CENTRED ATTACHMENT

This disaster in our relationship arises because we are self-centred in our original attachment. When we see the person as being so perfect, it means this person is so perfect for me. We actually incorporate this person into our ego, our self-identity. Psychologically, we try to make this person an expression of ourselves.. This is so self-centred. We give them no space to be an individual, to have different thoughts, to do things the way they want. This is an incredible recipe for fighting, because they are doing the same to us.

So, unhappily, because of our self-centredness and our inflexibility, we will not budge. A little bit perhaps, but in big things we will not accommodate their wishes. So there is disenchantment in our attachment, which we call love. Then we begin to move away from each other. Although actually there is love and some fondness for each other, this is contaminated by our attachment, our ignorant exaggeration of the qualities of the other and grasping at them. We begin to move away.

If we do not have skill, we start to dislike each other. Then, certainly, one of us, or both of us—usually it is one of us, which is very sad,—swings to the other extreme of hating, and the object of attachment is now suddenly an enemy, a devil.

Instead of being a god, now everything they do is bad. We do not like the way they walk. We do not like the way they breathe. The way they cough. The way they brush their teeth.

SWINGING FROM ATTACHMENT TO AVERSION

We think, “They are doing it to hurt us, to make us suffer.” This is what our mind does. Maybe I am talking in extremes, but it does happen this way.

Now our mind flips from attachment to aversion. We go overboard, we see them as totally bad, totally negative. We do not ever

want to see them again. But this is the same person we thought we could never be happy without, just a few months earlier.

This is selfishness, this is preoccupation with “Me,” and “My Happiness.” It is an absence of love, an absence of wisdom, and absence of compassion. It is a selfishness which is the root of relationship problems, of all our problems.

GIVING UP OUR SELF-CHERISHING

The only cure for selfishness and self-cherishing is cherishing others. In loving others universally and having compassion for them, we forget about ourselves.

It is not suppressing what we need. We just forget about ourselves because, paradoxically, if we give up our selfish pursuit of things, people automatically love us.

If we have sincere affection for somebody, they embrace us. They want to be always with us. If we have sincere compassion and kindness, then everybody feels comfortable in our company, so we always have friends. People will want to help us, if we are in trouble. If we are trying to do something, and if we are known to have a kind heart, then people will have great joy in helping us.

So the paradox is this—we give up this neurotic pre-occupation with “Me”, “Poor me”, “My happiness”, “I need a relationship”, “I need this”, “I need that”. By abandoning this, we receive. And it is the very “I need”, “I want”, “I must have” that is pushing people away, pushing happiness away.

MAKING OTHERS HAPPY

It is so sad that we suffer from this self-delusion. This self-centredness is strong. Practicing cherishing others is the method to be happy, but of course, that is not our goal. Our goal is to make others happy and

to bring compassion to others. His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, joked about it. He said, “If we really want to be happy, the most selfish thing is to love everybody else.”

The point is this: Happiness comes when you see people like the Dalai Lama. They are living examples of people who practise loving kindness and compassion in any situation. They seem so—not ordinary, but down to earth, genuine. Genuine as in not having to live in an ivory tower and constantly defining who I am, who you are.

PRIDE AND ARROGANCE

So many of us get caught up in the psychological prison of pride and arrogance, of putting people in their place. “I am important. If you want to communicate with me, you have to meet me at my level.” That is so painful, that is punishing ourselves.

With true love and true compassion, we see everybody at their own level. At any level, our mind is totally flexible, there is no arrogance holding us back. We have genuine conversation, genuine concern with the most lowly beggar in the street, just as we would with the prime minister.

Actually, selfishness is a sign of feeling inferior. Even arrogance is an indication of insecurity, that we do not feel secure in the world so we have to put up ego defense mechanisms. We pretend. We play roles. We can never be open and sincere.

We can even become lost in our false identity. I think that is true. I think our insecurity, our habit of building up psychological defenses, can lead us to psychosis—a breakdown in our self-identity. Suddenly, we become paranoid. “Everybody is looking at me. Talking about me. Saying bad things about me.” The ego is there, so manifest and confused. It reflects the incredible misery that is happening in the mind. The mind is in a whirlpool of confused thoughts. That is suffering. That is real suffering. It is the inevitable end point of

building up false images, and believing them to be true.

In fact, you could even say this is the hell realm. Buddhism talks about literal hells. It is possible to be reborn into these states of great misery. I do not know what they are, but psychosis we do understand. Maybe it means that after we die our mind experiences psychotic terror, somewhere, for some time, until eventually it wears out and we come back as humans.

There is this danger, if we do not learn how to break down the false images built up by ignorance, attachment, hatred, pride and jealousy, and so on. There is danger for us, either in this life or in future lives.

What I have been talking about is an introduction. I have been trying to instil a sense of urgency to put these teachings into practice, and of the practice itself.

I hope you can remember all of what we talked about today because with this foundation, I want to go into the explanation of how we can more skilfully lead our lives, how we can extract happiness and joy from every situation.

ABANDONING OUR AVERSION TO SUFFERING

The first point we have to learn is to abandon our aversion to suffering.

Everything that happens always has different angles. If a problem arises in our life and we only focus on the angle of pain, of suffering that has happened to me, if we only see that point of view, then we will be miserable. We will continue to hurt, and we will not want it to happen again.

But we can learn to look at it from another angle, just like the skilful mother who told her child, “It is all right if Tommy plays with your toy car. He will give it back to you when he has finished.” She has given her child another way of looking at the situation, and his

distress has stopped. He thought Tommy would never give it back.

We have to learn to look at problems in a different light.

If we just focus on the pain that it is causing us, then our pain will get worse and worse. Every time we think of the event, we will cry. That will only increase the tendency to be sad, to be sorrowful. It will not help us get over the problem, if we focus only on how “I was hurt.” We are hurt. Whether it is justified or not does not matter. Whatever happened, we were hurt.

We want to stop being hurt. So we have to stop focusing on the pain, and try to look at the situation from a different angle. There are many different angles we can look at it from.

From our side, we can think, “This problem was caused by some karma in previous lives. Now that karma is gone. This person has freed me from the karma to be hurt.” That thought brings happiness, that we have purified this particular karma.

Or we can look at the situation from the angle of compassion. “This person was angry at me, and this person hurt me. But in their anger they were suffering, they were unhappy. Now they have created negative karma, to be hurt in the future. And in a way, it is my fault.”

We should not rejoice (Laughter) and think, “I hope they go to hell.” (Laughter). That is dangerous. Then we create more negative karma. We do not want that to happen.

With compassion we reflect that this person who hurt us has been kind to us, even in this life. They were kind, and for some reason, their mind became angry and they hurt us. We can forgive. Forgiveness is very powerful. It is not a sign of weakness, it is a sign of wisdom, a lack of self-centredness. A sign of kindness. And it eases the pain in our hearts.

Suddenly, we are much lighter. And the person now becomes super friendly, because they were frightened of our adverse reaction. It does not always happen this way, but it can.

The main thing is, we cannot stop the event that has already happened. But we can change our psychological approach to the event.

Okay? So the things we call “problems” can be dealt with in a skilful way. Then there are no such thing as “problems” in our lives.

DEALING WITH ANGER

Student: How do we deal with anger?

Venerable Gyatso: In the actual situation, it is very hard to stop anger that has already arisen. We need to train well, to be able to deal with situations as they occur, and prevent anger from arising.

By all means, we should avoid getting angry. Anger is an agitated state of mind that wants to inflict hurt, wants to get back at some person, or even some inanimate thing. We can even get angry at ourselves. Anger is an agitated state of wanting to hurt. When we are in a provocative situation and people can start pushing our buttons, if we are lucky we realize what is happening and we should try to separate ourselves from that situation.

That is the most skilful way, to leave the room before we explode. Once the explosion comes, it is too late. Irritation, which precedes anger, can be recognized and dealt with, and so we can catch our mind before it becomes angry. The first thing is to get away from that situation, try to find some space, and then think about it.

Perhaps we cannot get away from the situation, perhaps the person is abusing us verbally. Then, at least, we can make our minds like a block of -wood. We can freeze our mind so that it does not get angry. Maybe if we do not respond, they might get even more angry at us. (Laughter)

First, we cannot stop their anger unless we can control our own anger. If we can keep our minds solid, then we can start to control

the anger. First, we think of the disadvantages of getting angry. We should reflect upon anger itself. Anger is always destructive.

When anger is manifesting, our mind is unhappy. Our mind is shaking. It hurts—physically it hurts in our heart. And our faces become ugly. With anger, even if we are relatively handsome or attractive, we are really ugly. Little children look at our faces and they start to cry. (Laughter)

Maybe a good thing to do when you are angry is to whip out your mirror (Laughter). Wow, do I look like this? Then we are using our pride, but pride is not as destructive as anger.

First, see the faults of anger. Anger makes us irrational. When we explode in anger, we say hurtful things to our loved ones. These words are like arrows or bullets piercing our hearts. With anger, we can even smash our precious possessions.

When we are driving in our car, perhaps somebody cuts in front of us. We get so angry that we drive into them. We smash their car in revenge, but we also smash our own car. That is the stupidity of anger. Anger can cause us to drive our family and friends away. They can no longer bear to be with us because we are unpleasant. We become more and more alone.

And another thing: anger causes us to hurt ourselves. We drink alcohol excessively or we smoke cigarettes.

I know a lot of people who had given up smoking. Then, in a state of high emotion—in anger,—they start smoking again. They do not care what it is doing to their lungs. It is almost as if anger is self-destructive. Not to mention karma. Anger destroys positive karma; it actually weakens the power of our previous virtuous karma, so that the effect is much less.

Anger is useless on every level. In fact, anger is our worst enemy because it makes us suffer so much. Anger can even make us kill others and go to the hells as a result.

Now, let us go back to the provocative situation, where someone

is trying to push our buttons. When we notice that we are feeling irritated, we should remember the faults of anger and reflect on the uselessness and the great danger of anger. Just that reflection alone can help us deal with the situation skilfully. Look at it from another angle. That is the beginning of what we can do.

HELPING OTHERS

Student: Such teachings touch on very sensitive situations. How can we get these across to our loved ones, or to those whom we know might have a problem and want them to understand and want to help them?

Venerable Gyatso: It is very hard to create the situation where those close to us will gain Dharma insight. My teachers began to give meditation courses at the monastery in Kathmandu, in Nepal. These were attended by people from all over the world, usually 150 to 200 people, for a whole month, studying Dharma. Many young Westerners attended. They listened to these teachings and at the end of the course, they wrote serious letters to their parents back home.

A few weeks later, there would be representatives from the Australian embassy, the US embassy, coming up to Kopan and asking, “What have you done to my children?” The parents had contacted the embassy saying, “Our children have never talked to us like this before.” (Laughter)

When we go home, we try to tell people. They cannot hear. It is really hard to confront people with their problem and with the solution. As you say, it is very sensitive. In their angry state of mind, they do not want to see it.

I think that the best way, actually, is by personal example. Not to broadcast the teaching, unless they ask. Each of us should try to subdue our own mind, to control our own anger, our own attachment.

People will ask, “You are so peaceful. Why? What happened?” And then, if they are open, we can help. Without this attraction and interest from their side, we might have the opposite effect. They might even get more angry at us. I have had this experience many times.

I do not talk about Buddhism so much. My friends do not want to know. I love them. I would like so much for them to practise and I know they can make their lives happier. But even with close friends it is so hard, when they psychologically do not want to know.

Nevertheless, this is impermanent. There will be a time when they are open. And if we are true friends, even if they are hurting us, we will always be there when the time is ripe.

PRAYING FOR OTHERS

Student: When we really care for a person, can we pray to Buddha to care for them?

Venerable Gyatso: Yes, we can. Definitely, that is a valid practice. If somebody is very obstinate, they are actually suffering. If we have a good karmic relationship with them, then praying is a good method. We can pray to whatever our comprehension of what Buddha might be—Kuan Yin, Chenrezig, the Compassionate Buddha. We can put that person in our heart, with love and compassion, and say mantras, and visualize light purifying the karmic obstacles in their minds. This can help people in all situations—whether they are sick, or even if they have died and they are already in their next life.

Through sincere prayer and accumulating merit, we change the conditions in their life (whether here and in their next life) in such a way that their positive karma can ripen.

We cannot transfer merit. We cannot transfer good karma to their mind, to make them listen to the teachings or heal from their sickness. But because of our connection with them, we can create

a condition where their own good karma already created will ripen and they may recover from their sickness or their obstinacy, or their anger will fade away.

Student: There is a situation where somebody has great faith in the Dharma. The mother suffered and was in a coma for three months. He lost faith because his mother was virtuous.

Venerable Gyatso: I think it indicates a lack of understanding of many things. A lack of understanding of the First Noble Truth.

Our body and mind are magnets for suffering, because they are created by karma and afflictions. Even the Buddha, after he achieved Enlightenment, showed some physical pains on different occasions. Some Arhats experience headaches and sickness, because their bodies were derived from karma and affliction.

We have to understand that there are the six consciousnesses. The sixth is mental consciousness, the area of meditation. That is what we are working on.

Although we might be, experiencing sensory pain, our mental consciousness can be blissful. So, this person may not have understood that his mother, although her body was paralyzed and in coma, may actually have been calm in her mind, blissful and meditating. Mentally, she may not have been suffering at all. If there was suffering, she had karma from previous lives. In this life, she was virtuous and did many good things, but we have many karmas from previous lives that we do not know about. And we only need a small negative mind to arise to allow them to ripen.

There are many books published on the Dalai Lama's teachings. I am reading one now. They are so clear and to the point. We have various titles in the library and in the book shop. If you could glance through them, you might find something there. And your friend might find his answer. Definitely, the Dalai Lama's teachings are highly recommended.

DEALING WITH MISSIONARIES

Student: How do you skilfully try to tackle a person who insistently tries to convert you?

Venerable Gyatso: Yes, we do meet with this kind of persistence. We should never get angry. Also, it is important that we should never cause another person to lose his faith in what he believes in. There is no value in criticizing another person's religion, unless it is a situation like Jonestown where they are all going to take cyanide and commit suicide. Then you might be a bit more forceful.

But if they have a belief which observes morality and they stop killing and lying, and they observe karma—then, it is actually quite harmful to criticize their religion. It is not necessary.

Always treat people kindly, with a smile. Perhaps if we say, “We feel very happy on our Path shown by Buddha, and we rejoice that you are happy on your Path,” I think they might get the message.

Student: But then, they might say we pray to idols, to statues?

Venerable Gyatso: We can defend our side. We can explain that it is not praying to idols at all. We can tell them that the Buddha statues are symbolic, representative of the goal. They are there to remind us, to give us inspiration, just as the crucifix in Christianity is a powerful image to inspire people to emulate the qualities of love and compassion of Christ.

People do criticize Buddhism because they have misconceptions. If they are open, you can explain. If they are not open, just be friendly and change the topic. (Laughter) No point arguing. (Laughter)

KARMA AND OUR LIFE SPAN

Student: What determines our life span? What can we do to ensure minimal disruption to our life?

Venerable Gyatso: It is said in the *Abhidharma* that when we are born, we have a karmic life span. I do not believe that it is absolutely fixed, but there may be karma to live, 10, 40, 100 years. The way in which we live our life can affect whether obstacles might cause us to die earlier, or whether we are able to prolong our lives. There are practices. We have recitations of long life mantras. The practice associated with the female aspect of Buddha, called White Tara, can purify negative karma that causes early death, so that we can live out our karmic life-span.

Karma which leads to a short life is the karma of killing in previous lives, and even karma of killing in this life. So, practices like rescuing animals that are going to be slaughtered, and blessing them and setting them free, and helping people who are sick, nursing the sick or looking after those with physical problems all create karma and a situation to prolong one's life.

Purification of negative karma through Tara practise, and accumulation of positive karma are two practices. It is said that because we have so many karmic imprints from previous lives, it is rare that karmas we do in this life, actually ripen in this life. I think that by doing these positive actions we create the general psychological conditions of protecting and preserving life. So that our own karma for sickness and certain death do not ripen, and we experience the full karmic benefit in future lives.

Purifying past karma, if we do it skilfully, can prevent it from ripening at all. It can be removed altogether by realizing Emptiness. (Laughter) It is not so easy to realize Emptiness. But of course, on the Path, practitioners reach a point where they destroy karma. We do not have to experience all the accumulated karma. Just as anger can destroy positive karma, virtuous practices can destroy negative karma.

There are four particular actions called the four opponent powers. We will talk about them next time. These can, depending upon

the strength of our practice, first weaken and then eventually completely destroy negative karma. They are mentioned in several books. You might check in the library, if you want to read about them beforehand.

DEALING WITH THOSE WHO MAY HARM OUR PRACTICE

Student: Should we continue to be friends with people whom we know, at some point or other, may cause us harm?

Venerable Gyatso: If they are people who are intellectual, very strong and very antagonistic, they might harm our Dharma practice. We are just babies. Our wisdom is like a small candle, and somebody's intellect can blow it out easily. If somebody can harm us from that point of view—destroying our faith in Dharma—it is better to avoid them, until our light of wisdom becomes unshakeable. We do not neglect them, we do not stop loving them and having compassion for them. But we see, at the moment, that they can be quite dangerous. It is better to stay clear of them, until we are strong enough.

DEALING WITH PHYSICAL DANGER

Student: Should we stay and help, even though it puts us in severe physical danger? For example, if a person gets drunk, shall we stay away?

Venerable Gyatso: If it is an actual physical threat to our lives, well, yes. (Laughter). I mean it is hard, isn't it? It is often somebody we live with. Father gets drunk and beats his children and his wife. It is a sad situation because if we go away, then he will become totally destructive. There is a real fight going on here, between kindness and how long we can stay, although he is going to physically harm us.

