

How to rely on a spiritual mentor as the root for developing the path - Part 3 of 4

(lightly edited transcript)

by Ven. Thubten Chodron©, at Dharma Friendship Foundation, Seattle, 1991/92.

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Advantages of cultivating a good relationship with the teacher

We were talking about how to cultivate a good relationship with our spiritual masters, and this involves recognizing the qualities of our teachers and appreciating the good effect that they have upon us. We talked about the advantages of cultivating a good relationship with the teacher. I'll just read through them to remind you, before I get to the disadvantages, so you don't freak out [laughter]:

- 1) We get closer to enlightenment.
- 2) We please all the Buddhas.

Remember all of these advantages come because having a good relationship with our teacher means we put into practice what we learn, and our Dharma practice in turn benefits our mind.

- 3) All the harmful forces and misleading friends don't bother us because our mind is clean-clear. We know where we're going and why.
- 4) Our afflictions [Note: 'afflictions' is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'disturbing attitudes'] and our gross behavior diminish. Won't that be nice?
- 5) We gain meditative experiences and stable realizations.
- 6) We will not lack spiritual teachers in our future lives. Again, a very important thing.
- 7) We will not take a lower rebirth especially if we remember our teacher at the time of death and if we practice the teachings well when we're alive. These will eliminate the cause for lower rebirths.
- 8) To summarize, all of our temporary and ultimate goals are fulfilled by properly relying on a spiritual teacher.

By temporary goals, we mean all the advantages that we seek while we're still caught in cyclic existence. "Ultimate goals" means the lasting goals of liberation and enlightenment. By relying on a spiritual master, we can actualize these aspirations. Again, this is predicated on checking up people before accepting them as your teacher.

You shouldn't think that your teacher has to be somebody who sits on a high throne, wears fancy brocade and big hats, beats drums and plays cymbals and has ten thousand people around them. His Holiness always says that there are many high lamas around. If you have a good connection with them, that's fine. But even if a teacher has a lot of qualities, if you don't have that karmic connection, then nothing is going to ignite. He also says that it's actually quite lost to us if we think, "The high lamas – these are Buddhas, these I respect", but we neglect the teachers who help us day by day. His Holiness encourages people to select their teachers well, according to the teachers' qualifications and according to your feeling of closeness and being able to keep a good relationship with that person. Also, we should practice this with the individual teachers who guide us day by day, not necessarily the ones that buzz in on a jet on Friday and leave on Saturday.

I really saw this very much through my own experience. We were living at the monastery and Geshela (the resident Geshe at the monastery) would be teaching us day by day, putting up with us. He tried to teach, but we were always interrupting with questions, especially me [laughter]. He put up with all the things that went wrong in the monastery – this person fighting with that person, financial problems, etc. Sometimes I feel we really took Geshela for granted. When a high lama visited, we were all bright and shiny, nice new dancing disciples! But it was actually Geshela who took care of us day by day on all the nitty-gritty things and helped us along. I remember what His Holiness had said very much, just from my own personal experience.

Disadvantages of improperly relying on or abandoning the teacher

Then we began talking about the disadvantages of improperly relying on or abandoning the teacher. This means getting angry with the teacher, renouncing the teacher, like saying, "I'm fed up! I've had it! I can't stand you! I'm breaking off this relationship!" and then going around bad-mouthing and being really quite hostile. As I explained before, when we reflect on the benefits that our teacher gives us in terms of showing us the Dharma and giving us the possibility of making our life meaningful, then if we turn our back and completely throw away that person who gave us the greatest gift to practice, it's like we're denying the gift of the Dharma. It's like we're throwing the gift away as well. We're completely giving up everything beneficial that we learn from that person by dismissing that person.

All these disadvantages are not listed by the lamas to get us to be nice, good disciples through threatening us with all these horrible results. Rather, it's information to help us to be aware of the results of our own actions. We can use this knowledge to check up our own attitudes and see if we're thinking in a way that's going to benefit us or bring us harm. That's why these things are said.

1) It's like showing contempt for all the Buddhas

It's like showing contempt for all the Buddhas, in the sense that our teachers are representatives of the Buddhas. They teach the same things that the Buddhas teach, they teach the same practice. If we have contempt for our teacher, it's really like having contempt for the Buddha. Our teacher is doing exactly what Shakyamuni Buddha would do for us.

2) We will be reborn in the lower realms for the same number of eons as the number of moments we were angry with our teacher

Again, as I've explained (in the previous teaching), it doesn't refer to situations where you get angry with your teacher while still having the basis of a stable relationship with them. It refers to real anger, really throwing away the relationship.

3) Although we try to practice tantra, we won't attain enlightenment

Again, this is because in the practice of tantra, it's important that we try and see everyone, everything, as a Buddha, and the whole environment as a pure land. If we're trying to see every being as a Buddha, then surely we must try and see our spiritual master as a Buddha, since they are the ones who gave us the empowerments into the tantra and opened the doorway to the tantra. If we see that person as a

rotten apple, then it's completely opposite to the pure view that we're trying to cultivate in tantra. This applies actually to any being in tantric practice. We're supposed to try and imagine everybody as a Buddha. Although we may not all be great tantric practitioners, I'm giving you this information because some time in the future, you might take initiation. The whole idea of overcoming ordinary appearance and grasping at ordinary appearance and seeing things as pure will be explained more in-depth at that time.

4) Although we may put great effort into tantric practice, it will amount to actualizing a hellish rebirth

If we can't see the kindness of the person who was kind to us, how can we see the kindness of anybody else? If we can't see the kindness of anybody, where are we going to wind up in, in our next life? Also, if we don't practice the teachings as our teacher taught us, we can't actualize the result. We'll only actualize a bad rebirth.

5) We won't develop any new qualities or siddhis and what we have developed will decline

We won't develop any new qualities or siddhi. "Siddhi" means the realizations or the attainments of the path. The qualities and realizations we do have will also decline. This comes because we aren't properly following our teacher's instructions. The whole point is, the higher regard we hold somebody in, the more we're going to follow their instructions. The more we disparage somebody, the less we're going to follow what they say. If our teacher is teaching us the Dharma, and we disparage the teacher, we're going to stop practicing whatever they taught. This is what happens when we stop practicing. It's not a punishment. It's just the cause and effect. Nobody is punishing us. The Buddhas are compassionate. They certainly don't want us to have harmful results. It's just the way our own mind works. When we have a negative state of mind, there's no way we're going to experience a happy result from it. When you're hostile and angry, there's no way you can have a good rebirth.

