

Disadvantages of Not Thinking about Death
(including explanation of the Eight Worldly Concerns) (lightly edited transcript)
by Ven. Thubten Chodron ©, at Dharma Friendship Foundation, Seattle, 1991/92.

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Summary of Previous Session

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

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

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

The second level is that in common with a person of the intermediate level of motivation where we seek to be free of all the confusions of any rebirth whatsoever. We want to get off the Ferris wheel. We want to attain liberation, so we generate the determination to be free from all of our confusion. To achieve these, we practice the three higher trainings – ethics, concentration and wisdom.

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

Remembering Death to Motivate Our Practice

We're going to go back to the initial level of practice, that initial motivation, and go through that in more depth. The first topic is remembering death. And then we will talk about another 'favorite' topic of ours – lower realms. By thinking about these, it makes us more concerned about dying and being reborn. This will make us take an interest in getting some guides. We then take refuge in the Triple Gem as a guide to help us through all this mess. The general guidance of the Triple Gem right off the bat is about karma. These are the four principal topics in this initial level of motivation – death and the lower realms to activate our interest in doing something, and taking refuge and observing karma to help us solve the problem. I'm trying to give you the general scope, and then slowly narrow it in so that you know where we are and how the topics fit together. This will help you understand things better.

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

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

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

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

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

I remember when one of my friends' mother died. She had Hodgkin's and so she was really wasted when she finally died. They embalmed her and everything. Then when people went up to see the body they said: "I haven't seen her look that good in a long time." I couldn't believe it! That's how we treat death. People are very concerned about it. They make good plans, like who their makeup artist is going to be when they're dead. They want to look beautiful in their casket. This is just indicative of our whole closed-mindedness towards the issue of death. It is also indicative of all the anxiety that goes on about

it.

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

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

The Dharma way of thinking about death is to face it honestly. Instead of letting the fear of death fester in the closet, we're going to take it out and look at it. It probably won't be as bad as you think it's going to be, once you take it out and look at it. The purpose of doing this is to get us in touch with reality. By doing that, it gives us more energy to do our Dharma practice. Understanding death gives us a framework with which to look at our life and appreciate it and take full advantage of the opportunities that we have in this life.

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

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

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

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

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

Six Disadvantages of Not Remembering Death

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

1. If we don't think about death, we don't remember the Dharma

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

Look at how most of our society lives. Nobody thinks about death. People pretend it doesn't exist. The

whole purpose of life becomes to have as much pleasure as you can possibly have. People run from one pleasure to another in their attempt to be happy.

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

2. Even if we're mindful of the Dharma, we won't practice it

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

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

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

3. Even if we practice, we don't do it purely

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

4. Even if we remember the Dharma, we don't practice it consistently

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

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

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

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

Another common scenario is we actually get ourselves to sit down, we start to meditate, we do the prayers, but we go: "Oh my knees hurt; my back hurts; well, I'll get up and go watch TV instead." We get ourselves to the cushion but we can't stay there. Again, it happens because we're not thinking about death. If we think about death, these kinds of thoughts won't torment us so much.

5. By not remembering death, we get involved in a lot of negative actions

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

6. At the time of death, we die with a lot of regret

Another disadvantage is that when we reach the time of death, we die with a lot of regret. You go through your whole life doing whatever you're doing to get happiness. When you're dying, you look back on your life and you ask: "What have I done? How has my life been meaningful?" Let's say you're dying of cancer or heart disease. You look back on your life, see how you've spent it. "Well, I've spent it putting on big fancy airs to make people think I'm important. I've spent it running around, playing sports, to get more trophies so that I can believe that I'm worthwhile. I spent it lying to get more money and to cover up all the devious things I've done." "I've spent my whole life getting angry at people, I've held grudges, and haven't talked to people in years and years."

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

Elaboration of the Third Disadvantage: our practice gets very mixed in with worldly things

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

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

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

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

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

These happen because we're trying to practice the Dharma but we're not doing it purely. Our worldly motivations are getting mixed in because we aren't thinking about our own mortality. We lose the purity

of our practice.

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

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

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

So he figured: "I'll prostrate to the stupa." The next day he was out there prostrating. He was prostrating up and down and up and down, perspiring profusely. Then his teacher came by and he said, "Oh, it's very good you're prostrating, but it'll be better if you practice the Dharma."

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

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

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

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

This is a very important point to look at. To always be very aware and question ourselves: "Why am I practicing? Why am I doing this?" Like I've said, we bring so much of our old behavior patterns into the Dharma. If we're not aware of our motivation, it all comes up: "I'm doing all this great studying because I want to be a very famous scholar. I'm doing all this meditation because I want to be able to sit at the front of the room and have everybody look up to me and praise me and think I'm holy. I'm doing all this service in the Dharma community and in the hospices and food banks because I want approval. I want people to think I'm good. I want some praise." That is why we can't look at the external thing we're doing. We have to look at the internal mind that's doing it.

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

For other people, not doing Nyung Nay could be an incredible escape from practicing Dharma: "What?! Go a whole day without eating? No way am I going to do that! Do all these prostrations. Get so

exhausted. Uh, uh, I might get tired out. I'd better do all my work and chores in the monastery. I'll let all these other people do Nyung Nay."