We have to be skilful. Obviously, if we are in severe danger of physical harm, we have to protect ourselves. Situations like this create negative karma, so we have to work out the best solution with compassion. That is not easy.

Whatever decision we make, we should try to be free of anger towards this person, and try and have love.

It may mean that in our love, we hurt them by moving away. But we see that it is a no-win situation. If we stay together, they are going to get worse, more destructive. Although they may hurt if we leave, in the long run it may help them.

It is similar to the mother who has to send her children to school. The children cry because they do not want to go to school. But in the long term it is helpful for them. So, we have to be free of anger, in whatever we decide to do, as much as we can.

Student: Rather than anger, we generate fear.

Venerable Gyatso: Fear is a type of aversion. Fear is the same as dislike, in a way. It is the same as saying somebody is bad. Anger is wanting to hurt them. Fear is wanting to be away. Fear is something that is not helpful for us. It is a sense of disliking, and we have to also overcome fear with patience and with loving kindness.

HOW VENERABLE GYATSO CAME TO BUDDHISM

Student: Can you tell us a little bit about yourself before you were ordained? And what inspired you?

Venerable Gyatso: Well... (Laughter) I do not know. I first met my teachers, Tibetan Lamas, in Kathmandu, in 1974. I was a doctor, working in hospitals around England, Australia and New Guinea. I was interested in the mind, particularly in how our mind causes problems, suffering and so on, from a doctor's point of view.

When I heard the Lamas' teaching, I was deeply impressed by the psychology of Buddhism. It is a simple and clear presentation of psychology and I appreciated that immediately. Later, through many different events, I checked up on Buddhism. I did strong meditation.

I did a three-month meditation retreat, alone, in Australia, just myself and the kangaroos. (Laughter) I cooked my own food. That was fantastic, to go into the forest, to not see anybody for three months. And to do very strict meditation, and only turn my mind towards Dharma, to read many books about Dharma.

The teachings became clearer and clearer in my mind and I felt that this was a precious opportunity. I loved medicine and I had girlfriends, so I could easily have had a domestic life—it is something I always intended to do, and was living towards. But I felt that the value of being a monk was so much more, and I was not committed. I had the freedom to choose.

I saw the futility of everyday life. After the retreat, I went back to my father's house in Melbourne. My mother had died a few years before and he was living alone. I walked into this empty house. The echoes of so much happiness in the past were everywhere. My father, alone, was, so miserable, wanting the companionship of his wife.

I saw that all of their life together, their happiness, their aspirations were all gone. Actually meaningless in terms of establishing real happiness. Of course, I benefited very much from their love and kindness. That was meaningful for my brothers and sister. My father did not have anything to give him security and happiness in his loneliness. Then a neighbour came in, one of my mother's friends. This neighbour was an alcoholic, killing herself with alcohol. The misery on her face was intense. After three months in retreat and not talking to or seeing anybody, just by looking at people's faces you can feel their whole mind, you can really empathize with them and with their sadness.

It came to me very clearly that I wanted to be a monk, that there was no point in trying to establish happiness as a householder. So I just wrote to the Lamas, and said, “When can I become a monk?” (Laughter)

I think that was a key point. After that retreat, I decided to be a monk. That was 22 years ago. As each year passes, I feel more and more fortunate.

It does not mean that everybody has to become a monk or a nun to practise Dharma. Not at all. One can practise as a lay person. Most Buddhists are lay people. It was just my situation. It worked out well, and I feel very lucky.

Now, we have created a lot of positive energy together. Rather than letting the energy be wasted, we will dedicate this energy to all sentient beings.

As you recite, reflect on the qualities of the three jewels of refuge, the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. And reflect on your inner motivation, the most skilful motivation to engage in the action of discussing Dharma, which is to think ‘May I quickly gain all the realization on the Path to Enlightenment in order to benefit all beings.’



24TH AUGUST 1997

GOOD AFTERNOON, EVERYBODY. Thank you for coming to hear the second of a series of talks on how to transform everyday experiences, both pleasant and unpleasant experiences, into the Path.

MAKING USE OF WHATEVER HAPPENS

How can we make use of whatever happens to us? I think most of us are fully aware that we do not have a great deal of control over the experiences in our lives.

As much as we try to avoid problems, they tend to find us with great ease. This is the nature of our lives. So, instead of compounding our suffering and reacting to both pleasant and unpleasant experiences in unskilful ways, there are many methods we can use to transform the various situations into the Dharma Path, into the Spiritual Path.

We can make use of whatever befalls us and, in this way, gain great courage—the courage of the Bodhisattva, to have no fear of whatever may happen.

Then, we have the means to deal with it. That is so important, particularly in this world, where misfortunes are not uncommon, and they seem to occur more frequently. And if we do not have the methods by which to deal with them in the best way possible, then we will only suffer more than is necessary.

So, the teaching is extremely useful. It is not just the teaching for each individual to be happy. It is the teaching for all individuals to be happy. By practising this mind transformation we can act as agents of happiness, and agents of refuge among our family and friends, and among the wider circle of people that we meet.

By being brave and courageous in dealing with our own misfortune, others will look to us for guidance when misfortune falls their

way. This happens constantly. We often hear of friends and acquaintances for whom some tragedy or some major problem has arisen. It can often be very frustrating not to be able to help, or even to be so overwhelmed by emotions ourselves that we only compound the problem.

Not to mention our future lives, if we can stay stable, friendly and see the positive aspects of everything in this life, we can be so helpful to those who depend upon us.

I mention that the real motivation to do this practice is Bodhicitta, the mind determined to achieve Enlightenment to benefit all beings. It is not just how we can deal with our problems, but how we can benefit others.

Bodhicitta, the altruistic mind, is based on the mind of equanimity. It is founded upon how we tend to pigeonhole people whom we meet into one of three categories.

DISCRIMINATING MIND

Anybody who is potentially helpful or friendly, we label as friends. We treat them specially, with attachment. Others who are potentially threatening, we label as enemies. We put people we do not like in a different category.

This is the mind of attachment and aversion, which leads to anger. The mind paints a total picture. It sees people in a pigeonhole as totally good or totally bad. We become blinded by the way in which we discriminate.

The third group is those who have no apparent benefit or harm to us. We do not know them and we just sort of ignore them out of ignorance. We label them as strangers and we do not feel either strongly attached to them or aversion to them. But we do discriminate with ignorance, because we are not particularly concerned with their welfare.

If there is an accident, the first thing we want to know is whether any of our friends are involved. As soon as we find out that none of our friends are involved, we are relieved, extremely happy.

What about the strangers who were hurt in the accident? This proves that we discriminate against them. We do not really care. “Of course I am concerned about them, but I am so happy that my friends were not involved.” Maybe if our enemies were involved, we might even rejoice. We might think, “Excellent! Good thing. They deserve it.”

DISCRIMINATION ARISING FROM THE SELF-CHERISHING THOUGHT

This discrimination of people into three categories—friends, enemies and strangers, motivated by attachment, anger and ignorance—is caused by what we call the self-cherishing thought. This thought arises from the “I-grasping” ignorance and we see ourselves as more important than others.

This sense of self-importance is why we discriminate against others according to how we perceive whether they can either help or harm us, or do neither.

So, our discriminating mind is categorizing people in this way in order to use them, ultimately, for self-advantage, for self-gain, for self-protection. We have to check the way our minds operate, to see how it does this.

LOVE AND COMPASSION, MIXED WITH ATTACHMENT

Being fond of our friends is not 100 percent negative. We do have sincere love, sincere compassion, which are not necessarily self-centred. But our love and compassion are mixed with attachment. So we have to recognize the contamination of attachment in our friendships.

Similarly, with our so-called enemies. Sometimes we will admit that they have good qualities. And we do not hate them 100 percent, without any reservations at all.

Of course, there are people who are harmful. Without doubt, there can be extremely harmful people who may be specifically trying to hurt us, or just hurt people in general. It is self-preservation to at least avoid such people. We do not have to get involved with them if they are very harmful and destructive.

But on top of just avoiding them out of common sense, we should be mindful about whether we feel anger and hatred, which colours our discriminating attitude. And that leads to negative action, negative karma and compounds our problems.

MIND OF EQUANIMITY

The foundation of this practice of transforming problems lies in gaining a mind of equanimity. Of not being attached to friends, not having anger to enemies, and not ignoring strangers out of a lack of concern. To see all beings equally—this is what we call a mind of equanimity, a balanced view.

Here is a question that was written and sent to me after the last talk. “What about when I have friends, and I treat them well, but later I find out that they are not being friendly, they are harming me behind my back? I am being friendly to them, and they are not being friendly to me.”

I think that is an excellent example of why we should have equanimity, why we should not have attachment to friends.

Not having attachment to friends does not mean we should not love them, have compassion and like them. Attachment is based on self-cherishing, based on the mind which is infatuated with one's self-importance, and is using this friend for self gain. That is unskillful, that is what we try to be free from.

HOW FRIENDS CAN BECOME ENEMIES

In the meditation we contemplate exactly this point, how friends can become enemies. It happens all the time. I think within society the most severe enemies and the deepest hatred I have witnessed is between people who used to be husband and wife. Have you noticed? Not all the time. Sometimes couples can separate in a mutually friendly way. But some of the most severe hatred I have seen is expressed by the wife hating the husband or the husband hating the wife. I am talking about ordinary people. The ex-wife, the ex-husband. Or even the current wife or the current husband.

At one stage, these people must have been very fond of each other. They must have liked each other so much that they wanted to spend the rest of their lives together. And they probably lived many happy years. Then something went drastically wrong. Now they do awful things to each other. It shows that even our closest friends can become our worst enemies. We are looking at this from the point of view of learning how to have a balanced mind and not be attached to friends.

CONTEMPLATION OF PREVIOUS LIVES

Even if our friends, to whom we are very attached in this life, are still good to us in this life, we should contemplate that in previous lives they have been our murderers, they have stolen from us, they have done all sorts of harmful things towards us. So, it is not correct to believe in attachment, which labels friends as “100 percent helpful” and “My Friend.” We should be realistic and be aware that things change.

They are very intelligent now in the United States. When they get married, they sign an agreement on how to share their possessions when they get divorced. They do it at the same time as they get married. That shows a degree of relative wisdom. But also, it is a

pathetic statement on the superficiality of so-called love.

I do not know what the percentage is, but a high number of marriages do not last the full distance. We are aware of this but we do not understand the cause, which is attachment. We still feel attachment and we do not allow our love and compassion to mature, on the basis of wisdom seeing reality.

So, instead of signing this legal agreement it will be much better, I think, to do a meditation course when we get married and learn about our minds. Because we do not mature mentally. It seems that physically, we are maturing more and more quickly. But mentally, we remain like children.

Within families there is jealousy, competitiveness, petty attachment and petty anger which are no different from the school yard. I do not want to put children down; I like kids. But kids are very open in expressing their emotions. They have not yet learnt to conceal their feelings. In the school yard, there are extreme emotions. Tears one day. Then, the next day, they are friends and happy again, which is very good. The grudge is usually not maintained for a long period of time. Unfortunately, for adults, we have not learnt how to unify love and compassion with wisdom seeing reality. So we have these problems.

On the other side, look at how we discriminate against people we dislike. We dislike a lot of people. Perhaps something happened and we made a decision that these people were bad. We discriminate with anger or hatred; we see them as 100 percent bad. But that is also illogical.

Just as thinking that this person will be my friend forever and ever, thinking this person will always be my enemy forever and ever more is also wrong. Sometimes our worst enemies can become our best friends.

A few years ago in Australia, there was a court case where two men had been involved in a fight. One of them had tried to shoot

the other. Fortunately he did not kill him.

A few months later the trial was held and the man was being tried for attempted murder. But in the time between the shooting and the trial, the two men had become best friends. During the trial, the man who was shot gave character evidence in support of the one who had shot him.

I think it is a good example of how even our worst enemy who tried to kill us can become our closest friend. It is a matter of changing situations. It is unskillful to exclude -people with dislike, anger or hatred. We should try to see them equally as friends.

We can reflect that in previous lives, the person whom we hate so much has once been our father, our mother, husband or wife. Similarly, although we may have no apparent connection with a stranger now, in previous lives we have had every relationship.

So all beings are essentially the same. It is foolish and incorrect for us to discriminate against them through attachment, anger and ignorance. We should try to see people equally, with a balanced view. That is very beneficial. It does not mean that we do not give friendship. In fact, then, we are capable of giving friendship to everybody—a friendship that is sincere and that does not expect anything in return.

So, on the basis of being able to see all beings equally, we can cultivate loving kindness and compassion.

SEVEN-STEPS OF CAUSE AND EFFECT MEDITATION

And as I mentioned last time, we follow the seven steps of cause and effect, where one meditation becomes the cause for the next meditation.

First, we reflect upon the reality that, in previous lives, all beings have been our mothers, not only once, but countless times and have been infinitely kind to us. Having realized that, and having a

strong feeling for that, we reflect upon the great kindness that all beings have shown to us. Life after life they have protected us from fear and hunger and illness, and taught us how to enjoy our senses.

Then we reflect upon the thought of repaying the kindness, the sense of feeling indebted to all living beings. It is not a heavy obligation, but a delightful sense of how wonderful it would be to help all these beings who have been so kind to us.

And as we reflect further on that point, we have the thought of great love, of heart-warming love. This is a special type of love. An example of heart-warming love could be when parents hear their children laughing and enjoying themselves, the parents send forth waves of warmth from their heart, great joy—a powerful sense of love for their children. The heart-warming love is similar to this fourth meditation stage, where we see all beings as a parent sees his child. Just by seeing them, this heart-warming love comes. And this heart-warming love is the direct cause of Great Compassion.

Compassion is the mind unable to bear the thought of others suffering. Because of our love for others, we see their obvious suffering, the gross suffering, the changeable suffering and the pervading suffering. The various types of suffering are explained by the Buddha.

And so Great Compassion arises just as the mother's thought when hearing the child's laughter turn to tears, is instantly, "How to help, what is the problem, how to solve the problem and solve the tears?"

Great Compassion comes strongly in the mind after we have reflected upon the first principles of how the sentient beings have all been as kind to us as our mothers.

Great Compassion causes what is called the Special Thought, the Unusual Thought, the Exceptional Thought, which is the attitude that "It is my responsibility."

"All living beings are my children. They are all my mothers. It is

my responsibility to bring happiness to them all, to stop the suffering, because in previous lives they have been exceptionally kind to me.” We do not think, “Ah well, they have also been kind to everybody else, so why cannot my brothers and sisters look after them?” That is not the mind training that we are involved in.

It is a reality that as individuals, all beings have looked after everybody else. But we are consciously training our mind to generate altruism. And so we follow this logical sequence of thought, up through heart-warming love and Great Compassion to this exceptional attitude that it is our responsibility to rescue all beings from suffering.

That in turn becomes the cause of the great mind of Bodhicitta, the thought which is determined to achieve Enlightenment, in order to become a fully qualified Buddha who is able, forever and ever, to be there, and to work for sentient beings wherever possible.

That is called the Bodhicitta, and is necessarily the motivation behind this practise. That is the psychological foundation for doing this practise of transforming the mind.

LINEAGE OF THOUGHT TRANSFORMATION

The text that I am talking from was written by a Tibetan Lama called Tenbel Nyima who lived at the turn of the century. He studied the teachings that we call the Ear-Whispered Lineage of Thought Transformation, which came to Tibet through the great Teacher Atisha, who received the transmission of the thought training in Indonesia, from the teacher Serlingpa or Dharmakirti, who lived in Indonesia in the 10th or 11th century.

Serlingpa had himself been to India when he was younger and studied under the great Masters, who had received the Lineage of the Thought Transformation.

In Tibet, this particular practice introduced by Atisha was

accepted as a favourite and very special lineage of teaching and has been nurtured within Tibet. It seems that this tradition did not follow the Buddha's teachings, away from India to other countries. Or if it did, there is no evidence of it being practised now.

The precious Lineage of Thought Transformation, fortunately, was taken to Tibet where it was treasured for a thousand years as being the very focus of Dharma practise.

We are exceptionally fortunate that the Lamas have not only preserved the transmission of this tradition, but have also preserved the practice. They make this practice a reality in their own minds.

And so, Tenbel Niyama was writing partial instructions on how to accept happiness and suffering as the Path, how to transform happy and unhappy situations into the Path. The first section is the means, the method of accepting suffering as the Path to Enlightenment. This is done firstly by examining the Relative Truth and secondly, by examining the Ultimate Truth, Ultimate Reality.

The first point he makes is very relevant. "Whenever harm comes to us, from beings or non-beings, the environment or others, if our mind experiences only the consciousness of sorrow, then from one small incident, great mental pain will develop."

OUR APPROACH TO LIFE

If we just experience misery and unhappiness when some harm occurs to us, great pain will come. Why? Because it is the nature of the mind, that whatever we allow to abide, to be manifest in our mind, it has a tendency to always increase.

For example, if we are habitually happy, we see things from a positive point of view. Then, that attitude becomes repetitive. We have a stronger and stronger nature of having this positive attitude.

Whereas if we have a negative attitude, then this habitual tendency of seeing things in a negative or a threatening light becomes

stronger and stronger. And so it is difficult for us to be happy because we are always seeing the bad side of what happens to us. It is habitual, it is the way our mind reacts.

Is this not true? If we look at our friends, there are those with a light approach, and those with a heavy approach to life. Those with a light approach are able to skim over problems without being hurt.

Those with a negative, heavy approach may experience the same problems, but these hurt them like arrows and bullets.

There is a great difference in the degree of sorrow experienced by the two types of people. That sorrow is not caused by the problem, but by the subjective way of experiencing this problem. Is it not? We should check this point out.

The text continues, “If we always allow sorrow and misery to abide in our mind, then the experience will become gradually stronger and stronger, until there comes a time when no matter what happens to us, it will become a cause for bringing unhappiness. And happiness will not have a chance.”