6) Many unwished for things, like sickness and calamities, will befall us in this life.

This is because the karma we create with our spiritual teachers is very strong. If you have a good relationship, you create a lot of very good karma. If you have a bad relationship, you create a lot of bad karma. And both the good karma and the bad karma can ripen fairly quickly because it's created with a powerful object in our life--our spiritual master. That's one of the characteristics of karma. Karma created with very strong objects in our life can ripen quickly.

7) In future lives we will roam endlessly in lower realms

Again, this is because we haven't created the cause to meet the Dharma. When we've had the Dharma, we've thrown it away.

8) We will lack spiritual teachers in future lives.

I think that's a very frightening thing, to think of future lives without having a proper spiritual teacher. Even if you have all the conducive circumstances to practice, but you don't have a good teacher, what can you do? It's like having the best computer system but there's nobody to teach you how to use it.

These are the disadvantages of breaking the relationship with our teacher.

Now we come to the subject of how to cultivate a good relationship with our teacher. One way is to do this through our thoughts. In other words, what we do mentally, the kinds of attitudes we develop. The second way is through our actions, our external verbal and physical behavior.

How to rely on our teachers with our thoughts

First, we'll talk about how to rely on our teacher by means of our thoughts. The whole thing we're trying to get at here, is how to see our teacher's qualities and how to recognize the beneficial effect that they have on our lives. Seeing our teacher's good qualities will inspire us to practice. This is talking about how to do that so that we receive the benefits.

Developing confidence that our teachers are Buddhas

The first point under this is developing the confidence that our teachers are Buddhas. Again this is talked about mostly from a tantric aspect. In the Theravada tradition or when you take refuge and precepts, you talk about your teacher as a representative of the Buddha. In Mahayana, you try and see your teacher

as a manifestation of the Buddha. And then in Vajrayana, you try and see your teacher as a Buddha. These are different gradations of how you try and view your teacher. Here, we're talking from the tantric viewpoint. Lama Tsong Khapa wrote the Lamrim with the presumption that everybody who studies it is going to go into Vajrayana.

There is some difficult material here. Lama Tsong Khapa is talking from the point of view of his audience being somebody who already knows a little bit about Vajrayana, has faith in the Dharma, and has some faith in the teachers. These kinds of teachings are much easier for Tibetan ears. But for us (Westerners), it's quite difficult sometimes. It's talking about a high level of practice that we aren't familiar with. However, somehow, maybe something will go in. At least it can make us start to think: are our perceptions of people correct? This section is a real challenge to our perceptions of people. Are our perceptions correct? Are there advantages to be gained from changing our perceptions? Try to listen through those ears even though you might not know much about the tantric practice right now. Feel free to ask questions. Please ask because this is a very hard subject. I know. My mind has battled this subject for years. I'm not going to pretend that it's all easy.

1. Why it is necessary to regard our teachers as Buddha

Here, when we talk about having confidence in somebody, we're talking about a positive attitude towards somebody who is constructive and who is worthy of our respect. It's trying to have faith or confidence by recognizing somebody's qualities.

First, why is it necessary to regard our teacher as Buddha? Or another way of putting it is, "Why is it necessary to see our teacher's positive qualities?", since regarding him as a Buddha comes down to the point of seeing their good qualities.

Well, as I have been saying, if we see somebody's positive qualities, they'll have a much greater influence on us. And especially in the case of a qualified teacher, if we see their qualities and as a result they have a greater influence on us, we will follow their teachings with more energy. We will also follow the example that they show us in how they live their life and how they handle situations. You see how, by having a good view of them, it benefits us.

Also, without the confidence or faith in our teachers, the inspiration of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas can't come. We can see that if we have a lot of doubt and a lot of nagging, a pestering mind, it's very difficult for the inspiration of the holy beings to enter us because our mind is so caught up in defilements. We can see it very clearly in our life, can't we? If we have this doubting mind, even if our friends are nice to us, we can't appreciate them. The same definitely happens with our teacher. Again, if we don't have the regard, we won't be inspired by their example, we won't follow their instructions. If we have the regard, the teachings will have a lot more effect on our mind because we'll take them seriously.

Just look, even in our general life, we often pay more attention to who says something than what they say, don't we? We can see that very clearly. If somebody is a professor, we listen to what they say. If they're Joe Blow off the street, we completely ignore them though they may say the exact same words. This is because we hold the professor in very high regard, while we think Joe Blow off the street is an idiot, though they're saying the same thing. What I'm getting at is that if you have a positive attitude towards your teacher, then you're going to take to heart what they say, because you're going to really regard it.

2. Why it is possible to regard our teachers as Buddha

Why is it possible to regard our teachers as Buddhas? Or why is it possible to see their good qualities?

First of all, we don't have the karma to perceive the Buddha directly. Remember the story I told about Asanga and Maitreya? Maitreya was always around but Asanga didn't see him because Asanga didn't have the karma; his mind was too confused, too obscured by all of his own garbage. Even when he saw Maitreya the first time, he saw Maitreya as a dog, remember? It's the same with us. Even if Shakyamuni walked into this room, we wouldn't see him. Some of my teachers say, if Shakyamuni walks in here, we'd probably see a donkey! This is more a reflection of our mind than anything else. Because our minds are obscured, we can't see the Buddha in a body of light with the 32 signs and the 80 marks. So the Buddha appears instead in an ordinary aspect as our teacher, somebody whom we can actually communicate with. It's very fortunate that at least we see our teacher as an ordinary being whom we can relate to and communicate with.

Also they have this great reasoning in the teachings. When we're very attached to somebody, even if that person doesn't have any good quality, we see good qualities in them. We see them as completely pure. Now we have here, before us a qualified teacher who does have good qualities. Of course it's possible to see their good qualities. It's definitely possible for us to recognize these qualities in them.

3. What to think to do this

What to think in order to be aware of our teachers' good qualities, and to think of them as Buddhas.

a. Vajradhara asserted that our teacher is a Buddha

This point is difficult for Westerners.

Vajradhara is the form Shakyamuni Buddha appeared in when he taught the tantric teachings. In the Hevajra root tantra, the Sutra of the White Lotus of the Dharma, and other sutras, Vajradhara said that in the time of degenerations (which our time is), the Buddhas will appear in the form of ordinary beings (as spiritual masters) in order to guide us. In other words, because the times are so degenerate, if the Buddhas appeared in their glorious aspects, we couldn't perceive them. Instead, they appear in ordinary aspects as human beings, as our teachers.