This often happens to people. Perhaps somebody has suffered a loss—somebody close to them has died, or they have a major disaster in life. They fall into a state of deep unhappiness where they cannot see anything positive. Their mind is living in sorrow, they go to sleep with sorrow, pining for their lost ones. They have sorrowful dreams. When they wake up, their mind is sorrowful. There is nothing we can do to cheer them up. They are abiding in sorrow.

Whatever the news is, they see it in a much heavier way. When they read the newspapers, nothing interests them. By allowing sorrow to abide in our mind, it can be devastating for our lives.

So, what can we do about it?

If we allow happiness to abide, then we change our world. Essentially we are all trying to be happy and trying to be free from sorrow. We mistakenly believe we can generate happiness and eliminate sorrow by changing the outside world. None of us are succeeding

in this effort because it is impossible.

But by changing the inside world of our minds, we can change the outside world, can we not?

Our mind can remain balanced even during events which would perhaps in the past have caused us a lot of sorrow. If we can see them and relate to them skilfully, we may not be deliriously happy, but we can maintain equilibrium.

We know people in our lives who are able to deal with problems so much better than we can. This is not a genetic thing. It is not that they happen to be born with a gene for a peaceful mind. It is through their own practice that they have generated this mental attitude. And there is no reason why we cannot do the same.

APPEARANCES

Tenbel Nyima says, “If we do not know that responsibility lies with our own mind’s way of experiencing things, and if we put the blame on external objects alone, then the ceaseless flame of suffering and anger and negative karma will increase. This is called “Appearances arising in the form of an enemy.”

The external world is only a series of appearances. What are appearances? Things appearing to our mind.

If we understand Buddha’s teachings, we will see that the external world is a reflection of our mind. When we look in a mirror we see the reflection of our body. This can change according to the state of our physical health and whether we are tired or fresh.

There can be very different appearances in the mirror. We make ourselves up to go to a party and we are quite happy with our appearance before we leave to go to the party. But next morning, when we wake up after going to the party, we do not want to look at ourselves.

Mirrors reflect our bodies. Life, the external environment,

reflects our minds. This is an extremely important point. We can start to understand how this works by looking at the way we relate to the world according to our changing emotions.

When we are happy, when we are unhappy, how does the world appear to us? It is definitely different.

So Tenbel Nyima says, "If we allow sorrow, anxiety, and misery to abide in our minds, the whole world will start to appear to us as our enemy."

We can see this in the development of paranoia. Paranoia is an extreme state of mind where we think the whole world is against us. We are completely convinced that everybody in the world is plotting to get us.

A friend of mine, a psychiatrist in Melbourne, once said that the definition of paranoia is when you go to a football game and the players get into a huddle in the middle, you think they are talking about you. (Laughter).

Paranoia is like that. People can reach the stage where they are terrified to leave their house, because they think that everybody on the street is out to get them. People driving cars are going to kill them. In Bangkok, it is true actually. If you ever try to cross the road in Bangkok, they are definitely out to get you. (Laughter).

The whole world appears as your enemy if you allow unhappiness and misery to abide in your hearts. The same thing happens, maybe not to such an extreme, when appearances arise as an enemy.

Tenbel Nyima says "You should thoroughly understand that the reason why sentient beings in the Dark Age are afflicted by suffering is fundamentally related to the weakness of their discriminative awareness." Which means the weakness of our knowledge, our wisdom. Discriminative awareness is just another phrase for understanding Reality.

In this situation, relative reality means how our minds function, how we experience things. When he says not to be hurt by the

obstacles of enemies, by illness, and by harmful spirits, this does not mean that we can drive away problems such as illness and that they will not occur again.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRACTICE

He says the way of overcoming this does not mean that we will never be hurt by external difficulties. But it does mean that these experiences will not be able to arise in the form of obstacles to our practice of the Path to Enlightenment.

We tend to practise Dharma when things are going well. When things go badly, we drop our bundle. That is exactly the point here. In order to prevent problems from obstructing our practice of Dharma, we have to practise.

There are two things to practise. The first is the attitude that rejects the state of mind exclusively desiring not to have suffering. To abandon our aversion to suffering, to abandon anxiety, to abandon wallowing in self-pity, to abandon the miserable, irritable state of mind. All those states of mind are dangerous.

We should think again and again about how useless and harmful it is to see problems as being unfavourable. To see problems as something to be avoided, and to be aware of the anxiety that we experience in our aversion to problems.

So we have to train ourselves to have great courage, and to experience powerfully the thought that from now on, whatever suffering occurs, I shall not be anxious, I shall not let anxiety or worry arise.

OVERCOMING THE FEAR OF PROBLEMS

This is the real point, to overcome the aversion, the fear of problems. Now, how do we do that?

First of all, we contemplate the uselessness of seeing problems

as unfavourable, of having anxiety and worry as problems arise. It is useless because our worry and our anxiety do not address or resolve the problem.

I think I made the point last time that a lot of us believe our happiness or unhappiness is out of our control. It has something to do with the outside world. Something to do with the food I eat, or the way I sleep, you know. Or what other people do or say or think.

We do not realize that anxiety and worry are subjective states of mind that we can deal with. We do not have to maintain them to be manifest in our minds.

A very simple approach was mentioned by Shantideva, that when we recognize that we are worrying, our mind is upset about something. The great danger is not the problem that made us upset. The great danger is being upset, because that makes us habitually miserable. This is really the essence. Realize that if anything is going to hurt me, it is my very own misery that is going to hurt me, because that creates the environment for more misery.

TWO WAYS TO APPROACH PROBLEMS

If we recognize that we are upset, we can apply Shantideva's simple approach. And we think about what is it that is upsetting us. We think, can this problem be resolved? And if that which is upsetting us can be resolved, then we ask ourselves, "Why are you upset? Why be miserable? It can be resolved, and if you just wallow in pity and misery, you are a fool!"

That is what we say to ourselves, we say to our mind, to our self-cherishing thought. We say, "Mind, you are crazy!"

Other people will say we are crazy if they see us talking to ourselves. We say, "Mind, you are absolutely crazy. You are a masochist. You are hurting yourself. You are being upset and miserable about this problem which can be resolved."

So what if the answer came, “The problem cannot be resolved. The problem is irreversible.” The answer is the same. We say, “Mind, why are you miserable? Your self-pity, your misery is only compounding the problem. It has happened. It cannot be reversed. If you continue to be miserable, you are pouring salt into the wound, you are creating a dangerous situation where you can be hurt much more.” It is like you are an exposed wound, you are terribly sensitive. The slightest thing going wrong now is going to make you suffer enormously.

And is that not true?

You know, when we are unhappy, the slightest thing to go wrong in our lives makes it seem so much worse. We experience great misery and emotional upset.

On the other hand, if our mind is happy, then problems are not even noticed. The small things that would have upset us when we are down are not even noticed as problems when we are happy.

So, again, this emphasizes the subjective responsibility in whether we are happy or not, and also the opportunity that we can train our mind.

The first point is that we are trying to overcome the mind that sees worry and anxiety and misery, seeing problems as undesirable. We are trying to overcome that.

And so, the first is seeing the uselessness of misery, and then the great harm.

Second is seeing the great harm, seeing things as really bad, seeing problems as problems, as being unfavourable. Anxiety saps our strength of mind. As I have already begun to mention this point, when our strength of mind is depleted by anxiety, then suffering arises very frequently in our mind. On the other hand, if we do not see them as heavy problems, we can bear things easily.

Tenbel Nyima says, “Because of anxiety, you are ceaselessly oppressed by unhappy feelings and even small sufferings are intolerable.”

NOT DWELLING ON PROBLEMS

He gives an example. When we are meditating, we try to block out the sensory world. We find a quiet place, and sit down and meditate and not be distracted by sounds, sights, smells and so on.

If we allow our minds to be aware of noises and other distractions, it is impossible to generate concentration. Similarly, if we allow our minds to dwell on the characteristics of suffering, then we will never be able to dwell in peace.

It is very much the nature of our mind to dwell on problems. Even if we try to sit and meditate, very often we bring up a problem.

Maybe we have not actually been thinking about it. But when we meditate and relive the situation, relive the argument, again and again, and try to think of something better to say, or something hurtful to say. And we suffer. We may start crying.

We might have a problem, which we put out of our mind during the day when we were at work. At work, while this problem is out of our mind, we are okay. We are communicating, we are laughing, we are joking because we have put it out of our mind. But then, when we are alone the problem comes back, and we start crying.

Now, is it the problem coming back? Not at all.

The problem happened last week, last year, 10 years ago. But if we allow our minds to reflect upon it the tears come, the sorrow comes. It is not the problem that is causing the tears. It is our mind not letting go. It is our mind reliving and abiding in the sorrow, in the unhappiness.

As long as we do that, we will never be free. We must gain the courage to get on with life, to see things or deal with life in the present moment and to deal with the new situations in life.

If we allow ourselves to be unhappy because of past events, we will not be able to experience much happiness. Our capacity to enjoy the present moment is severely impaired.

Because it is psychological, there is the opportunity to change

it. If we had really enjoyed running or walking, for example, and we lost our legs... all right, then it is difficult to experience the joy of running or walking without legs. But that is physical.

But a suffering mind is self-inflicted pain. Perhaps we used to enjoy the company of our children, of our family. And now, we cannot enjoy them because we are unable to let go of the sorrow of something else.

That happens so often. We can free ourselves. We must free ourselves, and not only to be able to experience happiness. That is not even the motivation. The reason is to maintain our mind in a positive state, to practise Dharma. So what we do now is develop the attitude of being happy when problems arise. All right?

DEVELOPING AN ATTITUDE OF HAPPINESS WHEN PROBLEMS ARISE

The conversation, up until now, has been about the first main point of abandoning the thought that sees problems as problems, that has anxiety and aversion to problems. Aversion to problems is of no value. That is the essence of what we have been trying to establish up to this point.

To support that, the next point is to develop the attitude of being happy that problems arise. Tenbel Nyima says that we should practise cultivating joy by considering suffering as an aid to the Path. That is the essence: That whatever occurs in our life can assist us in spiritual growth, in developing our minds positively on the Path.

Therefore, we can genuinely gain happiness when so-called problems arise, because they are useful opportunities to work on our minds. And our minds are the very substance of our spiritual Path.

A spiritual practitioner is like a sculptor who begins with a block of marble. Michaelangelo turned shapeless blocks into magnificent

sculpture. So, similarly, our minds are spiritually ugly. Spiritually, they have sharp edges, and are unpleasant.

The spiritual Path is to make our minds so beautiful that joy will arise in the hearts of whoever looks at us, whoever thinks of us, whoever hears our name.

We try to make our bodies beautiful. The advertisements on TV show that we spend a lot of money trying to be physically beautiful. We try and try again, but it is a difficult process. Anyway, as we get older we cannot retain beauty in our bodies, no matter what we do.

But our minds are different. Our minds can be sculpted, changed, and made so beautiful that they can become objects of pleasure for all beings in the universe. Even when we become old.

Just as when people look at a very attractive person, they feel very happy, then immeasurably more so, when they see somebody whose mind is subdued, whose mind is one-ness with loving-kindness, compassion and wisdom. That brings continuing delight and inspiration for themselves to transform their minds.

We are limited with what we can do with our bodies. But there is no limitation with what we can do with our minds. We must be convinced there is no limitation. We can achieve full Buddhahood. All sentient beings can. And we must, to fulfil our obligations to all beings who have been our mothers. We must be the sculptor who transforms our minds.

DEVELOP HAPPINESS THAT SUFFERING HAS ARISEN

So-called problems are opportunities to practise Dharma, to transform our mind into patience, into compassion, into the Path.

We develop happiness that suffering has arisen. Tenbel Nyima says, “Whenever suffering arises, you must have a virtuous practice to apply to it according to the ability of your mind, because it will be difficult to succeed if you only ponder the general principle that a

spiritual method can bring certain benefits from suffering, as a support to the practice.”

It is not enough just to know that we can transform problems into the Path. We have to have a virtuous technique, a virtuous method to apply when we are experiencing problems. Okay? So he gives a list of virtuous techniques that we can use when we have a problem.

USING SUFFERING TO GENERATE RENUNCIATION

First of all, he says, we can use problems that support us in the thought of turning away from samsara—the mind of renunciation.

Why are we caught up in the Wheel of Life? Because we are attached to the mistaken belief that indulging in the external world will bring us the unchanging-changing peace and happiness that we are all striving for.

This misconception is embedded deeply in our consciousness from habitual ignorance in previous lives. The evidence that we have this conception is in our behaviour, in what we consider to be most important.

We consider gathering the external world around us to be the real source of happiness, to have meetings with friends, to see movies, to look at things, to listen to music, to indulge in the restaurants where we spend a lot of money on special food simply for the taste.

The story of our daily lives proves that our investment in life is in our family for happiness, and in our husband or our wife for happiness. Our investment is in our children for happiness, or in accumulating material possessions and wealth, a career, reputation, power, property. We are relentlessly pursuing the external world because we believe that therein we will establish peace and happiness.

That shows we have the wrong conception, believing that the external world is the real source of happiness, not understanding that it is the inner world of the mind which is the real source

of happiness. This misconception is the opposite of renunciation. Renunciation is the recognition that the whole thrust of society, obsessed with the external world, is mistaken, and it is the decision to let go of that useless endeavour and follow the Path to liberation and enlightenment.

Although temporary happiness is achieved from external objects, eventually that happiness becomes the agent of sorrow. Impermanence and change is inevitable when we separate from the object of our happiness. So, it is not pure happiness; it is contaminated. And we have been pursuing that contaminated happiness for countless lives in the past. We have never achieved the peace we are looking for.

Renunciation is the thought that renounces obsession with the external world and realizes that peace is internal. It is the aim to achieve Nirvana and Enlightenment, internal realization in our own minds. That is achievable. And that, by its very definition, is peace.

Nirvana is peace. Nirvana is true cessation of sorrow. Renunciation is the opposite of grasping attachment to samsara.

RENUNCIATION HAS TO GROW AND GROW

The practitioner will have realized that we must generate renunciation. Renunciation is a process. It does not simply arise and we say, “Ah, I am renounced!” It needs to grow and grow.

Shaving your head and becoming a monk or nun does not mean you become renounced. I can assure you that after 22 years, I do not even know the meaning of renunciation. Maybe a glimmer of what it is. So, we need to increase our renunciation.

Therefore, with renunciation, when problems arise we can think, “Good! What do you think about that, Self-Cherishing? You are firmly convinced that you can be happy by this and that, but look, it has let you down! That which you thought would make you happy, has let you down! “

Our new car has a big dent in it. And do not we get upset? We thought our new car was going to make us so happy. But then, there is a big dent in it and we are totally shattered.

When problems arise we reflect in this way. As Tenbel Nyima says, “Think that as long as you are wandering powerless in samsara, suffering does not arise as something unjust, but the nature of samsara is like that. The nature of samsara is suffering.”

OBJECTS IN SAMSARA ARE IMPERFECT

Because our body is in the world, a product of karma and afflictions, its nature is contaminated. Therefore the objects in our world are imperfect. They are not pure sources of happiness and we should turn away from them.

Tenbel Nyima says, “Reflect that if it is difficult to bear even the little sufferings of the happy realms,” (the human and the divine realms) “then there is nothing to be said about the lower realms.”

The small problems that we experience as humans cannot be compared to the problems in the hells and hungry ghost realms.

“Develop sadness by thinking that alas, samsara is an endless and unfathomable ocean of suffering, and turn your mind to liberation.” That is the first virtuous method that we can apply when problems occur. We take time off, and we reflect on the reality of samsara, and we generate renunciation.

TAKING REFUGE

Secondly, we can use suffering as the support in our training in Taking Refuge. Taking Refuge is gaining conviction in the qualities of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, the Three Jewels of Refuge.

When we were very young, we took refuge in our parents. We relied on Mummy and Daddy to console us when we were unhappy, to be kind to us, and to make our minds happy. We took refuge in our parents. But as we grew older, we found that our parents could no longer remove our sense of loneliness, our fear of being without somebody who understands us.

In fact, when we are teenagers, we are convinced that our parents have not a clue what is happening in our mind. They seem to be agents of our suffering. Then we take refuge in boyfriends, or girlfriends, or husbands and wives. "I am lonely. I am miserable. I need somebody."

So we look to our peers, our friends. We form groups and bond with each other. Teenagers have their 'in' crowds, and friendships develop. So mutually we feel very brave. We support ourselves as groups.

But as we continue to grow, the group no longer supplies that supportive energy in our loneliness. The group disperses. We start forming more mature relationships, feeling that, "If I can live my life with this person, s/he will solve my problem of loneliness, will look after me.

These are ways of taking refuge. Taking refuge in parents, in peer groups, in individuals. Often, we find that individuals do not supply what we need. Or we might take refuge in a hobby, like collecting stamps. I do not know whether people achieve great solace that way, but they might. I used to collect stamps.

Many of our activities in life are taking refuge in fallible objects, objects which cannot resolve our problem of loneliness, which do not give us the security our loneliness is seeking.

We take refuge in reputation, power and wealth. So many of our activities are a desperate search for protection, but they do not work. We are constantly being let down by the people and situations that we expect to support us.

THE ONLY TRUE REFUGE

The only Refuge that will not let us down is the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, the Three Jewels. Buddha is perfect Refuge because Buddha is the embodiment of Wisdom and Compassion. Buddha sees all beings impartially and has equal compassion and love for all. The wisdom of Buddha is the antidote to the root ignorance, the cause of all suffering. The Buddha is the person who has destroyed all suffering. Therefore the Buddha is reliable, will not let us down, can always guide us out of suffering.

The Dharma, his teachings, are exactly the Path. That is exactly what we are seeking, how to destroy the cause of suffering. And the Sangha are the practitioners who have generated the realization and therefore are reliable helpers on the Path.