What is difficult about this, is that we Westerners will say, "Who in the world is Vajradhara?" "Why should I believe Vajradhara anyway? Who is this guy? He is blue?!" [laughter] This point is more difficult for us, because we don't have this kind of spontaneous faith in Vajradhara. This point is citing scriptural reference to prove that the Buddha did give some indication at the time he was alive that he and other Buddhas would appear in ordinary aspects as our teachers. That's all that this is coming down to. The Buddha actually spoke about it and it was recorded in the scriptures. We have to determine for ourselves how much faith we place in what's written in the scriptures. Each of us is going to vary in that. Also, as we practice, our belief in the scriptures is going to change. If this point hits you hard, that the Buddha gave some indications while he was alive that he would come back in this way, that's great. If it doesn't, don't worry, because there're a few other reasons. [laughter]

b. Our teachers are the media for conveying the Buddhas' enlightening influence to us

The Buddha's enlightening influence is his ability to generate realizations within us. In other words, the ability to connect and to spark something in our mind. The point this is trying to make, is saying our teachers are the media for conveying the Buddha's enlightening influence.

The Buddha's great realizations (or the Dharmakaya mind of the Buddha or the mind of wisdom and compassion of the Buddha) is something intangible. We can't see it. We can't touch it. We can't talk to it. There is a need for a media of communication between the Buddha's great realizations and we ordinary beings who are so stuck in materiality. Our teachers are that media of communication.

The scriptures use the example of a magnifying glass, that we could use to focus the rays of the sun to actually start a fire. The sun's rays are like the Buddha's enlightening influence. To start the fire, which is like the realizations in our mind, we need the magnifying glass, which are our teachers. The teacher is the vehicle that transports the Buddha's enlightening influence to ignite the realizations in our mind. The teachers perform the work of the Buddha. How can we respect the Three Jewels and the Buddha, but not respect the people who perform the work for them? Our teachers inspire us to have a receptive state of mind. They inspire us through their actions, through the good influence they have on us, through the teachings, through the example they set, and so on. It would not be logical to respect the Buddhas but disregard the qualities of this person who's bringing it all to us.

c. In this degenerate age, the Buddhas and bodhisattvas still work for the benefit of beings

When I heard the first two points, I said, "Yeah, well, OK, that makes some sense." But I remember when Serkong Rinpoche explained this third point, I went "OK. OK. I'm convinced." It was, personally speaking, the point that convinced me.

The Buddhas were once ordinary, regular, confused people like us. The whole reason they practiced the path to become Buddhas was so that they could benefit the rest of us. Now, when they finally become a Buddha for this sole purpose of benefiting others, but don't benefit anybody, don't communicate with ordinary beings, then what's the purpose of what they did? If somebody becomes a Buddha, it is only for the purpose of communicating with and helping other beings. There's no other reason. The Buddhas are

fully committed to helping other beings. How are they going to do it? What's the most effective way? The most effective way is to appear in the aspect of spiritual masters to teach us and guide us. The Buddhas can appear in whatever form is beneficial to us, according to our karma. They can even appear as physical objects or as cats and dogs if we have the karma to be benefited in such ways. So surely they can appear as spiritual masters because it's so clear the good influence that spiritual masters can have on us. If people become Buddhas, but did not help sentient beings by teaching them, then they're contradicting themselves.

d. Our opinions aren't always reliable

We like to think our own opinions are supremely reliable. However, just looking in an ordinary way, we hold people in high regard if they agree with us. If they don't agree with our opinions, then we don't have much regard for them. Look back at your life and see how much you've changed your opinions, and how much you've changed the people you hold in regard. Each time you hold somebody in high regard, you think, "This is it! This person is fantastic!" Then you change your mind, "Well, maybe my opinions aren't so reliable." [laughter]

In the teachings, they particularly highlight this example of how we like people who agree with us. If the student likes to go to bed early, and the teacher likes to go to bed late, then the student doesn't like the teacher and criticizes "Oh, this teacher is so bad...". But what's really going on is "This guy is keeping me up and I want to go off to bed!" We tend to criticize anything that doesn't agree with what we're attached to. When our teacher does things in a different way from us, we criticize them. When they say things to us that we don't understand, instead of checking up what they're saying and trying to understand it, we criticize.

Projecting our motivation on others

This point is all about helping us realize how judgmental and how fickle our own minds are, how unreliable they are. When we're able to see this, we'll begin to understand how much we project onto other people. When we see things that appear negative in our eyes, when we see actions our teacher does that appears negative to us, instead of believing that appearance, we remember the fact that our own opinions aren't always reliable. In general, we project a lot onto other people. Somebody is acting a certain way, we have no idea why they act this way, but we project onto them the motivation we would have if we were acting like that. And we usually project a negative motivation onto them, don't we? "Oh look, that person's showing off because they blah blah blah." Well, maybe their motivation isn't to show off at all. If we acted like that, we would be showing off. We project our garbage onto other people. If we do this to ordinary people in our lives, we also do it to our spiritual teachers.

If you are aware, then whenever you see something in your teacher that appears negative, instead of doing our usual trip of judging and condemning, we start to say "What is this saying about my mind?" In other words, how I'm seeing other people isn't saying so much about what they are. It's saying something about me and my mind. A spiritual teacher is somebody whom I've incredible confidence in, whose qualities I have seen, whom I've chosen because I've had confidence that they can guide me to enlightenment. But if I look at them now and all I see is garbage. What's this saying about my mind and where I'm at? I think this is a very good technique to use when we start to see negative qualities. Try to see it as a way to explore what's going on inside of us.

Teacher acting as our mirror

As I also said last week, if we see our own personal teacher doing something that we don't like so much, we say this is what we look like when we're acting like that. Our teacher is showing us that. If our teacher comes up to us and just tells us to our face our negative qualities, "You're always getting angry and you're so disagreeable, and blah, blah, blah", we're likely to get very, very upset. So what does our teacher do? Because we're closed to listening to that feedback about ourselves, our teacher shows us in their own behavior what our actions look like. When they're doing that, we think, "That's what I look like when I'm doing that. This is a way for me to learn something about myself." This way of thinking in relationship to your own personal teacher is very, very valuable.