So now when, problems arise, we realize that it is because we have been taking mistaken refuge in the external world to make us happy, to bring us peace. We have forgotten about Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. Problems are useful because they remind us, “Hey! You have been lax in your strength of refuge. Your refuge needs to be enhanced.” So, okay? You buy that?

Tenbel Nyima says, “Practise taking refuge by gaining certainty that The Three Jewels are the only unbetraying refuge amidst the continuous suffering of fear and danger throughout the succession of your lives.” Not just in this life, but in all lives, the Three Jewels are the only unbetraying refuge. So you should depend on them always, and not renounce them in any circumstances.

OVERCOMING PRIDE

The third virtuous practice is to see that problems are very useful because they help us overcome pride and arrogance.

Pride, contempt for others, is something that we all possess. We may say, “I do not have pride.” But it is there, in our minds. Pride

is a sense of superiority, a sense of putting others down, and feeling superior to them.

It is an inflated mental attitude that is like a balloon going up. It takes us away from others. Pride prevents us from having good relationships with others.

Pride becomes a source of anger. As soon as somebody insults our self-image, we become excessively angry and we do great harm in the immediate situation. And of course, through anger, we create karma for long term suffering. So pride is a major problem.

Now, when problems occur, we give them to our pride. We think, “Look, you are not as clever as you thought you were, you foolish person going along with your swollen head.”

Again, we are talking to ourselves. “Mind, with your proud and arrogant attitude, you think you are so clever when you are actually driving away your friends. This problem shows that you are really a fool.”

I think I used the example before. If we stumble in the street, the first thing we are worried about is our appearance, not about falling. Did anybody see me stumble, see me so stupid as to trip over my feet or to walk into a lamp-post? We feel greatly relieved nobody saw us, and only then do we worry about whether we are bleeding or not.

So, pride is something that is not just to be joked about. We must see how pride is a major problem in our lives, how it isolates us from others. It certainly supports the discriminating mind—Friend, Enemy and Stranger. It drives away happiness and, like a magnet, it attracts misery.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche says that pride essentially is an inability to rejoice in the happiness and good qualities of others. It breeds jealousy. There is jealousy of others doing well.

We think, “Oh, I could do better.” So there is no capacity to be happy when others are being happy. That is so harmful, the incapacity to rejoice at the good things that happen to others.

Such a mind can sometimes drive us crazy by being so uptight.

That is a word from the Sixties, but uptight exactly describes this attitude of being so wrapped up in oneself, so tense that one is unable to relax, laugh and relate to others in an easy way.

DEALING WITH PRIDE IN OTHERS

Student: When others in the group have pride and it is quite clear to us that their pride is creating a lot of dissent, unhappiness and negativity, how do we deal with that?

Venerable Gyatso: This practice is personal. It is how we deal with our own minds. Only individuals can get rid of their own pride, jealousy, attachment. So, in terms of other people, it is not so easy.

The main thing is that we ourselves must remain in equanimity. When one person in the group is causing problems, the rest of the group will turn against that person, and throw him or her out. There will be discord and maybe there will be division. So how do we deal with the situation?

We should remain undivided. We should not take sides. How we respond depends on our skill, and our relationship with the person. Preferably we do not confront him in the midst of the group and say, "Hey, it is your arrogance." That is a bit too much.

If we know we can communicate with them, we can take them aside in a peaceful and non-threatening way, point out their pride, well and good, do it. But be careful.

DEALING WITH ANGER IN OTHERS

Student: Sometimes it is directed at you. There are some things that we cannot let go.

Venerable Gyatso: Your question is how to help that person, or how to help oneself? When antagonism is directed towards us, the first

response is to deal with our mind. We have to deal with the situation skilfully and not react with anger. That is our biggest responsibility: not to let anger arise in our minds. If we can do that, we are well on the way to resolving the situation.

If we react with anger and we start arguing, then our anger causes us to insult and say hurtful things back. It escalates into a major explosion and that does not help anybody. If you can retain a calm mind and not react, then I think you are well on your way to resolving it. Of course, if people want to upset us it will make them even more upset if we stay calm. I think that happened with Buddha. His cousin Devadatta was insanely jealous and tried in many ways to harm and insult Buddha. But Buddha was always, of course, calm and kind. There is a story of how Devadatta ate a whole lot of butter. It was some competitive thing against Buddha. Devadatta considered himself to be enlightened, and he was dying through foolishly eating so much butter. Buddha came to him, laid his hand on Devadatta's chest and cured him. As soon as Devadatta woke up and saw the Buddha, he said, "Get your filthy hand off my chest!" What to do? If even the Buddha cannot stop people getting angry at him, how can we? We must not get upset and we should retain a loving attitude as much as possible.

If we find that people are specifically angry at us, check out why. What have we done to make them angry?

We do not have to debate. Anger is irrational. They are usually angry at us for an irrational reason. If we defend ourselves, it will only inflame their anger. It is not weakness; it is wisdom to not engage in debate while they are angry.

And of course, situations always change. At a time when they are not angry, maybe their mistake could be pointed out without making them angry. It is up to us. But just be aware of discriminating against them. And according to our general wisdom, how to help them. But it is not easy, as the story of Buddha and Devadatta shows.

DEALING WITH OUR PRIDE AS MIRRORED BY OTHERS

Student: Is our resentment towards another's pride an indication of the size of our own pride?

Venerable Gyatso: That is also a good approach. When we see pride, attachment or anger in another person's mind, instead of dwelling upon that, we could look at our own minds and criticize the pride, attachment and anger there.

ABANDONING WORRY

The first step in this discussion was to no longer see problems as problems, but to abandon our worry, anxiety and concern about things going wrong. Not to focus on our worry, but to abandon it.

Student: In order to do that, we first collect our mind, we concentrate our mind. And as a result of that, it tends to increase suffering.

Venerable Gyatso: The point is that we do allow our mind to dwell on our problems. And this is happening, whether we want to or not. The point is to catch our mind when it is dwelling on problems. Our minds do that. Our minds can be quite happy, but they now and then revert to dwelling on our problems. At that time we should catch our mind and say, "Hey, mind, what are you doing? Why are you dwelling on that problem? It is finished, it has been resolved. Why are you still dwelling on it? Or if it cannot be resolved. "Let go of it." We tell our mind, "Let go."

We do not have to search for problems. They come of their own accord. It is recognizing when we feel the fear and aversion to problems. We tell our mind, "Hey stupid, stop thinking like that." Do you see it? To no longer have sorrow, we must stop dwelling in the attitude that sees problems as problems, and instead see them as opportunities to train our minds.

Secondly, closely associated to this, is developing joy when problems arise. No longer seeing them as problems; now they are opportunities. This thing that has gone wrong. Aha! We are right there and we catch it. Yes, now we can use it to meditate on renunciation. Remember the four techniques that I mentioned. We can use this to generate renunciation. We can use this to strengthen our meditation on refuge. We can use this to overcome pride.

It is taking the here and now activity of an unwanted event, immediately stopping your mind from becoming unhappy and turning it into a useful event.

COMING TO GRIPS WITH THE MIND

Student: At the time when you are trying to tell the mind to let go, it grasps much more strongly.

Venerable Gyatso: You have to fight this one out with your mind. We do lose the battle at times. We must pick ourselves up and try again. This practice is difficult. It is a supreme practice. It is not something we can do overnight. We are going to blow it, you know, time and time again, but we pick ourselves up and we try again. There is no other way out of sorrow, there really is not. We must do this. We must come to grips with our mind. We cannot rely on our psychiatrist, or mummy or daddy, or our husband or wife or our children. They are not reliable, unless they are Buddhas.

DEALING WITH THE ATTACHMENT OF OTHERS

Student: May I ask a question about letting go? When a relationship is at an end, how do we help the other person let go?

Venerable Gyatso: We should be more concerned about our own

minds. This teaching is about our own minds. Our major responsibility is to retain a balanced mind. When people are attached to us, again it is not easy. It is just as when somebody is angry at us. Just as Devadatta was angry at Buddha. Also when somebody is attached to us, we cannot get into their minds and change their attachment. Very difficult.

I appreciate that question, because it is a common problem. Even as monks, you find this problem. People become attached and it is hard because they suffer so much, through their attachment.

We are the object of their attachment, and what to do? Difficult. The nicer you are, somehow that generates more attachment.

The real solution for them is wisdom, knowing how to deal with their attachment. So, if we have good communication and we are able to discuss the solution to attachment then we may be able to help out. When we are the object of attachment, it is almost impossible.

Mainly, I think, it is best to keep away. Because attachment is always stronger in the vicinity of the object. In many ways it is best to be kind and friendly, but to be away, to separate from the object, from the person who is suffering so much from attachment. But it is hard.

GUARDING MERIT FROM HARM

Student: Merit can be destroyed by anger. Is there anything else that can destroy merit, besides anger?

Venerable Gyatso: Merit cannot be 100 percent destroyed but it is greatly weakened. If we allow our mind to be strongly agitated by attachment, pride and anger, jealousy, greed and so on, this impairs the power of our merit to ripen. Anger is the most destructive. It is the opposite of love.

Wrong views are also very powerful and they are indirectly

harmful. Wrong views would be denying the Three Jewels of Refuge, denying karma and strongly advocating the opposite—that it is good to kill, that there is no harm in it. Those wrong views lead to heavy negative karma, so they impede or harm merit.

The best method of dealing with anger is to recognize that it is our worst enemy. When it arises in our mind, we should immediately see that it is terrible. At our flat in Rideout Road there is a five-foot long black cobra that comes onto our front lawn for lunch, chasing toads and frogs. When people see the cobra coming onto the lawn, they all get out of the way. They say, “Wah! This is big danger, do not go near!”

We should have the same reaction when we notice that anger is arising in our mind. We think it is like a black cobra. The object of our anger is nothing; that person or thing is not harming me at all, compared to my anger. Having this black cobra in our minds really makes us alert because we know it is dangerous. It can destroy our merit.

The way to protect our merit is to dedicate it with Bodhicitta. When we do a virtuous activity, we should reflect upon this positive energy or merit. And we should sincerely think that through this positive energy, may I benefit all beings. As much as possible I dedicate it to others, so I may quickly become enlightened. It is said that merit dedicated with Bodhicitta becomes invulnerable. It will last until Enlightenment because of the power of Bodhicitta.

Student: Seeing this life as a dream.

Venerable Gyatso: If we do not understand Emptiness, we should try to see the situation as we would a dream when we dedicate. When we wake up in the morning and reflect on last night’s dream, it was not real. But it happened. Rinpoche is saying, in the same way, that we should see the events in this life as not real. The appearance is false, because of the disturbance in our minds.

31ST AUGUST 1997

TRANSFORMING PROBLEMS,
TRANSFORMING HAPPINESS INTO THE PATH

IN ORDER TO ENGAGE in the action of discussing dharma, we should do so with the most skilful motivation. In our minds, we try to reflect on the qualities of the three Jewels of Refuge, reflect on the supreme motivation of Bodhicitta, remembering the kindness of all beings, and how fortunate it is that we have the opportunity to at last repay the kindness of all beings who have looked after us in previous lives as our fathers and as our mothers.

Feel that we have the opportunity now to do something universal, If we wish to just benefit our friends and families of this life we cannot even do that, unless we overcome our own problems and our own creation of problems. Not to mention benefitting every living being throughout the universe.

There is no way we can repay their kindness unless we attain the full achievement of the Path of Enlightenment, unless we become Buddhas.

As the Buddha explained, even the fly on the wall has the Buddha Nature, the ability to become Buddha. We should never think of any lesser goal. Not just for this life, but for our future lives we should always think that the direction of our actions is to bring us closer and closer to Buddhahood.

The way to meditate on Bodhicitta is to first generate love and compassion by thinking of the extensiveness of suffering throughout the universe, and then feel that “I can, at last, do something about it. I am going to participate in this discussion of Dharma in order to try and understand the profound method shown by Buddha.”

ABANDONING THE THOUGHT OF AVERSION TO SUFFERING

Up until now we have talked about the first step in this teaching by Lama Tenbel Nyima: How to transform suffering into the Path to Enlightenment. The first step is to abandon aversion to suffering. Abandon worry. Abandon anxiety. Abandon feeling sorry about suffering in general, about problems.

We explained that when there are problems in our lives, if we are continually unhappy, concerned or worried, it does not help the situation. We have problems just about all the time, do we not? Maybe little problems, the weather. Or big problems, with the people we work with, or family members.

I am sure you know the troubles that occur in your mind. It may not be gross anxiety, where you are literally shaking with fear. The main problem' that we are referring to is the pervading 'heaviness' in our hearts that life is not working the way we would like it to work. This depression in our hearts has no value. It is not necessary.

Not only does it not help the situation, it exacerbates it. It only has the quality of making the problem worse. We need to have the ability to stay calm when there are problems happening, to keep our minds balanced.

USELESSNESS AND DANGER OF WORRY

We need to recognize, first of all, the uselessness of this worry and secondly, the great danger of worry. Because worry, by its nature, tends to increase and magnify problems. So our own mind makes them into bigger obstacles than they actually are.

We can see many examples of this. I am sure we all know people who worry about one thing or another. Some people are worried about getting wet; others worry about mosquitoes; others worry about food.

A lot of people have their pet worries and they give themselves a hard time. I mean, we are not concerned about that particular thing. Perhaps we also experienced whatever they are worried about and got on with our lives. But because they harbour anxiety, worry and aversion to this problem, they have a terrible time when it happens to them. The terrible time is created by their mind.

This is the main point. Sure, there are external obstacles, but the obstacles themselves are not giving us a bad time. We create that. So, the purpose of this teaching is not to remove problems, it is to change our response when things go wrong. As long as we have these five aggregates, conditioned by karma and afflictions, then we are going to continually experience problems.

The point is to remain mentally calm. Do not allow the problems to be obstacles to our lives, and in particular, to our practice of Dharma in this life. That is the main thing.

It is difficult to practise Dharma, when our mind is so swept up in a particular problem that we have no inclination to meditate, no inclination to study, or to think clearly. This is the uselessness and great harm of having aversion to problems. This is the first point that we have talked about.

CULTIVATING JOY WHEN PROBLEMS COME

The second step was not having aversion to problems, but instead, having the attitude of being happy that there are problems. Being enthused and energized when things go wrong in our lives. Now, how can we do that?

We began to talk last week about some of the methods. We need to practise cultivating joy by seeing that problems and suffering are aids to the Path. They support our practice of Dharma. We can use the situation to energize our inner transformation, the growth of Dharma in our heart.

I was explaining this to a group of children at a Sunday school this morning. I was not sure if they were able to understand the profundity of it. They asked a question, so I had to give them an answer. There are two levels of Dharma: there is the external Dharma, the scriptural doctrine taught by the Buddha. And there is the internal Dharma, the doctrine of realization.

The purpose of the external teachings is to enable us to generate the internal Dharma—the calm mind, the wise mind, the peaceful mind. The mind that is maturing in wisdom, compassion and loving kindness.

If we have thoroughly reflected on the Four Noble Truths, we will see that the only thing that will make your existence worthwhile and meaningful, is to transform our minds into Dharma.

And that is not easy. We can read the teachings and think, “Oh that is very nice.” But intellectually accepting it is not enough. We need a deep inner transformation of our mind. And this is enabled by problems because it is when problems arise that our negative mind of anger, of pride habitually arises, and then we have the opportunity to deal with it. These feelings, along with jealousy, attachment and wrong views, arise in disturbing situations or in happy situations, through habit. That is no good.

Instead of just continuing the power of the disturbing mind, we must work against it. It is the very energizing effect of problems that gives us the opportunity to develop positive minds, instead of increasing negative minds.

PROBLEMS ARE OPPORTUNITIES TO TRANSFORM THE MIND
Last week, I mentioned the first three practices that we can do. We need to know there are virtuous practices that we can use to oppose problems arising in our lives, or to oppose the worry and anxiety that occur in our mind.

As long as we know there is a selection of practices and we know our particular mental weakness, then we can selectively welcome each problem. Say, “Aha! This is the chance I have to at last do something new. Instead of following habit, I can now follow the Path of Wisdom. This is an opportunity to transform my mind.”

We do not have to go on retreats in the mountains, or leave home, to practise Dharma. In fact, most problems occur at home, at work, in daily life. These are the best opportunities to practise Dharma. When difficulties arise in our life, we should welcome them with a feeling of joy. So, we need a different attitude in our lives.

RENUNCIATION

The first method we mentioned last week was renunciation. We need the thought of breaking our attachment, our grasping, our clinging to the illusory happiness of this life. And so, when things go wrong, then we look at the situation as being a teaching. “Now, I am learning something about reality. This is the First Noble Truth: True Suffering. Indeed, Buddha was right!”

Although this method does not stop the problem, it stops our subjective reaction, which is harmful. And we are able to generate a creative reaction, to use the situation in a constructive way by generating renunciation. We need the thought of letting go of clinging to the happiness of this life, and setting our sights on achieving liberation and enlightenment.

We reflect, “Well, if this problem is happening to me in this human life and I find it so difficult, imagine if I had to experience the problems of animals, or of hungry ghosts, or of hell beings.”

Reflect upon the extensiveness of difficulties in samsara. And turn our minds away from samsara. The first step: suffering or problems help to support our practice of renunciation.

RENUNCIATION SYMBOLIZED BY THE LOTUS SEAT

Secondly, renunciation is the lotus. Buddha Shakyamuni sits on a lotus, symbolizing the mind of renunciation. The sun is wisdom and the moon is the altruistic mind of Bodhicitta.

How did Buddha develop the lotus that he sits on? In this very way, by transforming problems into the Path. Buddha experienced many problems, even after Enlightenment.

People gave him a hard time. Devadatta particularly gave him a hard time, but so did other people. He was accused of doing this and that. But he dealt with every situation that arose with a totally calm, easy mind. Always a positive mind. Always trying to help those who were trying to harm him.

The Buddha's life is the model for our lives. We should never forget that. We should try to emulate him and follow that example.

TAKING REFUGE

The second point was that problems support our practice of taking refuge. Taking Refuge is the strong determination, in our minds, to follow the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. To use the Three Jewels as excellent guides in our lives.

When problems arise, it is usually because we have not taken refuge strongly. Not in Buddha, Dharma, Sangha but often, if we are starting to get worried, and anxiety arises, it is because we have taken the wrong sort of refuge—we have taken refuge in other people, in our career, in our family, in our bank account, in our house, in our car.

So we feel worried, we start to shake because the object of our refuge—our husband or our wife, or our bank account, is suddenly not giving us the support that we expected, that we wanted them to give. This is because we have invested too much. It is not realistic to rely upon people and phenomena which are products of karma and

afflictions to give us strength, because they have the fault of ignorance, attachment, anger, jealousy and pride.

Nevertheless we have habitually relied on other people to give us strength in this life. And even though we take refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, that does not stop the habitual taking of refuge in people around us. And so, we will be let down. This is not accusing people, or excusing people, or anything like that. It is just reality. If others are unable to subdue their own minds, how can they support us?

PRIDE: USING PROBLEMS TO DEFLATE OUR PRIDE

Also, last week, we mentioned pride. Our pride is an inflated attitude, that we are so good, so important. Pride is a great barrier to learning anything new. We think, “I know it already. I do not have to study. I do not have to meditate. I do not have to do prostration.” One of the main reasons for doing prostrations is to help us overcome pride. Pride becomes not only a barrier to learning, but also an agent of anger when we are insulted. We react way out of proportion to the insult.

Also, pride is the cause of sorrow and loneliness. Loneliness is one of our biggest problems. Our pride prevents others from coming close to us. It prevents us from establishing good, honest open relationships, where we do not have to put on a front. If we do not have close relationships, we feel more and more alone. Pride is really a big problem. We have to be honest and to recognize that.

So now when problems come, we give them to our pride. We realize we are not as clever as we thought we were. So we try to use problems to deflate our pride. If the particular obstacle that is arising is related to pride, then we rejoice. We think, “Good, this is showing me my pride.” And so, we melt that down.

ANGER: A DESTRUCTIVE EMOTION

Anger is one of the most destructive emotions because anger, by its very nature, is tremendously agitating to the mind. It is an agitated thought of wanting to inflict harm upon the object that is hurting us.

It could be another sentient being, an inanimate object, or we could be angry with ourselves. It is wanting to hurt an object that is hurting us.

I remember when I was a kid, I had a very bad toothache. I convinced the dentist to pull it out, because it was hurting so much. The tooth was pulled out, and the dentist gave me the tooth afterwards. I took the tooth home and put it on a concrete path and smashed it with a big hammer. Being angry at the object of our pain, or even angry at ourselves, can lead to self-destructive behaviour.

Anger is terrible. Its very nature is suffering and it causes great disturbance because it makes us irrational. We say and do things which we later regret very much. We say terribly hurtful words to our loved ones. We may even smash our treasured possessions.

In Australia, there was a man who had an argument with his wife. So he drove a bull-dozer through the family home. He destroyed the family home, because of his irrational activity of anger.

Not only do we destroy our possessions, we also destroy our bodies. Often if we are upset or very angry, we start smoking. We do not care. We know the damage that smoking does to our body, but we do not care. We start drinking heavily, not caring, punishing our bodies. Anger is physically and psychologically disturbing.

ANGER CAN LEAD TO LONELINESS

Anger also causes loneliness, because people cannot bear to be with us. They feel that we upset them. When we are in the presence of somebody who is habitually angry, nobody feels comfortable. We all

feel awkward and we want to get away from the angry person, as far as we can. So, we become more and more alone. Our friends leave us, our family abandons us. And a vicious circle is built up where we go into self-destructive behaviour through anger.

ANGER WEAKENS MERIT

From the point of view of karma, anger has the power to weaken the positive imprints that we have accumulated from the past. Through anger, we accumulate a vast number of negative imprints in our minds. This causes suffering now and in the future.

ANGER CAN LEAD US TO REBIRTH IN LOWER REALMS

Finally, anger is our worst enemy. Even the most terrible person in this life cannot do anything worse than kill us. But anger can send us to the three lower realms, especially to the hell realms. Anger is usually the cause for rebirth in the hell realms.

No human enemy can send us to the hell realms, only our own anger can do that. I am listing the faults of anger so that we are thoroughly convinced that it is something to be free from; it is vitally important to eliminate anger from our minds at the earliest opportunity.

PATIENCE—ANTIDOTE TO ANGER

What is the antidote to anger? The antidote to anger is patience. Patience is a virtue, a mental quality, a mental capacity to remain calm, in the face of adversity. Where do we get this patience from? Do we invest in it? Do we read about it?

Just reading about patience will -not make us patient. The only way we can cultivate the strength of patience in our mind is by taking advantage of problems. Perhaps somebody is agitating us. If we

see the situation in this new light, we recognize that this person is actually our helper. This person is enabling us to practise patience. He is our teacher, our friend. If we did not have somebody helping us, or harming us, we wouldn't have any patience.

So now, again, we generate happiness. We can generate joy that this person is annoying us. (Laughter) All right? A sincere joy, because definitely the only way we can develop patience is by dealing with the disturbing situation now. Of course, many of us have got people in our lives who make us very upset. We are going to blow it if we try to begin our practice of patience with them. There is no chance of success.

START PRACTICE OF PATIENCE WITH SMALL PROBLEMS

We have to begin our practice with small problems. Everyday problems, on the road, when people drive in front of us. Or shopping, when we cannot get what we want. Just a small situation, when we are starting to get irritated and angry—these are the times when we begin our cultivation and practice.

WHO PRESSES THE BUTTONS?

Slowly, slowly, we will become more and more capable of dealing with bigger and bigger problems. And dealing with these people who have the ability to press our buttons just by looking at us. (Laughter) Of course, who is really pressing the buttons? We are! Actually, we are the ones who press the buttons. They are just the object.

So, this is the fourth method we can use to deal with problems. If we find that a problem in our life is making us angry, then we realize that actually, this problem is the opportunity to practise patience. And so we stay calm; we can be more like Buddha. We do not react with antagonism.

The antagonistic reaction is so quick, almost like a reflex, is not it? As soon as you tap the tendon over the knee, there is a knee-jerk response. Well, it is the same thing if somebody insults us. There is almost a reflex reaction—the words come out. “Well, you’re stupid” or, “you did this last week.” Instantly we are defensive. Not only defensive, we are offensive. This is something that we have to deal with.

Even if the words do not come out, the thoughts do. (Laughter) We might put a smile on our face but actually our mind is not smiling at all. We are still antagonistic.

It is no good living like that. It is foolish. It is just hurting ourselves and increasing our bondage to samsara by creating negative karma. We must deal with this knee-jerk response of anger, starting with the slightest provocative situation. So, we need provocative situations to work on patience.

Also we need patience because it is only on the basis of patience that we can develop loving kindness and compassion. If we have anger, there is no way we can have pure love and compassion for all beings without discrimination.

This very beautiful quality of the Bodhisattva is universal love, which we see in the visiting teachers. Not this one. (Laughter). The lamas, you know. They really manifest this beautiful quality of loving-kindness and compassion. We feel so good in their presence, does not matter what their bodies look like.

This is a beauty that we can develop. Our parents gave us a mixed lot of chromosomes and genetic materials, so we are stuck with the appearance of our bodies. Most of us are not satisfied with the beauty, or the appearance of our bodies. That might sometimes be a problem in itself, but we cannot do much about it.

Of course, if we follow the ads on TV, there is a lot we can do about it. (Laughter) Unbelievable. The collagen pills. And all the skin things, hair things and reduce-the-tummy things. There is a big market out there. People are trying to look beautiful. In our age,

I think we are worshipping the body more and more, with the fitness rage and so on.

When such an attitude is motivated by self-cherishing, grasping, “My happiness,” then that itself is useless because there is no way that we will ever be satisfied by our appearance. And anyway, as I said at the beginning, we are limited by what our parents handed down to us through our genes.

OUR MINDS ARE NOT LIMITED

There is, however, no limitation in enhancing the beauty of our minds. And the most beautiful mental qualities are loving kindness, compassion, wisdom and patience.

All of the virtuous minds, the mind which cherishes others. Although we cannot see it with our eyes, we can feel it with our hearts, when we are with somebody. There is no reason why any of us cannot develop this inner beauty. And it does not cost anything.

You know, we do not have to buy all these magic pills. A lot of us think that alcohol can make us like that, and other drugs too. We actually crave that ability. I think one of the things that we like about alcohol is that it does reduce our inhibitions. In some ways, maybe it does give us the ability to be more friendly. But of course, it is at a cost. And also, it is a transient state of mind that is associated with confusion. We want to be more friendly and we drink more alcohol. Then sometimes our anger starts and our hold on emotions becomes unstable.

We should be aware that taking physical substances affects the mind and there is danger of becoming addicted to the substance and losing control. It is artificial. But sincere loving kindness and compassion, cultivated in our minds and combined with wisdom and by following the Path, is progressive.

The meaning of Dharma, the Spiritual Path is a gradual gentle

flowering of our inner qualities, the inner Buddha nature that we all possess. We can all do that. None of us cannot do that.

So-called problems are really situations which enable us to grow in loving-kindness and compassion. So again, we think back—how wonderful it is that this problem happened.

ANGER WEAKENS MERIT

Student: If we hold on to our anger, will the merit that we have weaken? What can we do?

Venerable Gyatso: If we allow anger to abide in our mind, it has the destructive quality to weaken the collection of virtuous karma that we have. Other afflictions also do this, particularly wrong views. So just knowing that is not going to stop the anger, is it?

The main thing in dealing with anger is to first recognize that there is anger in our mind. The best thing is to recognize the precursor of anger. Anger is like an exploding bomb. Once the explosion has happened, it is difficult to control. If we can defuse the bomb before it explodes, then we are safe.

What lights the fuse of anger? It is unhappiness, irritability. We are not angry, but the mind is agitated by unhappiness. With our meditation, we train ourselves to look at our minds, to be mindful of what is happening. As practitioners, we should be particularly mindful when we are unhappy, or when we are feeling irritable. We should notice this before the explosion of anger comes. And we do this by training ourselves to observe our minds at all times.

If somebody is talking to us, we participate in the conversation, but we are also watching our emotional reaction. If we find that we are beginning to dislike this person, catch that dislike. “Why? Why am I starting to dislike this person? What is the reason?” Try to immediately see the person in a different light. Because the danger is

that we get angry at this person and then it is very hard to stop.

By recognizing the fuel of anger—agitation and unhappiness—we can be careful and avoid exploding into anger. The best way to prevent anger is by not even letting it happen. What if it has already happened and we find that we are angry with this person? If we have any control, we immediately recognize that the real enemy, our own anger, has manifested. The Lamas say we should freeze our mind. Freeze it. Stop it. It is building up negative thoughts. Make the mind like a block of wood, the way Lama Zopa puts it. Just cease the whirlwind of angry thoughts.

The next step is to separate from the object of anger. If we cannot control our anger, it is better to get out of the room. Do not stay in the same room, but go to a space where you can calm down through your practice.

Once we have calmed down, we reflect upon the futility and danger of our anger, and we try to see the person in a different light. We especially think about what I have been saying: “This person is helping me, not harming me. This person is giving me the chance to practise patience, to stay calm in provocative situations.”

We have to judge how well we can handle it. We might go back into the room and attempt to re-negotiate or whatever, to discuss with the person, with a calm mind, from our side, and see how we go. There may be times when we just cannot do it. We have to try, try, try again. As long as we develop the habit of being totally alert to what’s happening with our emotional state in any situation and recognizing that the real dangers are internal, then we use these methods.

At other times we might suppress our anger. This can happen even without Dharma. We have developed the habit of suppressing anger. And then, when we go to bed that night, we lie down and the situation comes up. Suddenly we get really angry, just lying in bed because we relive that situation and all the anger bubbles out. Then we think of really clever things to say, to hurt the other person.

And our minds go on and on. We were so tired half an hour before. Now that we are lying in bed we cannot sleep, because we are so energized by anger.

Then we should try and stop our mind from this circle of destructive thoughts. Stop creating the fantasies of revenge, stop saying things or doing things to get back at others. That is all part of anger.

We must break this habit. We could visualize Kuan Yin, or Chenrezig above our heads. We could say mantras, feeling the purifying energy, visualizing cleansing light or nectar flowing down and clearing our mind of anger and its seeds. That is very powerful because Avalokiteshvara is the Bodhisattva of Compassion.

DEALING WITH ANGER

Student: How do we deal with another person's anger, rather than our own anger?

Venerable Gyatso: It is hard enough to deal with our own anger. How can we help somebody else deal with it? It is difficult if somebody is aggressive towards us. We have to assess the situation. If we love the person and really want to help him, we should not get angry in response, all right? If we respond with anger, it will get worse and worse.

Student: But the thing is that, if you are so patient, the person will keep on... again and again.

Venerable Gyatso: If we do not react, it makes them more angry. Well, that can happen, I guess. They do like to see response. We can pretend we are angry. (Laughter) We can shout and demonstrate physically, but in our heart, we stay calm.

Student: Can we show anger but with a good motivation?

Venerable Gyatso: We are not actually angry. But our intention is to try and help the situation. So we manifest wrath or anger, but it is a virtuous mind. In Tantra, we have these wrathful deities; Yamantaka is a wrathful manifestation of Manjushri.

Manjushri is the Bodhisattva of Wisdom. Pure wisdom. And pure wisdom can manifest in the most wrathful forms—buffaloes and flames and big eyes, big fangs. It is a skilful method to use the appearance of anger which is actually virtue. The real Yamantaka is not directed towards external enemies. Actually it is directed towards our own internal enemies: our own anger, pride, attachment and so on. In Tantra, that is the real enemy we are trying to subdue, our own unsubdued mind.

But I think it is wisdom, right? I think this is the clue. The Tantric way, or so-called anger, if used constructively is transformation of wisdom. It all depends upon the situation, our assessment, our ability to deal with the assessment.

If we feel that a manifestation of so-called anger can work, well then, we do it. We are motivated, as you say, to help the other person, to put on a wrathful face.

Mothers do it with their children all the time. They have to hold the rolling pin or wooden spoon in the air with this threatening mudra and the children instantly obey. (Laughter). So, it is like that. But if we do it to our husband, or our girlfriend, without the wooden spoon, it mightn't work.

Student: Is it necessary to get angry?

Venerable Gyatso: Anger itself, the destructive energy of anger, is never useful. It is always destructive. What we are talking about is not getting angry, but pretending we are angry, to help the other person.

I think it is important to recognize anger as a sickness, one of the worst illnesses in all of society. This recognition is very helpful. If our mother goes insane, and she attacks us with a knife—which happens—we will restrain her strongly, but not with anger.

We will have to use force and bind her to stop her from killing. But we will do it because we recognize her mind is sick and we will not have anger in response. Exactly the same attitude goes for people who are angry at us and are not insane. I mean, Buddhism says anger is a form of insanity. It is a sickness. If we have a compassionate, kind attitude, and if there is an opening in that person's mind, we can try and get them to face their anger. Then that is excellent.

But of course, it might make them more angry, if we try and indicate that their real problem is not us, but their mind. So in many ways, it is important to try and help if we can. Difficult. But what choice do we have? We all have family members who at one time or other get quite angry and upset, or habitually get angry. We should always do our best and deal with it. I think over time, the main thing is not to get angry from our side. To stay calm. At least with a calm mind, we can make some sort of rational response.

GENERATING JOY WHEN PROBLEMS ARISE

We were talking about ways to generate joy when problems arise. “This problem is fantastic! I can work on renunciation, I can generate refuge, I can overcome pride. I can overcome anger.”

KARMA

When problems next occur, we think, “This is fantastic! I can use this situation to purify negative karma.”

There are different causes for the sufferings and problems we are experiencing. There is the external object, but there is also the inter-

nal karmic seed, which is connecting us with this problem. So we use the problem to reflect on karma, to re-affirm, and to strengthen our understanding of karma. There is no way we could be experiencing this problem, if we had not created the cause to experience it.

FOUR PRINCIPLES OF KARMA

In the text, the Lama says: Think about the four principles of karma.

First of all, karma is certain. Positive karmic seeds definitely bring happiness. Negative karma seeds definitely bring unhappiness.

The tendency of karma is to increase. Remember, that is a scary one. Karmic seeds have the capacity to become heavier and stronger as time goes on.

For example, what if we abuse somebody with anger and say hurtful words to them? Say the situation happened this morning. We abuse our husband or wife, we are angry at them, and we hurt them through harmful words. We establish the karma of harsh speech. As long as we do not regret this action, that karma becomes heavier and heavier throughout the day.

It will continue to become heavier until, at some time, we generate the thought of regret, of remorse, for having done that negative action. Why does it get heavier? There are four branches to the establishment of a karmic seed. There is the motivation, the object, the action and the completion of the action. The completion of the action is the sense of satisfaction, the knowledge that what you intended to do has happened.

The fourth branch is still acting. As long as we feel happy that we hurt somebody and do not generate remorse, the fourth karmic branch is still working. Therefore, the seed is getting heavier and heavier over time.

That should make us afraid of karma. Karma is so dangerous.

We should reflect time and time again, during the day, on what we have been doing during the last hour or two. If we have generated a negative action, we should apply the four opponent powers and, at least, we should generate remorse, and maybe recite a mantra to overcome the karma. That will stop it from growing and decrease its heaviness.