Different approaches and motivation

I find from my own experience, that I constantly come up against my own preconceptions. Sometimes my teachers act in ways that I disagree with. It's not that they're being unethical, it's just their whole way of doing things is very different from the way I do things. My immediate reaction to this would be, "Well, everybody should do things the way I do! My plan is clearly the most efficient way. Why can't this person

see that?" It was so easy to get judgmental.

But if I were to stop and think "Well, maybe there're other ways to do things besides my way," and begin to stretch my mind and try to see how my teacher is looking at this thing, then I realize maybe efficiency isn't the highest quality to hold in this situation. Maybe being efficient isn't the most important thing when organizing something. Maybe it's the benefit other people receive from the way it's organized, or from working through all the hassles in it that is most important. My mind is so goal-oriented; I want to see the goal. My teacher, on the other hand, is more interested in the process, and so approaches it in a different way. Why should I be so judgmental and discriminatory? So, relax, sit back, observe and watch things unfold and try and learn from this person's example.

What to do if the teacher does something that seems unethical

Now if it happens that your teacher is doing something that contradicts Buddhist precepts, or if your teacher is doing something that appears extremely unethical in your eyes, like the story I told you last time of my friend whose teacher was an alcoholic, you don't need to whitewash this behavior and say this person is a Buddha and everything they're doing is pure.

His Holiness says that if we just try to whitewash everything by saying that this person is a Buddha and all their actions are perfect, this can actually be poison. In these situations where it concerns something that seems definitely unethical to you, you can go and speak to the teacher and say "What's happening? I don't understand why you're doing this. This is very confusing to me. Can you explain the behavior?" You go and ask for more information, but you do this with a respectful mind, not with a harsh, critical mind. If you're not satisfied with what you're hearing, and it doesn't seem to be a good reason, then you just keep your distance, again, without criticizing, because this person had taught you the Dharma before and you can always have respect and regard for that kindness that you did receive....

[\[Teaching lost due to change of tape\]](#)

...We think "Well, my teacher told me to jump off a cliff, am I going to jump off a cliff?" [laughter] We get really caught, "Well, if I don't jump off this cliff, then I'm this horrible disciple. I'm going to the hell realms forever because I'm not following the guru's instructions like Naropa. I should be like Naropa, so I'm going to jump!"

What we have to understand when we're listening to these stories of the lineage lamas is that they were incredibly highly realized beings. Naropa could jump off a cliff, and it didn't even look like a cliff to him. His mind is in the middle of the realization of emptiness, and he probably has all sorts of psychic powers so that he doesn't kill himself when he jumps off the cliff. He's seeing everything in his pure vision as a mandala. We shouldn't be thinking because Naropa did that, we can do that.

In the same way, some people may have teachers who drink. If a teacher isn't ordained as a monk or a nun, and they don't have the lay precept not to drink, it's fine that they drink. They're not breaking any precepts. Again, that teacher may be a highly realized being. When they drink, it's one thing. But we shouldn't think "Well my teacher drinks, therefore I can too." What if we can't handle the alcohol?

This is where a lot of people in America get off-balance in trying to have a pure view of the teacher. They think, "My teacher does that, and I'm following my teacher's example. My teacher is sleeping around with a lot of people. Well, I'm going to do too." That's not the point! What your teacher does is your teacher's business. You screen that teacher beforehand and know about this behavior, and if that's acceptable to you, you may accept that person as a teacher. If it's not acceptable, go somewhere else where the teacher acts differently. But if you accept that person as your teacher, don't think that you can necessarily do everything that they do. They might have realizations but we're just like Joe Blow. OK? This is an important point.

Letting oneself be abused is not proper reliance

Here is an extremely interesting point. In Newport Beach a couple of years ago, I went for a conference where His Holiness had a panel discussion with some psychologists, some of whom were Buddhists. One of them brought up a very good point to His Holiness. He said many of the stories told in the scriptures make it sound like to be a good student, you have to let yourself be abused, e.g. Naropa jumping off the cliff because Tilopa told him to, Milarepa building all the towers out of stone and tearing them down because Marpa told him to.

There's also the story of this bodhisattva called the bodhisattva who's always crying. He had a lot of respect for his teacher and an incredible longing to hear the Dharma. He was going to clean the room because his teacher was coming to teach. In ancient India, the floor was made of dirt. To clean a dirt floor you have to throw water on it, so that the dirt doesn't fly all over, and then you gather the dirt away. He couldn't find any water to sprinkle on the floor, so he cut his wrist and used his own blood to sprinkle on the floor to clean the room before his teacher came in to give teachings.

When we hear these stories, we wonder if we have to do all these things. What this person brought up is that these stories seem to indicate that, superficially, to all appearances, you have to be willing to let yourself be abused in order to be a good disciple. This is what the stories look like in our opinion, in our eyes. This man asked His Holiness about it, and His Holiness said that's not the idea. Having a good relationship with your teacher and having confidence in your teacher does *not* mean you let yourself be abused. It does *not* mean that you give up your own responsibility in life to make decisions. It does *not* mean that you give up your own wisdom and just follow blindly.

The whole purpose of having a spiritual teacher is to increase our wisdom, not to diminish it. If these highly realized beings can behave in those ways, that's fine, because their mind is at a completely different level. But if, at our level of mind, it seems to us to be a thing of abuse (whether or not the teacher from their side is trying to abuse us), then as a symbol of our own dignity, our own exercise of responsibility and wisdom, we have to go to the teacher and say, "I'm sorry. I can't do this." And you explain yourself respectfully.

His Holiness also says that in the tantra, you're supposed to follow your teacher's instructions. However, if your teacher tells you to go to the East but points to the West, you have no choice but to go and say, "I don't understand. I can't follow that." This is something to remember.

Issues to consider with Dharma coming to the West

His Holiness also made the comment at that conference that he feels that sometimes, we pamper the teachers too much. This is something we have to think about as Westerners, especially with Asian teachers coming. Very often with the lamas, we don't let them do anything for themselves. We just completely pamper and clutter around them. His Holiness said we shouldn't pamper them. Of course, that doesn't mean that you neglect your teacher because obviously, if you don't help your teacher and if they don't have what they need to live, you're not going to benefit much. It's a thing of mutual benefit. You have to help your teacher as a way of repaying kindness and as a way to keep on receiving that kindness. But it doesn't mean this kind of over-extended pampering.