I think for the same reason anger destroys our virtue. I think it is the same thing on the virtuous side. If we say kind words with love and we make somebody happy, that virtuous karma will also increase as a function of time. If anger arises, our mind becomes destructive and agitated and the increase of virtue stops. I think this is the first reason why anger harms virtuous karma. If it is extreme anger, it can not only stop it increasing, it can stop its strength and weaken it.

So when problems arise, we use them to reflect on karma. I have mentioned the first two general points of karma. Karma is certain in that virtuous karma always brings happiness. Unvirtuous karma brings unhappiness. The second is that karma tends to increase. The third is, if you have not created the cause, you cannot experience the result. If we are trying to experience something, but we do not have the karmic cause to experience that, no matter how much we create the conditions, we cannot experience what we are looking for.

On the other side, if we have not created the negative karma, no matter how bad the conditions, something bad cannot happen. The classic example is an air crash where somebody miraculously survives.

At that time, they did not have the karma to die, so the miracle occurred. Often you read that somebody was supposed to board a plane but he could not get to the airport in time because of the traffic. Then the plane crashes and everybody was killed. The person wanted to catch that plane, but was prevented from doing it. The result cannot occur if you have not created the cause.

Finally, the fourth point of karma is that what you have done

will not be wasted. Karmic seeds retain their potential over countless lifetimes. We may have created karma billions of lifetimes ago, and they are still carried on our stream of consciousness. They can ripen now. Often, we get angry when someone hurts us. We feel indignant, “I am so good. What have I done to hurt you? I have done nothing to deserve this problem in my life.” Well, that may be true. In fact what we did to deserve the problem was in previous lives. It may have been billions of lifetimes ago, but finally, that karma has caught up with us.

So, when problems arise we reflect deeply on karma, we generate the strong intention to purify negative karma.

Also, simply speaking, we can perhaps take joy that all these problems happened to us. Therefore this karma has ripened, and that is one less that I have to worry about. We can see it in this simplistic way. At least we have ripened one karma. “Whew! It is gone!” And we can generate some sort of happiness from that.

On top of that, we should be motivated to purify, to apply the four opponent powers. This is one method through which we can consciously decrease the strength of the karmic imprints in our mind.

Lama Tenbel Nyima says, “If you do not want suffering, then you should renounce the cause of suffering, which is being non-virtuous. And purify the previously accumulated defilements by using the four opponent powers. And determine to prevent the future afflictions and negative karmas from arising.” So, the situation is dealt with that way.

PROBLEMS SUPPORT TRAINING IN VIRTUE

The next reason to be happy when problems occur is to see that they support our training in virtue, our attraction to accumulating virtue. When we have problems in our lives, we tell ourselves: “You want to be happy, do you not? You have to create the cause. You are so

miserable in your life, all these things are going wrong. Well, that is because you do not have the causes for things to go right.”

Feel strongly motivated to practise generosity, kindness, patience, all positive actions to cherish others. Give up the self-cherishing thought.

Things going wrong can motivate us to do that. In fact, extremely strongly. There is the famous story of Ben Kunga, the famous Tibetan bandit. He terrified the countryside as a robber, a bandit and plunderer of merchants, when they were taking their goods from one town to another. At one time, Ben Kunga was attacking some merchants who had all their stores on horseback. During the fighting, a pregnant mare was mortally wounded. Her belly was cut open by a sword and the foal came out. Even though the mother horse was dying, she attempted to lick the foal clean and look after it.

When Ben Kunga observed this, he saw in this situation a reflection of the world, of problems in the world, and how compassion, kindness, and love are so much more powerful than aggression, hatred, and stealing. He gave up his stealing and banditry and became a monk and studied with the Kadampa Geshe in Tibet. He changed his life because of this powerful image, of the dying mare looking after the foal.

Similarly, when things go radically wrong with our lives, it does not mean the world has fallen apart. We can use problems, even small problems, to motivate us to practise virtue. Problems are useful, they remind us of the vicious nature of samsara, the wheel of life.

ATTACHMENT

Our attachment has been lying to us, it has been deceiving us. Our attachment has been saying, “There is happiness out there. You can get happiness. You must.” We are bombarded by advertising, by our friends, by the whole thrust of activity to indulge in attachment.

“There is definitely happiness out there and it is for you to buy.”

So, problems are fantastic, for they reveal the lie, the deception behind the advertising. These are deceptions behind the social beliefs that we are forced to incorporate in our minds, just by being in society. It is very hard to go against the stream of society, pushed by attachment. Problems are useful because they enable us to generate virtue.

PURIFYING KARMA

Student: If a person has achieved enlightenment, has he or she purified all the past karmic imprints?

Venerable Gyatso: With Enlightenment, the state of Buddhahood, one has definitely destroyed all the accumulation of negative karma. All karma associated with samsara, even virtuous karma associated with attachment to samsara, has been overcome. They cannot ripen.

So your next question may be: How come Devadatta could give Buddha a hard time? He hit him with a stone and tried to kill him. How could this happen if the Buddha did not have the karma?

There are two ways to answer this question. The Theravadian point of view is that, although Buddha's mind was enlightened, his body was still a true suffering. It was still a product of karma and affliction and was capable of being wounded. The Mahayanist point of view is that the Buddha was enlightened before he took birth as Prince Siddhartha. There was some karmic connection from Devadatta's side in previous lives with Buddha. But Buddha allowed the injury to happen, through his wisdom. This was a way to teach. Because he even said, “This occurred because of some karma with Devadatta in the past.” And so, he used the situation to teach the way in which karma is very sticky, and that we have to work hard to get rid of

karma. In reality, he did not have karma. From a Mahayana point of view, the Buddhas have totally destroyed their karma.

Still, from our side, we have karmic relationships with Buddha. I think last time I mentioned the five close disciples of Buddha who went on a strict fast with him when he fasted for six years and looked like a skeleton. These five disciples were with him and then when he took some food, they renounced him. They went away, saying, "He has given up his asceticism." Then he sat under the Bodhi tree and achieved Enlightenment. Then he went to the beer Park and he taught them the Four Noble Truths.

In previous lives, they had been Yakshas, meat-eating beings who ate the Bodhisattva alive, whilst he was meditating in the forest. As they were killing him, chopping off his limbs and eating his flesh, he made the prayer that when he eventually achieved Enlightenment, they would be his first disciples.

And so, through his prayer, he created the karmic situation such that they were able to meet him in the future. There were others who couldn't see Buddha because of the karma from their side. They saw somebody who appeared to them to be ordinary, not a teacher, so they did not bother listening. From our side, we have karmic relationships with the Buddhas. From the Buddhas' side, they do not have karma.

Student: How about Buddha's headaches?

Venerable Gyatso: I think it is the some thing. Arhats can have headaches. I think from the Buddha's side, it is definite that the Buddha had no mental or physical suffering. The mental factor of feeling is always blissful, in the Buddha's mind. Buddhas can manifest headaches in order to use that situation as a teaching. They do not experience any pain at all. But the Theravadian explanation is because their body is still a true suffering, a product of karma and affliction, then they can experience headaches.

Student: Why only be happy when bad karma ripens? Why not seek to purify past karma?

Venerable Gyatso: Both actions are important. Karma is just one of many causes for our pleasant and unpleasant experiences. When something goes wrong, we reflect, “All right, this is the result of negative karma.” It is not just leaving it at that and thinking, Oh well, that is one less. It is saying, “Wow—I’ve still got millions of negative karma that have not ripened. I must do something about it now. I must purify them.”

I agree with you—purifying is part of this practice. We have to actively engage in activities of purification.

Student: Yes, but sometimes it does not give you the extra oomph!

Venerable Gyatso: That is why we need the problems. (Laughter) That is exactly the point. Exactly the point. If it is going easy we can be lulled into complacency.

THE HELL REALMS

Student: That means beings in the hell realms rejoice more than us?

Venerable Gyatso: The trouble is, they cannot. Their mind is so swept up in self-pity and misery and anger, that they cannot generate virtue. If they could, in that situation, the virtue would be strong. The Buddha himself developed Bodhicitta in the hell realms... I forget why he was in hell. This was when he was a Bodhisattva.

He was experiencing the torture of being forced to carry something by these hell protectors, hallucinated demons. There were several people being forced to pull a heavy load. He felt compassion for the other person, and tried to carry his load as well. Instantly, through that moment of compassion, his hell rebirth ceased, and he

was reborn in the divine celestial realms. But generally, unless we have such strong imprints of Bodhicitta, it is impossible to create virtue in the hell realms.

That is why we must do it now. As humans, we have so much opportunity. We have some respite from our suffering. We can sit back and reflect on the opportunity to change our minds. Even as humans, it is hard. As hell beings, it is impossible.

PRACTISING DHARMA IN GOOD TIMES AND BAD

Student: We cannot get ourselves energized to practise. We see Dharma practice as a chore, when things go well.

Venerable Gyatso: As you say, it is a type of laziness. Laziness is a non-virtuous mind. We become complacent and lazy. That is why it is said that in these degenerate times, virtue is becoming rarer and rarer. It is harder and harder to practise virtue. Many people say, “What is Buddhism talking about? This is not the degenerate age. It is the age of Enlightenment. (Laughter). Look at technological advances. Look at the luxuries we have. Look at the diseases we have cured. Look at all the full bellies. This is the flowering of human history.”

Buddhism says the opposite. What is happening is that we are swept up in desire and attachment and incredible superficial pursuit of the outside world as the source of happiness. Spiritual inner growth is neglected. It is taught that there are times when everybody is very spiritual. At those times it is difficult to create strong karma, because there are no problems. There is not the energizing activity of things going wrong that shakes us out of our complacency, to do something with our mind.

Now, there are terrible problems. The other side of the coin of the Age of Enlightenment is that the suicide rate is going through the

roof. Suicide is one of the greatest plagues of this day and age. Not only suicide, but self-destruction, through drugs and alcohol, and simple indulgence through over-eating. That is a type of suicide.

Look at relationships. People cannot stand each other. In Australia, the majority of children at any school are not living with both their natural parents. When I was in school, all the kids lived with their mothers and fathers. Now it is a rarity for a child at school to be living with both natural mother and father.

This is the other side of the coin of the Age of Enlightenment. There is inner misery, deep inside, a sense of futility. Look at children, especially in the West. They have nothing to do. They get everything they want. There is no motivation to work on themselves, they just indulge. This is a generalization. Because, within society, there is also wisdom. There are people realizing the dangerous times we are in. And also, as predicted in Buddhism, there is a resurgence, a spirituality, a sincere seeking for the truth.

From my side, I felt that. I went through university in the Sixties, the fabulous Sixties. An incredible time to be in university. I did everything. I indulged in the flower power revolution, well into the Seventies. I realized the superficiality of it all. I suffered so much, flitting from one relationship to another, being superficial, being hurt when my partner flitted away from me. And hurt partners when I flitted away from them. You know the painful relationship situations.

There were many people in those days who met Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa, who had been through similar experiences. They are still the strongest students of Lama Zopa and Lama Yeshe, because they had experienced suffering. Fortunately, through some miracle of karma, they were able to meet the Lamas, and were shown the spiritual Path.

Today, it is a mixed bag of tricks. There is danger from simple indulgence, and yet there is also opportunity. The very problems of society can energize us to grow and mature inwardly.

So, we should not give up hope for ourselves and for our society. Definitely, we should realize the meaning of Dharma and practise Dharma.

ELIMINATING NEGATIVE KARMA

Student: Can we eliminate the negative karma by being regretful?

Venerable Gyatso: There are four opponent powers to eliminate karma. The first is regret, sincere remorse. The second is the power of the object, where the object is either a sentient being or the Three Jewels. The second power is to generate refuge, if the negative karma is against the Three Jewels. Or to meditate on compassion, if the object of our negative karma was a sentient being.

The third power is to do some action to oppose the negative action. And the fourth power is to generate the vow or the determination to not repeat the action. These four opponent powers oppose the negative karma in a relative way, depending on their relative strength.

We can only totally eliminate negative karma when the second opponent power, meditating on refuge and compassion, is combined with the wisdom realizing Emptiness.

From the Mahayana Prasangika point of view, when we first generate the meditative wisdom directly realizing Emptiness, we destroy all negative karmas. We are not yet enlightened, we still have a long way to go. But we have destroyed them and we will not create any more. This is the beginning of the Arya Bodhisattva's Path, the first ground of a Bodhisattva, as we remove all negative karma.

REALIZING EMPTINESS

Student: Develop renunciation. I have heard one of the teachers

mention that our depth of renunciation is related to the depth of suffering. My question is: When we are thinking like that, it is really difficult to generate joy, because the mind sinks. It is so overwhelming. How do you maintain that balance and still maintain some joyfulness?

Venerable Gyatso: Good question. If we do reflect on suffering, our mind can be overwhelmed by sadness. How do we prevent that? Again, it is the same answer, by meditating on Emptiness. Our compassion must be supported by the wisdom realizing Emptiness.

The reason we feel so sad is because we see the other suffering sentient beings as inherently existing sentient beings. We see suffering as inherently existing when it is not. When we see it as inherently existing, a great wall of misery suffocates us. That is because of our false projection that suffering exists from its own side. As it says in the Heart Sutra: “No suffering, no cause of suffering.” Forget what I said! (Laughter) You all know that does not mean there is no suffering at all. It means that the suffering does not inherently exist. That is why we fall into despondency—because we are grasping at true existence.

The solution is to combine our renunciation and our compassion with Emptiness. So we realize that the beings who are suffering do not exist on their own side. But we know that the wisdom realizing Emptiness, the Fourth Noble Truth, is the solution. This leads to blissful cessation of suffering, the Third Noble Truth.

When Buddha taught the First Noble Truth, true suffering, everybody went, Orrr! (Laughter). Then he taught the True Cause of Suffering, and they went Orrr!! Even more loudly. They were about to jump into the Ganges to commit suicide, when he taught the Third Noble Truth, the Cessation of Suffering, and everybody went Ahh!!! (Laughter). Then he taught the True Path, which leads to True Cessation.

Student: Emptiness. Can it be likened to a dream? While you are in a dream, the suffering is real. The experience is real. When you wake up, that suffering is not real. Likewise, when people are in so-called samsara, the suffering is real, while we are in it. When we are out of it, like in clear light, that suffering may look like a dream.

Venerable Gyatso: Yes, very good. Excellent! This is a good way to think about Emptiness and to deal with suffering. When we have a nightmare or something, we have terror and fear. This is a big problem during the dream because we think it is real. But then, as soon as we wake up, we are flooded with relief. Because “Oh! It was only a dream.” It was only in the mind. It was not real. And so there is sudden happiness. That indeed is a good illustration of understanding Emptiness. Ordinarily, in our lives, we project too much, we exaggerate the suffering and ourselves to be intrinsically real, concrete and solid. Our minds fabricate more than what is actually there. We feel there is no escape.

The wisdom realizing Emptiness is like waking up from a dream. That is, it relieves the intensity of the suffering experience. That is a good illustration, I think, on why we should meditate on Emptiness.

Student: Suffering. Would it help one to develop compassion? There is some benefit in melancholy in that it helps to empathize with others.

Venerable Gyatso: That happens anyway. Because we do not realize Emptiness, when we meditate on the suffering of the three lower realms, we do feel sad. And indeed, in the generation of compassion, we should generate sadness by reflecting on the suffering of others and transform that sadness into compassion.

This is an effective means to generate compassion. If we realize Emptiness in the beginning, then maybe we wouldn't be sad.

But you see, it is an interesting point; it is not possible to realize Emptiness without having love and compassion. In order to realize Emptiness, we must have great merit. That merit is generated through love and compassion.

The two realizations, compassion and wisdom, mutually support each other and are developed together. So, I accept what you say.

DO NOT WAIT TO PURIFY KARMA

Student: Being a human being, and knowing that I can purify my bad karma, sometimes makes me create more negative karma, because at the end of the day I know I can purify.

Venerable Gyatso: One of the four opponent powers of purification is vowing not to repeat the action. (Laughter) If we are practising well, we should do the four opponent powers immediately, not tonight. One of the great Indian pandits used to carry around a stupa with him. Whenever a wrong thought or speech occurred in his mind, he would immediately set the stupa on a table, do three prostrations and confess. So, we should not wait till tonight. (Laughter)

Student: What if we do make the mistake again?

Venerable Gyatso: Then we should make the vow not to make the mistake in the next five minutes. (Laughter). If we manage not to do it in the next five minutes, then we should extend it. It is true. We should be realistic. We think, “I am never going to do that again. For the rest of my life, I am never going to abuse my husband.” No chance!

Of course, as soon as we realize we have broken a vow, we apply the four opponent powers more strongly. There is no way we are going to be perfectly pure, go from purity to purity. But we should not use the possibility of purification as an excuse, “Oh, I can purify afterwards.”

There are many jokes referring to the Confessional in Roman Catholicism. People have a good time on Saturday night, because they know they can purify the next day at church. And next week, it is the same thing. But I think the Confession is the four opponent powers. It is exactly the same method that Buddhists use to purify negative karma. If one is serious in the Confession, one will definitely purify the sin. They say it is God that purifies you, God absolves you from your sin. Actually, it is their own action that absolves them from their sin. And God is wisdom and compassion, I think.

Student: Regarding the working of consciousness, two hours ago, Princess Diana died in an accident.

Venerable Gyatso: Died? I heard she was injured.

Student: So, my question is, how does consciousness work?

Venerable Gyatso: Everybody is the same. When the body is damaged to the point where it can no longer support life, there is separation of the mind from the body. In an acute situation like this, it would all depend upon what state of mind we are in, when we are injured. It is difficult to judge if she was angry at these people (paparazzi). It may not be such a good sign for rebirth. Then again, we must never be angry. It is true. We might suddenly die, and then, for sure, we will be born in the lower realms. Some people do die when they are angry, because they have a heart attack.

PURIFICATION PRACTICES

Student: When we are generating the power of regret, in purification, what are the negative actions we are focusing on? One Lama says we should cover everything. That would take the whole night.