In this light (I know I'm digressing a little bit from the Lamrim outline), I want to just bring up something that is my own personal opinion: I wonder sometimes what it really means to please our teachers. An example would be how we spend money. When His Holiness (or some of the other high teachers) visit, people would sometimes build a house for His Holiness. Or His Holiness would have a special room in the center. Nobody else stays there. His Holiness comes once every four or five years and stays two or three nights each time. They would paint it and redecorate it each time His Holiness comes. In Tibet, this was a way of showing respect to your teacher. The more you can give them materially, the greater the merit. The greater the positive potential you create by making offering, the greater respect you're showing to your teacher. There's also that element in our culture, to be lavish with people we respect.

My doubt is, and this is my personal opinion, whether His Holiness would want the money to be spent this way. When I think of His Holiness, I think if the room were very nice and pleasant, I don't think His Holiness would care how old the paint job was, or if it was the same paint job as five years ago. I think His Holiness would prefer that all that money be used, let's say, to help the monasteries, so that people who aren't Buddhas yet can practice more and release themselves from suffering. My own personal opinion is that very often, in the Tibetan system, there's a lot of pomp and ceremony.

Another example is very often before the monks in the monasteries in the South (i.e. South India) take their Geshe exams, they have to offer huge amounts of money to the monastery and have paintings done and statues built. They have to buy a katag (silk scarf) for every single monk, and make offering to each. It's true that the Geshe candidates would create a lot of good karma doing this. But His Holiness doesn't think that it's necessary that everybody does that, because monks aren't supposed to have a lot of money, so how do they get all this money to make these offerings? It becomes a huge economic

burden on these monks. They have to borrow money from their families, or they have to write to their sponsors in the West or they have to do who-knows-what to get the money, because it's expected of them to give all these lavish offerings. His Holiness doesn't think that it's a good system to perpetuate. I happen to agree with it. [laughter]

It seems to me that it's more important, if there's money available, for example, to build toilets in the monasteries, as the sanitation is very bad at the monasteries and many monks get sick. I think they could use a toilet more than a silk scarf. Also, people can still become Geshees even if they don't have money. But somehow, the system is ingrained in this idea of lavish offerings. There's so much social pressure in the monasteries to do so. This is similar to the kind of pressure we feel when the lamas come here, that we have to rent limousines, let them stay in the best place and eat the best food – outlandish amounts of money spent. I think the people who are real Buddhist practitioners would be happy to have something plain and simple, as long as their basic needs are met. If they need a lot of telephones and a fax machine, as His Holiness does when he travels – great, you have to provide that as the host. But I think His Holiness would be much happier if people weren't pressured into making offerings. If there was extra money, it could be given to those who really needed it, in a way that enabled them to practice the Dharma.

Again, this are just some of my concerns with Dharma coming to the West and how we as Westerners are going to relate to the Tibetan custom of being very lavish in everything we do. His Holiness visited San Francisco last year. He arrived at the hotel and I was with the person who was organizing the visit. The organizer was dropping me off somewhere, and he was in a tizzy because he had arranged for a limousine to take His Holiness to an event in the evening, but His Holiness said, "I don't want to go in a limousine, I want an ordinary car," and this guy didn't have an ordinary car! To me this is saying something about His Holiness. This is also something to keep in mind about how to be with our teachers. But again, these are just some of my personal views. You're free to evaluate and think as you wish. But it's something I do think about with the Dharma coming to the West.

Also, while we're on this subject, I see sometimes with some Dharma centers, in their publicity materials, it's stated that if you become a benefactor for a certain event, then as a token of appreciation, you get to sit in the front row, or have a private lunch with the lama, or something like this. Personally speaking, that doesn't feel quite comfortable. If people want to be benefactors, it's marvelous. If we have the money and we can give it to help people come and teach the Dharma and to help people listen to it, it's good for them and it's also very meritorious. It creates a lot of good karma on our part. But, to hold it out as a prize, that if you do make a special donation, you get this prize. Well, something about this feels uncomfortable to me. It's like if you have a lot of money, you get to sit in the front row. But if you're poor...and you see, I'm usually a person who's poor and I'm a nobody. I can't pull status and I can't pull money to get myself into things. So I've experienced this kind of situations myself. If we bring the Dharma over here and it depends on your status and who you know and how much money you have to get you into things, I don't think this is right.

When we organize Buddhist events, it is important to be fair and open to everybody. Now it's true, if somebody is a benefactor, like if somebody all of a sudden gives a house to DFF, people are going to be grateful and we should definitely show our gratitude to people who benefit us. People who help us in our practice are incredibly kind and we should definitely show our gratitude to them. Maybe you could do something special for them. But we should do it out of a feeling of gratitude instead of "If you give us this, we'll give you that." You see what I mean? This is just something to think about.

Review

Maybe I'll just review right now and then open it up for questions.

In recognizing that there's a lot for us to gain personally by having a good relationship with our teacher, that there're many advantages to it, we want to try and train ourselves to see that person's positive qualities. This is the attitude we should have as we practice with our teacher. We also want to avoid projecting, getting nit-picking and negative about whatever things they do which don't meet our fixed image of how we want them to act. We want to avoid doing this because our opinion could be very unrealistic. We project things onto other people, we like the people who agree with us, and so on. We should use these situations as a mirror to help us open our mind to different ways of doing things. We do

receive a lot of benefit from regarding our teachers in a positive way.

It's possible to do this because we see good qualities in the people we're attached to though they don't have them. Definitely, it should be possible for us to see the good qualities of our teachers because they do have them. Also to remember that we don't have the karma to be able to see the Buddha as a body radiating light and so on, but we should try and recognize that they can appear in ordinary forms and to see their good qualities in that way.

We also talked about what to think in order to mentally develop a good attitude towards our teacher:

- 1) To remember that in the scriptures, there're many quotations by the Buddha saying that he will appear in degenerate times in the form of spiritual masters.
- 2) To remember that our teachers are the media for conveying the Buddha's inspiration to us. In other words, they channel the inspiration and the teachings to actually spark the understanding in our mind. Our teachers are doing the same work as the Buddha. I remember Geshe Dhargyey said that to me one time, and it really struck me. If the Buddha came here, he wouldn't say anything different from what our teachers are saying. I think this is something essential to think about. The Buddha already taught the Dharma before; our teachers are teaching us exactly what the Buddha said. If the Buddha came, if he showed up here, he's not going to say anything different from what our teachers are already teaching us. Remember that in this way we should have a feeling of confidence in our teachers and in what they are instructing us to do.
- 3) To remember that the whole reason people become Buddhas is to help benefit us. They're certainly not going to abandon us and refuse to benefit us. The best way they can benefit is clearly by coming and teaching us the Dharma. It's very possible that our teachers are Buddhas appearing in that form.
- 4) Our own opinions aren't always so reliable. With minor things our teacher did that we don't understand – I'm not talking about grave unethical behavior – we try and say "Well, this is what I look like when I'm doing this." Or "What other reason could my teacher have for acting like this?"

Examples

Just to give you an example. I remember one time I was at Kopan, a monastery in Nepal. They had just built a brick wall around it. They were in the process of putting glass on top of the brick wall. Lama Yeshe was out there with them putting glass on top of the brick wall. And at first my mind went, "Lama Yeshe – he talks about compassion for all beings – what's he doing putting glass on top of brick walls?!" My mind was saying, "This is like saying, 'This is our property. We don't want anybody in here. If you try and get in, we're going to cut you into pieces!'" This is how my mind was perceiving what Lama was doing.

And then I thought, "Hold on a minute. Maybe Lama is also recognizing that as abbot, it's his responsibility to protect the welfare of all the young monks at Kopan, and if thieves did come and steal from the Sangha community, they will create incredible negative karma. If you harm people who are engaged in Dharma practice, you harm yourself much more than you harm them. In putting the glass there, Lama is preventing these people from creating so much negative karma by stealing. Try looking at things in a different way.

Also, it's important not to develop negative states of mind when your teachers criticize you or when your teachers tell you things that you don't want to hear. We usually think, "This person is a Buddha and if this person is so highly realized, they should always be kind to me." I think that if your teacher sees that you have a strong mind, and that you have a strong basis, then the teacher actually has much more freedom to point out your faults to you. With a student who is very wishy-washy in their commitment to the Dharma, who doesn't have a lot of self-confidence, then the teacher has to be very, very nice to that student. If the teacher says anything that that person doesn't like to hear, they're going to run away. But with somebody who in one way is much closer to the teacher because they have a more stable practice and they have the ability to listen to criticism, then the teacher is going to be able to be harder with them and actually point out their faults to them and say things that they won't like to hear.

I remember one time I went to see Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey. I was about to start a retreat. I went to say "Goodbye" to Geshela and to ask him a few questions about the sadhana I was going to do. I asked him a few questions and he looked at me and he said, "You don't understand what you're doing anyway, why are you doing this retreat to start out with? You just don't understand the simplest thing about the sadhana!" And I was like ...because I just wanted him to pat me on the back and tell me how good I was and wish me a good retreat, and here he is telling me I don't understand anything. I left the room feeling

completely topsy-turvy. I walked up the hill from the library to Tushita (because I was doing my retreat up the hill at Tushita), and the whole way, I'm thinking about "Well, I don't understand. Why am I doing this retreat? There's certainly some truth to what Geshela said..." When I got to Tushita, Lama Yeshe was in the garden – this seems too much of a coincidence, it's like Lama was there waiting for me – and I started asking him these questions and he started answering them. Later when I thought about it, it was almost like they were setting this up and that somehow, by Geshela being really hard on me that way, he made me ask these questions which Lama then answered and enabled me to have a better retreat.

And another time, Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey was teaching at the library and His Holiness was teaching in Manali. I wanted to go to Manali to listen to His Holiness teach. Alex Berzin was going to translate. When I went to tell Geshela that I was going to Manali – he's so outrageous [laughter] – he said, "Why are you going there?! You want to hear Alex Berzin teach Dharma? You don't understand His Holiness, you're always listening to Alex. What are you doing?!" [laughter] It was good because initially it made me think, "Hold on...I got to reassess it.." but then when I thought about it more in-depth, I really came to think, "Well, I know very well why I'm going. I want these teachings. I feel a very strong connection with His Holiness and I know this will be helpful for my mind," and so I went. But I think Geshela was really making me think very deeply why I was doing this. Lots of times our teachers can do this to us.

Questions and answers

[Audience:] If you regard people as Buddha, does that necessarily mean you think they are realized?

Yes. In other words, if you regard them as the Buddha, then you think "This person has the realizations of what they're teaching me."

[In response to audience:] Now they say that from the side of the teacher, the teacher may or may not be a Buddha. Not all teachers are Buddhas. From their side, they may or may not be. But from our side, they say it's beneficial if we think that our teacher is a Buddha. Why? Because if we think this person has the realization of what they're explaining to me, then we're going to listen more attentively, we're going to take it more to heart. Our trying to see this person as a Buddha isn't something that benefits the teacher. It's something that benefits us as we listen with a more open mind. From the teacher's side, they may or may not be.

[Audience:] As a student, I find it irrelevant whether or not they are a Buddha as long as they're teaching the same things and they're consistent.

Yes. If we think, well if the Buddha were to manifest in this world, given our ordinary perception, would the Buddha act any differently from how our teacher's acting? Will they say anything differently from what our teacher is saying?

[In response to audience:] Yes, and it helps our mind. Whether they are or not, it doesn't matter. It helps our mind very much to look at them that way. They are practicing what they're preaching.

[Audience:] How do you know that the teacher is not saying anything different from what the Buddha said?

That's why we have to learn the Dharma very well and we have to read the text ourselves. We have to study with a wide variety of teachers so we can learn the Dharma from slightly different perspectives. We also have to think very deeply about the teachings we hear to see if they're logical. It's not just a question of blindly believing what the teacher says, but you have to learn the scriptures and everything yourself.

Alex told me a very good story. Once Serkong Rinpoche was teaching and he said something that Alex thought, "Wow, this isn't what it says in the teachings." But he was translating what Rinpoche said, so he translated that. Later on, he said to Rinpoche, "I didn't understand why you said that because I've heard otherwise." Rinpoche looked at him and said, "Why did you translate it then? If you knew I was saying something wrong, you should have stopped me!" [laughter] Learn the teachings yourself and if the teacher makes a slip of tongue or if they say something off, then come back and say something.

[Audience:] It seems contradictory to say don't whitewash their behavior, on the other hand, don't necessarily criticize it either.