Venerable Gyatso: Have you heard of the Bodhisattva's Confession? When we do prostrations to the 35 Buddhas and recite the short

confessional sutra, that covers everything. It is a list of all the ten non-virtuous actions. It is very beneficial, to recite that with feeling. Just one page covers all negative karmas.

When we do prostrations, this is the opponent powers of doing an action to oppose a negative action. We should reflect beforehand as well, on the more recent negative karma that are close to our consciousness.

Student: When we apply the four opponent powers, do we have to do the whole process?

Venerable Gyatso: There are many different purification practises that we can do. I think the simplest way, at the end of the day, is to reflect on how we did during the day. Where we created negative karma, we generate sincere regret. And I mean sincere regret, coming from here (points to heart). Then we meditate on compassion and try and combine that with Emptiness. We may say one Vajrasattva mantra, or 27 or 9, or at least one, even the short Vajrasattva mantra. After saying the mantra we determine not to repeat the action. We can do it sitting down, in the few minutes it takes to do that. At least generate regret, because that stops the karma from increasing. Do not wait till tonight, do it now.

All right. I think that is enough for today. We will complete this next week. We have created much positive energy by reflecting together on the Dharma. So we should dedicate it to all beings, especially those unfortunate people who died in the car accident in Paris. Today, maybe thousands and thousands of people have died in car accidents around the world. But this is real, is it not? Suddenly when somebody very important, somebody who seems to exist from their own side, does not exist any more, it is a very powerful reminder of suffering, and the cause of suffering, and how it can come any time. So, let us dedicate this positive energy, especially to these unfortunate people and pray that they have a fortunate rebirth.

7TH SEPTEMBER 1997

LET'S TRY TO CULTIVATE a pure motivation to engage in the action of discussing Dharma, thinking that through this activity, may I quickly generate the understanding of how to follow the two-fold Path of method and wisdom, in order to achieve full Enlightenment, in order to benefit all other sentient beings.

Today, we will complete the series of talks about transforming everyday experiences into the spiritual Path. How to deal with situations, not only problematic situations, but also happy situations. How to skilfully avoid falling under the control of attachment, pride and so on, and to use that situation to strengthen our Dharma practice, our practice of the spiritual Path.

Until now, we have spent a lot of time on how to transform difficult situations into the Path. How to be skilful and deal with the problems that arise in our lives and to not allow them to become obstacles to inner growth. In fact, not only to avoid allowing problems to become obstacles, but to actually use problems to enhance our spiritual growth.

The first step is to avoid problems being obstacles, and second step is to actually make the so-called problems advantageous for our minds.

We have talked about the various methods of doing this. When problems or suffering arise, we have seen how it is not only useless but harmful to generate anger, or to have anxiety, to let our mind be disturbed by problems. Because when the mind is disturbed, that in itself does not help the problem. It only makes it worse.

The point is that we need control. We need to have some ability to have inner control, to deal with problems. There is no doubt that problems will continually arise in our lives. We do not have to look for problems. They find us. So often, when we think things are going well, the unexpected happens.

A MOST SKILFUL METHOD TO MEET WITH PROBLEMS

We need to be prepared, to have the most skilful method to deal with problems. Within Buddhism, we understand the relationship between the subjective mind and the objective world. There is an inter-play between what is happening in the mind and what is experienced in the world. Each of us needs to make the decision that we are going to control our future. No longer are we going to allow external conditions or internal karma to push us around.

We are like the skinny kid on the beach. The big bully of karma and the external obstacles have been pushing us around for too long, for lifetimes. Now, we have to act. We see the ads for the gyms in the newspapers. The skinny kid builds up muscles, and then goes to kick sand in the face of the big guy. We have to do something like that. But it is not our physical muscles that we have to build up. We have to build up the inner muscle of confidence, of cheerfulness, of understanding, not to be clouded by doubt and confusion. So that we can deal with problems very skilfully.

HAVING AN AGENDA IN OUR LIVES

When we plan our life, we have an agenda. What we are going to do today and how we are going to achieve our wishes. Not only do we have a daily agenda, we also have a long-term agenda. We study a course because we want to become qualified maybe two, three, four years distant, in order to have a career. So, we plan our external agenda. But in order to gain the strength of being a Dharma practitioner, we have to have an inner agenda as well. It is not just the outside world where we should put all our thought and energy. We have to realize that the most important aspect of our lives is to mature inside, in our own minds, to develop the muscles of wisdom and compassion and loving kindness. Then we will have the opportunity to deal with the external obstacles.

INNER MATURITY

BRINGS ABILITY TO DEAL WITH PROBLEMS

We still need to organize our lives with regard to the external world. We have to have a roof over our head, we have to have food to eat, we have to look after our family, we have many obligations. We should not neglect those obligations. But we should realize that what is more important is inner growth, in our minds—so that we have the ability to deal with problems and to deal with happiness and so on as we mentioned.

SEEING PROBLEMS AS TEACHINGS

Through the various methods, when problems occur to us, they can help us generate the thought of renunciation, turning away from samsara. They can help us to generate patience and overcome anger. They can help us to reflect upon karma. Having learnt about cause and effect, then when problems come to us, we see them as teachings.

The various aspects of karma reinforce our understanding, they reinforce our determination to overcome karma, to stop practising negative karma, and to start practising positive karma, accumulating merit.

Then, when problems occur, we can use them to overcome our pride and arrogance. Especially when we are suffering, when we are sick, when something goes wrong with our life, with our relationships, then we can really understand compassion. We can have compassion because we can understand how other people are suffering.

Princess Diana herself said that her ability to give love and to show compassion was a direct result of having suffered so much in life. She had many personal problems, eating disorders and so on. She had many situations of feeling inferior but was able to overcome this and come out on top.

I think people all around the world felt so close to her because her compassion and her kindness were not artificial. It was not some sort of ‘pretend’ activity, to make people think, “Ah, she is very nice.” It obviously came from deep in her heart, as a result of the suffering. We can do the same. We should take her example.

PRACTISE BEFORE PROBLEMS OCCUR

When things go wrong for us, we can immediately practise. We do not have to wait until afterwards. We do not have to wait until it hurts unbearably. Even before the problem happens, we should reflect, “If I am going to suffer, this is a great opportunity to understand how others are suffering, much more than I am.”

TO REALLY HAVE COMPASSION, WE HAVE TO SUFFER

In fact, we need to do it beforehand, because it is difficult to do once the situation arises. Compassion is born out of understanding another person’s situation. Actually, to have great compassion, we have to suffer.

Tenbel Nyima says, “When we are experiencing pain, we should reflect that, like myself, other sentient beings are also tortured by the same or greater suffering. We should train ourselves to think how good it would be, if they too were to free themselves from all sufferings.”

GIVING AND TAKING MEDITATION

When we have a terrible headache or physical pain, or a problem in our lives, instead of thinking, “Poor me,” and being swept up in self pity, we should abandon that and realize the reality that there are so many others, many more than us, who have the same problem and many much worse. In our hearts, we know what they are feeling.

Just as we wish to be free from pain, may they be freed. And

we can think that we are taking their pain upon ourselves, through what is called the giving and taking meditation. Visualize the sufferings of others in the form of black smoke and breathing in with compassion, take their suffering upon yourself and imagine them suddenly being released from their pain and worry. Rejoice in their happiness.

You can visualize all humans, the animals, the hell beings and even the divine beings one after the other, taking their suffering upon yourself in the form of black smoke.

Transform their pain into black smoke, breathe it in and feel that this smoke builds up into a thundercloud at the centre of your chest. At that place, imagine a black rock, and think, “This is the self-cherishing conception, the root of all my suffering.”

Having taken the suffering of others upon yourself, think that the black cloud turns into a lightning bolt which strikes the rock of self-cherishing thought, your worst enemy and the rock disintegrates.

As you breathe out, send blissful rays of the white light, of loving kindness, to the humans, the hungry ghosts, the hell beings, all the different levels of rebirth. The light brings to them whatever they need. The poor receive wealth, the homeless receive houses, the jobless receive jobs—whatever they need for physical happiness and pleasure. On top of that, they are able to meet the teachings, follow skilled teachers and achieve the stages of the Path.

If we do this giving and taking meditation now, before big problems arise and we become accustomed to it, then when we have a problem, we can do it automatically.

Let’s say we have a stomach ache. Think of all the people in Singapore who have stomach aches, or in India... there are many stomach aches in India. Think of all the stomach aches around the world and imagine their pain like yours and take it upon yourself.

Think, “May they be relieved.” Not, “Poor me—can I be relieved.” But, “May they be relieved from their pain.” And take it upon yourself,

with compassion. You will be surprised how it benefits your stomach ache. It is not going to make it worse, even though you sincerely want to take it upon yourself.

When a mother hears her child crying in pain, it makes her distraught. She would do anything she could to take the pain of the child upon herself, to ease the child's suffering. As mothers already have this selfless thought for their children, so we should train ourselves to see all beings as our children, to take their suffering upon ourselves. We can achieve that, through the experience of suffering.

PROBLEMS:

AN EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY TO TRAIN OUR MINDS

This leads us to the final point in transforming problems: problems provide an excellent opportunity to train our minds in seeing others as more dear than ourselves, to really understand the faults of self-cherishing and the advantages of cherishing others.

I was talking about agendas before. We need an external agenda, just to keep the amenities of this life together. But the important agenda is the internal one—to develop our minds.

Each morning we should always remember, “Today is another day, another opportunity, to train my mind. I must not forget. I must not fall into my habitual daily behaviour, where I do not even reflect on what is going on in my mind.” Most of us are like that. Most of us are swept away in conversations, distractions, or just the very busyness of work and families, so we do not pause to check, “How am I handling this, inside? Am I being skilful in dealing with the situation? Am I growing from the situation?” It is so very important.

PRACTISE WELL BEFORE PROBLEMS COME

It is difficult to practise taking suffering as the Path when you come face to face with sorrows. So it is important to become familiar in

advance with the practices of virtue that are to be applied in unfavourable circumstances.

Also, it is best to apply a practice in which one has clear experience. So this whole teaching, all these Sunday afternoons, are meant to give us the chance, right now, to reflect upon how to deal with suffering. Not when problems arise.

If we wait until a big problem comes along, then we have to get out our notes and try to find the teaching—now, what does it say? (Laughter). No way. We will not be able to do it. We have to familiarize our minds with seeing suffering as good. It is quite obvious, but we can fall into this trap because we are so habituated to seeing problems as bad.

The idea that they are useful is revolutionary, so we need to indoctrinate our minds with this revolutionary thought. Perhaps it is the same as in Communist countries, where people hold political meetings to convince themselves that sufferings are actually opportunities. Not that we want to suffer—but we are going to suffer anyway. So, we need to have the method to deal with the problems.

“It is not enough simply for suffering to be a support of our virtuous practice.” This is an interesting point. We have to realize perfectly that this is what’s happened. We have to consciously work on our minds and say, “Right, I have this pain. I am going to make it virtuous. I am going to turn it into compassion. When it works, this brings about a degree of joy, of happiness, in my mind.”

This joy, this inner sense of confidence, becomes more and more stable. It becomes the natural state of our mind. I think you realize this when you see the Lamas in action. They are often a great example. Nothing upsets them. So many things go wrong and they take everything in such an easy way, such a happy way, in a laughing way. Whereas the students are all pulling their hair out, if they’ve got any (Laughter) or tearing their robes. We all go to pieces while the Lamas are so calm.

There is a stability of joy from doing this practice. It is not some magical thing from mantras. It is the joy of confidence, of knowing that we have a practice to overcome problems. Is this not what everybody in the world is looking for? Well, it is here. It is not going to stop problems happening, but it stops problems from upsetting us. That is the key. The mind, the mental consciousness remains calm and stable.

“Even if suffering is severe, it will be an agreeable thing.” This means that even though there can be physical suffering or mental problems, the underlying mental consciousness can transform it and remain calm. It is like a mixture of something sweet and something that does not taste so good. The sweetness is the mental calm. The not-so-good taste is the problem. So it will not stop the problem, but it will maintain a joyful mind.

AN ANXIETY-LADEN,

MIND CANNOT TURN SUFFERING INTO THE PATH

Reversing the thought of dislike for suffering is the foundation of taking suffering as the Path. Because while your mind is disturbed, and your courage or your interest is extinguished by anxiety, you cannot turn suffering into the Path. It is going from the state of a great deal of anxiety that we have now, to less and less anxiety. And that anxiety is replaced by calm and joy.

By training in taking suffering as the Path we will improve our capacity for bliss, because by experiencing suffering as the Path, we will increase our practice of virtue and our mind will become more and more virtuous. And therefore, our mind becomes more and more cheerful.

A VIRTUOUS, NOT VICIOUS CIRCLE

And so, instead of the vicious circle: Have problem, giving anxiety,

which makes problem worse, which gives more anxiety, which makes problem worse.... It is the opposite.

It is a pleasant circle, a joyful circle, where a calm mind gives us confidence and joy that we can deal with problems. And that helps us to deal with more problems.

So, if in the practice of changing problems into the Path we begin with small sufferings, by gradually training our minds we will be able to deal with great sufferings. We have to begin with small sufferings because, otherwise, great sufferings will be overwhelming. They will be too much to bear. Our minds will not be steady enough.

It is not easy to deal with the problems in our life with a calm mind, is it? We can talk about it. But when the situation arises, our mental energy is so swept up in negativity. We are so quick to respond in a negative way.

It is important to deal with small, physical discomforts. Try to avoid them but if you cannot, then you can experience them without letting your mind be upset.

I do not know if it happens here, but in restaurants in the West, people are often finicky about what they are served. Sometimes, if the food is not cooked exactly right, they make a big scene and send it back to the kitchen. I find this acutely embarrassing.

People can destroy their whole evening if there is some minor blemish with, the food. They go out with the specific intention of enjoying themselves and the company of their friends. Then some minor thing goes wrong and they fall apart. They end up totally miserable and they ruin the evening for everybody else. Not to mention the poor waiter and the cook, who are probably saying terrible things about them in the kitchen (Laughter).

So, it is not worth it. It is not worth allowing little things to disturb our equilibrium. It is crazy. But we do such things with our children, with our parents, with our husbands, with our wives. Little

things we allow to get under our skin and to irritate us. Then it becomes worse and worse, and that makes us more and more closed, brings us closer to the precipice of irritation, then anger, and then we explode.

Completely ridiculous. From small things, the big problems grow in our lives. We must guard against it. It is up to us. It is not whether we take Prozac, or Valium, or tranquilizers. I have not tried Prozac. They say it makes the mind exactly the way we are talking about. “Equanimity.” “Equilibrium.” We are not so easily pushed over the edge. But what’s the use of relying on this external, artificial stimulus?

I can accept the use of tranquilizers temporarily. If our mind is terribly agitated, I think such things are definitely useful. But we should not come to rely on them totally. We should realize that the true answer is in self-control, self-growth and replacing anxiety with love and compassion. That is the perfect tranquilizer. I think you get the message.

In order to be able to do this practice, we should pray to our guru, or pray to the Three Jewels of Refuge—Buddha, Dharma and Sangha—to be able to do this practice of transforming problems into the Path.

PRACTICE TO AVOID ANGER

Student: When anger or pride is manifesting, how do we deal with them?

Venerable Gyatso: In the acute situation where we are abusing somebody, then we have not trained very well. If we had trained well, we would not be angry. Being angry is a sign of not having practised.

Let’s deal with a situation where we find ourselves very agitated, but we have removed ourselves from the object of our anger. We

have some space to calm our mind. Then we reflect upon our anger itself. We look at what it is doing to our body, what it is doing to our mind, how it is hurting us. And it is ridiculous. It is not beneficial. Anger is like a sickness. I think if we are strongly convinced that anger and pride and so on are a type of sickness, then we are well on our way to overcoming them.

REFLECT ON KARMA

Then, we can reflect upon karma. Reflect that this person has upset me. Well, all right. That is something coming from the person's side. From my side, there is a karmic seed ripening. This person insulted me, because I had the karma to be insulted, a karma which I created in a previous life. Also by being angry and insulting him back, I am perpetuating that karma. I am creating the cause for only more suffering. So if I respond with anger, then I will never get out of this tight chain of karma, cause and effect.

REFLECT ON COMPASSION

We can reflect with compassion, thinking, "This person is upset, his mind is very angry at me and he is creating the cause of suffering." So, by understanding our own upset mind, we can understand his mind, and generate compassion.

The last point I made was that, in order to practise well, we should pray to the Three Jewels—Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and our teacher, to be able to put this method into practice.

REQUEST PROBLEMS TO PRACTISE VIRTUE

When your mind grows a little stronger, after making offerings to the Three Jewels of Refuge, and even to the local spirits, you should then

ask them to send problems to you, so that you can train in the practice of virtue. So, for most of us, this is exceptionally revolutionary.

Normally, we only pray to the Three Jewels when we have problems. (Laughter) Ah, something is wrong, you better go to the temple to pray to Kuan Yin, and make offerings. And Kuan Yin will solve your problem.

This is totally the opposite. Now we go to the temple, and we pray to Kuan Yin to send us problems, so that we can practise virtue. Is this crazy? (Laughter) It is not. How confident are we? I think we can be sincere.

Can you see the incredible advantage of practising in advance, how useful it is to use this method to transform problems into the Path? And so, if we have this attitude of anticipating, then when the problems occur, we can deal with them. Now, do you think Kuan Yin will send us problems, the Bodhisattva of Compassion?

PROBLEMS ARE DEFINITELY COMING

Problems are always coming in our life. They are definitely coming, for all of us. There is no question of this. We are all growing old. We are all going to die. We are going to get sick. There are going to be car accidents. Our houses are going to burn down. We all have big problems just around the corner. This is reality. This is not pessimism.

So, if we have reflected beforehand, strongly, on the ways to making problems advantageous to the point of praying to the Three Jewels, then when it occurs, we are going to be so strong.