Let's say your teacher is embezzling money from the Dharma center – let's make up something very outrageous – they're taking all sorts of money from the group and they're going on lavish holidays. If you say, "My teacher is the Buddha and he obviously knows what he's doing with the finances and he must have some real deep karmic reason for spending all the money so that we're all broke [laughter].." and make up excuses that let somebody do something that could actually be quite harmful, then we're not discharging our responsibility as mature adults. This is where abusive and codependent behavior come in. You just whitewash everything because this person is the leader of the organization and it somehow becomes very threatening to challenge the leader of the organization. People just keep quiet. This is the danger of whitewashing.

What you can do is you can say, "OK, he's taking all this money. The Dharma center's broke. We can't pay our water bills. The teacher's having a 5-star holiday." (By the way, I haven't heard of anybody doing this, I'm just making it up.) "I don't understand why this is happening. However, something doesn't feel comfortable to me about what they're doing. They may be a Buddha, but this action is something that I don't understand (so you're differentiating between the person and the action). They may be a Buddha, they may be doing it for some incredible reason, but this action is not something that I think is beneficial for the Dharma center, and it's not something I understand." And so then, you go and you ask, very politely. You don't go print an article defaming them in the newspaper, but you go through appropriate channels and you try and understand what's happening. Is that making more sense?

[In response to audience:] Yes, it's very, very hard. On one hand, we want very much to respect them. We have to acknowledge we may not see things realistically. On the other hand, we can't just whitewash and ignore things. We have to find some way of clarifying our doubts.

[In response to audience:] Then you have to maybe ask some of their students. Or ask other people, as you try and come to some understanding about it. Again His Holiness says we should have a spirit of sincere inquiry and try and understand. We can do this without criticizing the other person. And I think this in general is very good advice for us with anybody we deal with. Usually, when somebody does something, we're quick to judge, condemn and criticize. If we can instead just train ourselves to think, "Well they're doing something and I don't understand what in the world they're doing. But I'm not going to judge and condemn, I'm not going to whitewash. I'm going to go and find out what's happening."

Sometimes you just have to be content with your present level of understanding of what's going on. I've seen with myself in some cases, that initially, I can only understand this much. But later, as my mind gets broader or I do more purification, I'm able to understand more. But it is difficult.

[Audience:] We want to avoid whitewashing when it comes to ethical stuff, but in other things like, just behavior things that don't seem to be really harming anybody, then those things we should just have a more open mind towards?

Yes. Again, we don't know why they're doing it. And definitely, it's challenging our preconceptions, isn't it? If it's not an action that is harmful, and you take it in the way of "Wow, look at all my preconceptions", then you're going to benefit no matter why they're doing it because of the way you look at the situation.

[Audience: inaudible]

It seems to me there're two things: there's the religion as a doctrine, and then there's the person who's practicing a religion. There's a difference between a person who's practicing a religion and a doctrine. The doctrine may say "There's a creator God", and all the little people in the religion may say "Yes, there's a creator God, and I've got to be nice otherwise he'll punish me." But if you ask a person who's practicing that religion "Is there a creator God?", he could say "No, there's no creator God." And if you ask what's ultimate reality, maybe they'll explain the realization of emptiness. In one way their mind is not matching the literal tenets that their own religion is preaching. This is what I mean, that you have to look beyond the words into the conception, to know what that person really means.

[Audience: inaudible]

What we're saying is, if I look at myself, I don't understand anything. For my mind to get from where I am to Buddhahood, I need a religion that is going to be able to communicate to me those realizations in a framework that I can understand. Now if one system (not even religion) describes those realizations in a way that I can communicate with, in a way that enables me to generate these realizations, fine. Great.

Then there's another religion, and the way its teachings appear to me, is that I have to believe in a creator God. If I have to believe in this, that and the other, then I'm going to say it's not teaching me those realizations that I need. Maybe the great practitioners of this religion believe something different, I don't know. The standard party-line that I'm getting as it's being interpreted to me isn't clicking.

[In response to audience:] A lot of it has to do with karma. This is why Buddhism says we have to think very deeply and use reasoning. Use logic. We are very easily drawn here or there. I think it's not very useful for us to go through life with this little checklist of what is a good religion and what is a bad religion. Which one has my blessing and which ones I am going to condemn. I think that's not a very useful way to approach things. I think it's more useful for our own growth, if we have some idea of the kind of realizations that make sense to us, that we feel we need to gain to become enlightened. Our job is to seek the tradition that explains those things to us so that we understand it. Don't worry about what everybody else is doing and what everybody else is saying. Our purpose as practitioners is not to go around judging other religions. There have been so many religious wars fought because people spend their time judging religions instead of practicing them. That's not our job. Our job is to know the kinds of things we need to develop and then seek the system that teaches us how to develop them. Let everybody else do what they want to do. The most we can say is that this system resonates in me and that system doesn't.

You have to make a distinction between the dogma, or the party-line of a religion, and the realizations that very deep practitioners of that religion have, because they might be two very different things. You can debate "Is there a creator God?", but you have to give the word "God" a certain definition – if creator God means somebody sitting up there who waves his magic wand – you both understand you have the same conception of what that word means. Then it's perfectly legit to debate whether God exists or not. Does that make sense or not?

But, what one person's particular understanding of God is, may not be what that word is as we're commonly defining on the debating ground. In order to increase our own intelligence, and our own understanding of the path, we have to give words specific definitions so that we can figure out what we believe in and what we don't. But that doesn't mean that everybody who is practicing that religion gives it that same definition. They might have a completely different understanding in such a way that they have very deep spiritual realizations. That's why I keep saying, don't look at the words, look at the meaning.

For example, the party-line of one religion – if you look in the theoretical books – might be very literally, "It's OK to slaughter animals." But some deep religious meditator of that tradition might say, "It's OK to slaughter animals. But 'animals' here means our animal barbaric instinct, and it's perfectly alright to slaughter that selfish, animal-like mind that disregards other human beings. That's the meaning of what this religion is saying when it says 'It's OK to slaughter animals.'" You see – there's a difference between what that person as a realized being is interpreting those words to mean, and what the literal meaning is that's coming through the system in the books. I have to figure out what I'm going to follow. If I follow that high meditator, that's great. But if I follow that statement literally, and I, Joe Blow, then start to go around killing animals, that's not going to be useful.

[Audience: inaudible]

I don't think there's any scientific evidence. You just have to go on what it says in the scriptures as to the kind of qualities and capabilities you'll have when you completely purify your mind and totally develop all your good qualities. We're very, very limited beings and what we're capable of doing is very limited. If you look at our mind, our minds are also very defiled, and our good qualities aren't developed. If we could imagine what it would be like, what kind of qualities of mind would it be possible to have if you get your mind to the state where you never, ever again get angry or annoyed or attached or jealous – your mind is going to have some special qualities and capabilities. In the scriptures, it says that as you develop on the path, you develop some of these...I guess you could call them magical, or supernatural

powers. In other words, these people don't have normal states of mind like us. What they can physically and verbally do isn't limited to what we ordinary beings are capable of doing.

In terms of scientific evidence, that's difficult. But I think if we can try and think of what it must be like to have a pure and developed mind, e.g. if we think of a person who has some ability in meditation, who is able to meditate at the time of death to guide their rebirth – that's an incredible ability. We can't do that now, but we can see how that could be possible. It's possible to eliminate the craving in our mind so that when we die, we can in some way guide our own rebirth. Then you take it from there to the kinds of qualities that are possible to develop with a pure mind. These qualities are talked about in the scriptures. You can accept it provisionally and think about it the way I've just described, try out the path for yourself and see if you can do it when you gain those realizations.

[Audience:] If you're somehow holding the teacher higher, how do you have equanimity for everybody in the group?

This is a very good question. This again is a point that many people in the West miss. The teacher becomes very special and everybody else is just flaky. I think that here you have to ask: for somebody who has high realizations, what is it they cherish the most? They cherish other beings. Bodhisattvas, Buddhas, they cherish other beings more than they cherish themselves. If we're going to respect Buddhas and bodhisattvas, and if we're going to see our teacher as a realized being, then definitely we should try and value the thing that's most important to them, which is other beings, everybody else. Being all nice and sugary sweet and pleasant and wonderful and courteous and helpful to our teacher, but completely obnoxious and disrespectful and greedy in regards to other sentient beings is completely contradictory to what we should be trying to develop in our practice.

[In response to audience:] I don't know if it's as serious an error, because still, by keeping a good relationship with your teacher, you're opening your mind to eventually coming around to the point that respecting your teacher means respecting other beings. Whereas if you throw away the relationship with your teacher, you're throwing away a lot of that possibility to eventually come to that conclusion.

Here is another very common mistake. I remember in the scriptures, there's one story that explains how anything related to your teacher is very precious. You should treat your teacher's dog with incredible respect because this is your teacher's dog and your teacher's family; anything related to your teacher you should treat with utmost respect. Many people get into this whole thing of "The guru's dog is just so precious!" and patting it and stroking it and praising the guru's dog. But they forget that all the other people around them are the guru's other disciples, and are nasty and mean and competitive to all their Dharma friends. They forget that these people are also who your spiritual teacher cares about. Again, this comes sometimes from the way the teachings are presented. We're taught that anything related to your spiritual teacher is like so high. Actually, the whole point of that teaching is just to help us see somebody's qualities so that we follow the teachings better, but we misinterpret it to get into this whole devotion trip [laughter].

[Audience:] In the West we're exposed to such a wide variety of teachers and teachings. It seems easy for us to go from one to the next. Yet here in the teachings it seems to be really emphasizing having a steady relationship with a particular teacher or teachers, something steady and concentrated. But here in the West it's a very different thing. You're with your teacher for four days every other year, and then you're with another teacher for another four days, and another teacher for another four days. What does it mean to have a relationship with a teacher?

We can go to people's teachings, we can learn from them, but accepting that person as our teacher is a different thing. You can go and learn from many traditions and many people. When some tradition really clicks with you, or some person really inspires you, after you've checked things out, you make your decision, "That person is my teacher." You may have made that decision about several people. That's OK. But it doesn't mean that everybody you go to and listen to teachings from becomes your teacher. If you take refuge, if you take precepts, if you take initiation from somebody, then they become your teacher. That's why you should check before you do these things. But otherwise, you're free to go and learn from a wide variety of people. Then when something really hits you on a deeper note, whether that person is around all the time or not, if you feel a real heartfelt connection with them and their way of teaching and that particular tradition, then try and stay steady in that.

It's true that in the West, we're exposed to many, many different traditions. I think it's good that maybe you find one particular approach that suits you well and use that as your mainline thing. You can go to other teachers and other things, and that becomes like ornaments or decorations for your basic practice. It's much better to have a main focus, and have other things added on to it. That's very, very good. Whereas somebody who Monday night does breathing meditation and Tuesday night, does Dzogchen and Wednesday night, does Mahamudra and Thursday night, does Tonglen and Friday night, goes to a medium, they're not going to get anywhere. Whereas if you make some connection with a particular teacher, have a stable practice, that will be very beneficial. And you can always write to that person if they're not around. But it's something you can take your time in forming.

[In response to audience:] That has a lot to do with our own disposition and our karma. We have to select what is appropriate for us. That doesn't mean it's the best thing or the best teacher for everybody. It's like at a buffet dinner. I like rice. You like potatoes. I can't say, "Rice is better because I like it!" If you're nourished by potatoes, fine. But if potatoes don't get along with my digestive system, then I have to eat rice. But that's OK.

[Audience:] What does it really mean to be inspired by the Buddhas? Does it mean something conceptual or does it mean something non-conceptual? What's really going on?

Whether it's something conceptual or is there something else going on depends very much on our mind, the teacher's ability and our karmic relationship with that person. If you go to a teaching, there might be a thousand people in the teaching, and one person is going to go out and say, "Wow! What an incredible teaching. That completely opened my mind!" And somebody else is going to go out and say, "Oh, it's so boring, I didn't get anything!" Now that is a reflection of people's karma and people's disposition. A lot of it depends on us.

[In response to audience:] They say that receiving the blessings or the inspiration of the Buddha means our mind is getting transformed, and that means somehow that we're at the point – from doing some purification, or from whatever – where our mind is receptive to transformation. It might be the conceptual teachings coming from the Buddha, it might be just the whole energy from that person coming, but somehow our mind is ready and ripe at that time. Something clicks. Our receiving this has a lot to do with how we see that person. If you see that person as an idiot, you're completely closing off all your ability to tune in to whatever it is they're trying to convey, conceptually or non-conceptually. Whereas if you try and have a positive view of that person, seeing them with qualities, then your own mind is going to be more receptive to communication, verbally and non-verbally.

Let's meditate.

This teaching is based on the *Lamrim* or *The Gradual Path to Enlightenment*. Please refer to the following web-page for its outline and other transcripts or to listen to the audio recording of these talks: <http://www.thubtenchodron.org/GradualPathToEnlightenment/outline.html>