OF NOT SEEING PROBLEMS AS PROBLEMS

The reason for doing this is that it will give us the confidence of happiness and cheerfulness, of not seeing problems as problems. It might

seem hard to us now, because we have not realized the first point: there is no such thing as a problem. These situations, which we previously labeled problems, are actually great opportunities to develop virtue.

Having gone through those prior steps we can have this confidence, this courage, this joy, this happiness.

It is a happy mind that can deal with things so well, as opposed to the anxious mind. When the mind is weakened by anxiety, small things become huge problems.

FEEDING MOSQUITOES

I think I mentioned to the group how Lama Zopa Rinpoche deals with what we consider big problems, with mosquitoes. Did I mention that? Yes, he exposed his body to clouds of mosquitoes, out of love and compassion. We couldn't bear one mosquito. But he regularly—not just once, but regularly—would offer his whole body to clouds of mosquitoes at night. Open the window, and say, “Come in.” (Laughter). Whereas me, I spend half the night closing the windows, blocking any little holes, to stop even one mosquito getting in. By working with small problems, we can overcome big problems.

KEEPING ENTERTAINMENT AT A DISTANCE

There is more advice on how to do this. When we are first training in this practice, it is important to keep entertainment at a distance.

In the midst of entertainment, you may be influenced by misleading friends, who ask, “Why don't you enjoy yourself instead of all that meditating?” From worries caused by our enemies, our relatives and our wealth, our minds will be polluted and disturbed beyond control, so that we will develop bad habits. In addition, the mind may be disturbed by various incidental circumstances.

FIND A QUIET PLACE

In solitary places, these distractions are not present. There, the mind will be clear and easy to concentrate.

For this reason, when good practitioners do this meditation of controlling sufferings they do not do it at first in situations where harm is caused to us by people, in places of distraction: homes, work, cities. Instead they go to isolated, solitary places where they can strengthen their minds.

They go to places where there are apparitions of gods and demons, in solitary cemeteries and wild places. So we avoid our home because that is too disturbing and we spend the night in the cemetery, okay? That is much easier.

I suppose many of us would probably think that a cemetery would be more difficult than our home. But look at our homes. Look at the chaos when the children come home from school. There is this, that, everything happening all at once. There is not a moment's peace. There are all of these external distractions. Finally, we get to sit down and rest, and then the phone rings. Then the visitors come. And then there is this and that. It is constant, busy, busy, busyness.

In the cemetery... (Laughter)... it is so quiet, so peaceful. The problems are in our minds. The ghosts are in our mind. They are not going to harm us. There is not any demon that is going to eat us. It is all a conjecture of our mind.

So, we can deal with it. If it is just created by our minds, then the cemetery is a nice place to deal with this mental, not physical pain.

We could take a nice blanket, and a comfortable cushion. We could even take a mosquito net, and we could sit in the cemetery, and deal with our mind. So there might be a little fright, a little noise. And also the noise will keep us awake, all right? If we try to meditate at home, we just go to sleep, right? But we will probably stay awake in the cemetery.

STOP THE ARISING OF AVERSION TO INTERNAL ILLNESS AND OUTER ENEMIES

“In order that the mind may stay unaffected by bad circumstances and suffering, and also in order to extract bliss from the problems themselves—we should stop the arising of aversion to internal illness and outer enemies, to evil spirits and to disharmonious speech.”

SEEING DANGEROUS SITUATIONS AS VALUABLE

“And we should accustom ourselves to just the feeling of liking, a happy mind, of liking situations because we see the advantage. For this reason, we should cease to view dangerous situations as defects, and we should train ourselves, with every effort, to view them as valuable.”

“Whether things are pleasing or not depends on how they are perceived by the mind.” For example, if somebody persistently sees the faults of worldly pleasures, then even if that person’s wealth increases, if the person’s circle of friends increases, he will not have attachment.

We understand the faults of samsaric pleasures. We can still enjoy our pleasures without attachment. We will have renunciation. So, it is not the pleasures that are driving us crazy. It is our inner grasping. Wanting more, more, more, and being dissatisfied.

NO HARM COMES TO A VIRTUOUS MIND

Student: In a cemetery, is there any assurance that people will not be disturbed by spirits?

Venerable Gyatso: I think I asked you this before. Does anybody know anyone who has been hurt before in a cemetery by a spirit? I asked that question in Kuala Lumpur. And one lady said, I do. Somebody she knew had been going to a cemetery at night. The

branch of a tree caught his shirt (Laughter) and he got such a fright that he ran and fell over a grave. So, that was his mind. If we are practising virtue, our mind is virtuous. No harm will come. What if we have done bad things in previous lives? Well, the thing is, even if we have karma to be hurt, if we are practising virtue, that karma cannot ripen if the mind is virtuous. So, we have to be virtuous in a cemetery.

By training in this way, our mind becomes flexible. We have so much space in our minds. We are no longer upset by problems or potential problems. We are much more easy to get on with. We are not so uptight. People are no longer worried about offending us, saying the wrong things. We are much easier to live with.

And automatically, people around us become relaxed. They become more happy. Whereas, if we are anxious and obsessive and worried, that spreads to others as well. This practice is very useful. It makes us flexible and easy to be with. It makes us courageous. We can face up to anxiety-provoking situations. To be courageous, maybe, in public speaking. Or perhaps in facing up to somebody we have a problem with. If our mind is flexible, then we can do so. Especially, we can work on our own minds, to overcome our own anger. All bad circumstances will appear to us as fortunate. Our minds will always abide in the bliss of peace.

THE ARMOUR OF BEING ABLE TO TRANSFORM PROBLEMS

To practise the Dharma Path in this dark era, this era of degeneration, is very difficult. We need the protection, the armour, of being able to transform problems. It is as if we think that in the morning, we are going to meet somebody important at our work, then we are going to put on our best suit, and look good, and try and make a good impression.

We are always looking for some external way of protecting us

from being ridiculed, or missing out on an opportunity. But the best Dharma, in this life, is the internal armour of developing our minds.

When we are unaffected by suffering, when we are able to deal with suffering, it is as if we go into battle. But instead of having to shoot the other soldiers, we find that the weapons just drop out of their hands.

We cannot be hurt. We become invulnerable to external enemies. Even illnesses will disappear when the mind is calm, easy, flexible and able to deal with disturbing situations.

This is because by not having an unhappy mind or being discontent about anything, our minds will not be disturbed. When our minds are not disturbed, the wind energies, the chi energies, or the prana energies, are not disturbed. And when the wind energies are not disturbed, the other elements of the body are in balance.

In a reverse way, because the elements and the winds are harmonious in the body, our mind is in balance, it is happy. So there is a physical feedback.

On the other hand, if our mind is disturbed by anxiety, and anxiety disturbs the winds, the winds disturb the elements, and we have physical bad health. So, there is this very important relationship with our whole organism.

“Learned people perceive that all happiness and suffering depend on the mind. So they search for happiness from the mind itself. The causes for happiness are complete within our own being.” That is important. So often, we feel that we are not happy because we are missing out on something. We do not have the material means, or we do not have the right friends, the right contacts, or the right house to live in. Therefore, we are unhappy.

We feel that life has been cruel to us. There is a permanent state of being miserable, dissatisfied. A feeling of lacking something that others have. That is mistaken.

WE ALREADY HAVE EVERYTHING WE NEED

We have everything we need, for pure inner bliss. And in fact, a lot of the paraphernalia we have collected around is, our possessions, our friends, our club memberships, our car, this and that—they are the agents of our sorrow. Those are actually causing us to be dissatisfied, causing us to be agitated.

So the causes of happiness are complete within oneself. They are not dependent upon externals. There is nothing to be hurt by any afflictions by beings or non-beings. If we have anxiety, it is like having a wound. If we have a healing wound, it is incredibly tender. If we are in a crowd of people, we will have to protect our wound from being bumped, because it will hurt. So anxiety is like a wound in the mind. Our mind is so tender, so vulnerable, the slightest offense, and the mental hurt is huge because of our anxiety. With no anxiety, with peace and happiness, then small problems almost do not exist. There is no disturbance.

Also we will not be hurt by suffering, even when we die. Because in dying there is a strong chance for fear and suffering to arise. If we have a calm mind, we will be free. We will be able to deal with death in a skilful way.

CHASING AFTER EXTERNAL OBJECTS

“Foolish people run after external objects, thinking thereby to obtain happiness. Whatever happiness they do find, great or small, they try to gain. They will have many failures, such as not getting what they are after, or not getting all that they wanted to, and feeling incomplete, or misjudging.” They think “This will make me happy,” but in fact, it does not.

Foolish people fully believe that happiness is a result of the external world and so they pursue that. You see, there is no chance of happiness if control is in the hands of others. If your long hair is

caught up in the branches of a tree, you are stuck to the branch. If the wind blows in one direction, you are pulled this way. If it blows in that direction, you are pulled that way.

There is no freedom. Following our misconceptions is like being pulled by our hair, caught in a tree. If we invest all of our hopes in achieving peace of mind and happiness in the external world, we will be under the control of the external world.

We will be pulled this way and that, running to join this club, or running to buy that product. Because everybody is doing this, I must do this also. This is the vogue, the new fashion comes out. “Oh, I have to buy that!” “I have to buy this!” Trying to keep up with others.

We spend so much money. And then we have to work the rest of the year to earn the money to be able to continually run this way and that. Finally, we die, exhausted (Laughter), still unsatisfied. We are worried about our funeral. Will we have the best coffin? Will it be this and that and the right car?

In America, the funeral is ridiculous. It is an industry, what people do, concerned about their death, and how they look after they die. They will pay tens of thousands of dollars just so they have a pretty body, which is a bit excessive, I think.

This is just a brief instruction on thought transformation. There are many instructions, particularly in Shantideva’s Bodhisattva’s Way of Life, where most of this teaching comes from, and where Shantideva has talked in great detail.

REFLECTING ON ULTIMATE REALITY:

IDEAL METHOD OF OVERCOMING SUFFERING

The second way of transforming suffering in the Path, is by reflecting upon ultimate reality, upon Shunyata.

This is the ideal method by which we will overcome suffering.

By reflecting upon Emptiness we draw our mind to supreme peace, dwelling there in the knowledge of having abandoned the cause of suffering. We see impermanence. We see the true nature of suffering, we see selflessness. There is no longer the agitated mind, grasping at permanence, grasping at self-existence and so on.

I am not even talking about actual direct realization of Emptiness, but just the intellectual thought of Emptiness. When we come out of meditation the mind is so clear. One of the preliminary meditations on Emptiness is the 'space-like meditation', where we watch the breath coming and going, and then we dissolve the inner organs into light. We retain the outline of the skin and think that our body transforms into light, becomes very clear like space without any solid contact.

That supports meditation on Emptiness. When we complete meditation, we retain the sense of space-like quality and if somebody says bad words, the words go right through us; there is no where for them to stick. We say "In one ear and out the other ear." The words go right through our body. There is no self-cherishing thought.

When people insult us, it is the rock of self-cherishing at our hearts that the words stick to. Then we become agitated and angry. If we reflect on Emptiness, then we are much freer, much more able to deal with suffering. So remember Emptiness well.

PREVENTING HAPPINESS FROM BECOMING AN OBSTACLE

The second part is dealing with happiness. We are trying to generate happiness. But there is the danger that we can lose control when we are really happy. We can generate pride, laziness, complacency when things are going well. The price is that laziness and complacency will become obstacles to our Path. We should not be afraid of happiness itself. In fact the purpose, as you have already realized, is to increase our happiness but not allow obstacles such as attachment,

greed, pride or laziness to arise from happiness.

It is difficult not to become attached to the object of pleasure. It is difficult not to have pride. Perhaps we can have great happiness because we have fantastic meditation. Happiness is a result, a side effect, of meditation. But then pride can come. “I am a great meditator. I am so clever.” Almost immediately, we become agitated, because we want to go tell our friends about our fantastic meditation. Or we go into a fantasy, “Maybe I am going to become enlightened. This is it!” And so the mind is swept up. Or, when we are happy, we start thinking of virtuous things. “Oh, I am going to do this, and this, and this. Then I am going to help here... and do that.” And that also becomes a hindrance to meditation and clear thinking.

NOT TO BE DISTRACTED BY HAPPINESS

This happens in meditation. If you do a retreat, your mind comes up and you go into a fantasy of good things—building monasteries, building libraries, helping the gurus, and so on. Anything we can think of. We cannot get away from it. We have to not let our mind be distracted by happiness. This does not mean not to be happy. But do not be distracted by happiness.

There are various methods to use. Reflect upon impermanence, upon the nature of suffering, and selflessness, and reflect upon renunciation, realizing how attachment is the cause of samsara. In a similar way to what we are talking about turning problems into the Path, we turn this energy of happiness into the Path. When we are happy, we are energized. We should try to channel that energy into our meditation, into our particular Dharma practice.

Tenbel Nyima says, “You should think, ‘I am happy. This is my great fortune for having practised Dharma in the past. So, the reason I am happy is positive karma, the result of having practised Dharma. Therefore I will use this happiness to maintain my mind

in Dharma practice and not to just go and indulge, or become lazy or complacent.’” In this way, the energy of happiness keeps us in Dharma, keeps us positive, and then we create more happiness. And they support each other; Dharma creates happiness, and the happy mind is the support of more Dharma practice.

One of the problems that can arise when we are happy is that we can see the potential of more happiness. And “Wow,” we want to improve it. This is a form of attachment.

The means to overcome this is contentment, the ambrosia of contentment. Being content with what we have. That is so important—being content. Feeling, “I do not need. I am peaceful. Why do I have to go out and change? Just enjoy the peace of mind.” Often we might be with a group of people and we are all really happy. “Let’s go to a movie. Let’s go to a party. We’re all feeling so good.” We somehow feel that our happiness is going to expand exponentially. But of course it does not. We should remain calm and content.

Enjoy the happiness, but do not become lost in the pursuit of increasing it. And also, think of Emptiness—Emptiness of the object of attachment, the object of pleasure, and the I. In that way, our happiness can remain without disturbing us.

So, more or less, that is all I have to say about transforming problems into the Path, and transforming happiness into the Path.



AMITABHA BUDDHIST CENTRE

AMITABHA BUDDHIST CENTRE (ABC) is a centre for the study and practice of Mahayana Buddhism from the Tibetan Vajrayana Tradition. Founded in 1986 by our Spiritual Guide, *Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche*, a wise and deeply compassionate Tibetan Master, the centre strives to offer the pure liberation teachings of Je Tsong Khapa, the 15th century founder of the Gelug lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. To that end, we offer courses in lam-rim, or the graduated path to enlightenment, Buddhist philosophy, thought transformation and the practice of tantra.

ABC is a member of the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT), the world-wide network of Dharma centres, monasteries, publishing houses, and service organisations established by *Lama Thubten Yeshe* (1935-1984) and *Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche* in 1975.

OUR EDUCATION PROGRAMME

At ABC, we provide a range of courses from beginners' meditation and introductory Buddhist talks to the intermediate level lam-rim, or the graduated path to enlightenment, to the study of more advanced Buddhist philosophical subjects. Teachings are conducted in English or Tibetan (translated to English).

MEDITATION RETREATS

Bearing in mind that Buddhism is a living tradition, teachings to be studied and put into practice, ABC organises a variety of meditation retreats. These include one-day retreats and Nyung Nay retreats—an intensive two-day fasting practice with prayers to Avalokiteshvara (*Kwan Yin*) as a way of immersing our minds in compassion.

DEVOTIONAL PRACTICE

Since faith, the accumulation of good karma and purification of negative deeds are as important as correct understanding of the teaching, we hold regular devotional practices, such as Tara and Guru pujas. In

these practices, chanting, meditation and ritual combine as a powerful way to bless and inspire the mind. We also arrange for large-scale offerings to be made on special days at holy places. In line with the Buddha's teaching on loving kindness and compassion, we also liberate animals regularly, reciting prayers for their benefit before releasing them.

SOCIAL AND WELFARE ACTIVITIES

In keeping with the Mahayana spirit of love and compassion, ABC complements its teaching programmes with social and welfare activities to nurture true caring and concern for others. ABC also provides chanting services for the sick and deceased, and schedules visits to homes for the less fortunate. Our resident teachers also offer advice to people with Dharma questions and spiritual problems.

PUBLICATION ACTIVITIES

ABC is deeply committed to share the benefits of the Dharma with others and will make available various titles to ABC members, the public and overseas readers as funds permit. Our mission is to support Amitabha Buddhist Centre (ABC) in its effort to benefit the public by informing them of teachings and activities available through the free distribution of Dharma books, newsletters and brochures. By so doing, we hope to bring more people into contact with the Dharma, because the gift of Dharma is the greatest gift of all!

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THE MERITS OF PRODUCING BUDDHIST TEACHINGS & BUDDHA IMAGES

1. One's light karmic misgivings will dissolve, while heavy ones lighten.
2. One will be protected by devas, and be unharmed by natural and man-made disasters.
3. One will always be free from the suffering of hatred and vengeance.
4. One will be unharmed by yaksas, evil spirits and wild beasts.
5. One's mind will be at peace, free from harm and nightmares.
6. One's complexion will be radiant.
7. One will be full of auspicious energy.
8. One who practices the Dharma wholeheartedly will have adequate living necessities.
9. One's family will be harmonious and be blessed with fortune and wisdom.
10. One who practices what one preaches will be respected and loved by all.
11. One who is dull-minded will gain wisdom.
12. One who is ill will gain health.
13. One who is poor will gain wealth.
14. One who is female will be born male in future lives if one wishes to.
15. One will be free of being reborn in the negative realms.
16. One will be able to help others grow in wisdom and gain great merit in doing so.
17. One will always be able to learn the Dharma, till one's wisdom & spiritual penetrations are fully grown and becomes a Buddha.