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

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

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

Eight Worldly Concerns

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

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

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

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

First pair: attachment to receiving material things; aversion to not receiving material things or losing what we have

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

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

We always want more and we always want better, no matter how much we have. Our economy is built

around this first worldly Dharma. We're encouraged to have it with the advertising. We're encouraged to want and to crave and to get attached to things. We all have different things that we're attached to. Our mind can get attached to anything and everything. You give it the opportunity, it will stick to something.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I remember one time I spent weeks making him some book covers for his Tibetan texts. I got some brocade. There's no sewing machine, so I hand-sewed and stitched these beautiful book covers. I was so proud of myself. At my appointment with Rinpoche, I went in and gave him the set of book covers. After that a Geshe came for a visit. Rinpoche gave the book covers away to the Geshe who walked out with them. I had to really check up: "Well, why did I give this?" Very often even when we give people gifts, it's not with a completely pure motivation. As a result, when we give somebody something and they give it away, we get very offended. Isn't it incredible? As if they don't value us because they gave that thing away. If we've really given it, it no longer belongs to us. It belongs to the other person. They can do whatever they want. So we have to really check up our motivation for giving.

Second pair: attachment to praise; aversion to blame

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

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

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

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

Learning to evaluate ourselves

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

Conversely, if they tell us that we have bungled something, that we're awful, then we must really be awful. We completely believe what other people say about us. That's why we get so mad when they tell us unpleasant things. If we didn't really believe what they said about us, why get mad at them? If we had the ability to evaluate ourselves correctly, then why get mad if somebody else sees a fault that we know we have? We know we have it, what's wrong with admitting that we have it? Everybody else sees it. It's like somebody telling you that you have a nose on your face. It's there. Everybody sees it. "Yeah, I made that mistake." Why get so mad when other people say it? We get so mad because we don't do that kind of internal evaluation to look at our own weaknesses.

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

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

Conversely, when we messed up, let's acknowledge it. It's not so bad. It's not such a catastrophe. It can be purified. It can be amended in some way. If we do that, then we're not going to give the power of our self-respect and self-confidence to other people. We're going to retain it for ourselves because we'll be able to look at ourselves accurately. That would solve a whole lot of problems. If we constantly rely upon what other people say about us and think it's true, we're going to get awfully confused.

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

If I were to completely believe whatever anybody else said, I'd be totally confused. But I was so glad

that incident happened, because it pointed out to me how other peoples' opinions of me are simply that – opinions. Whether I'm too strict, whether I'm too loose, only I can determine that. If we don't look at ourselves and evaluate ourselves, there is no way to be in touch. And then we will have all this attachment and aversion, depending upon what other people say.

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

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

Third pair: attachment to having a good reputation; aversion to having a bad one

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

Again the problem lies not with the reputation, but with our attachment to the reputation. We want everybody in that big group to know how good we are. We want to have a good reputation in our family. We want the family to know that we're successful. We want to prove ourselves to the family. We can also have such an attachment in a Dharma group – we want everybody in the group to think we're wonderful. "I want to be known as the best Dharma teacher, so be sure and tell everybody!"

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

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

Fourth pair: attachment to sensual pleasures; aversion to unpleasant things

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Disadvantages of Eight Worldly Concerns

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

In addition, by seeking all these things that we like, or running away from things we don't like, we create a lot of negative karma. If you look at the reasons for doing the ten destructive actions, they all relate to these eight worldly concerns. Why do we steal things? Because of attachment to material stuff or attachment to reputation. Why is there unwise sexual behavior? Attachment to tactile sensation. Or attachment to reputation, attachment to praise. Why do we speak harsh words? Because somebody offended our reputation or somebody didn't give us the material we need or somebody stole from us or somebody doesn't appreciate us. Or somebody burnt the food.

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

Review of Talk

We did all this discussion under the topic of thinking about death because by thinking about death, it will give us a way of looking at our own life so that we can live more peacefully now, prepare for our future lives and realize our own potential. If we don't think about death, we will not think about the Dharma, so we will not think about using our potential or planning for future lives or doing anything spiritual. If we don't think about death, then even if we think about the Dharma, we have the *mañana* mentality: we procrastinate, we postpone our Dharma practice. Or even if we remember the Dharma, we don't do it purely because our mind gets all confused with the eight worldly concerns. For example, we start being generous in order to get a good reputation.

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

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

When you wake up this morning, it doesn't really matter what you dreamt about last night, because it's over. Similarly we might have been completely obsessed with somebody criticizing me yesterday: "How can they do this to me?" We get so upset because of this criticism. Or you might have gotten so entranced when somebody said: "I love you" and "You're so beautiful" and "You're so talented and creative." But today, all that had happened yesterday is gone. They no longer exist. The pleasure, the pain and the aversion – they are like sand falling through your fingers. There's nothing to show for it at the end of the day. Why get so upset, anxious and neurotic about all these attachments and aversions? Better to use our energy to transform our mind, i.e. to practice the Dharma.

Answers to Questions

Acquiring a good reputation to serve others

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

That's very true. But there's a difference between having a good reputation and being attached to having one. There's a difference between having a bad reputation and finding it very disagreeable having one. The thing is that we want to act well. We want to act well first of all for our own karma. Second of all if you're practicing the bodhisattva path, if you sincerely care for others, you definitely want them to have a good opinion of you, not because you're attached to them having a good opinion of you, but because it helps them if they do. So it all depends completely on your motivation. You can have a good reputation and seek to act in a way that other people will think well of you, but not because you're attached to it.

Using meditation to check on our motivation

[In response to audience:] Our meditation is the time when we can shine the mirror and ask ourselves why we are doing what we are doing. Sometimes it may not be clear. Sometimes we'll find that our motivation is mixed. We'll have a good motivation and a lousy one at the same time. Or we'll flip back

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

Importance of continually reflecting on death

[In response to audience:] What you're saying is that you are very aware of death at this time when a dear family member almost died. It really helped you to tune in very much more to that person, to your whole family, to your life. But when the crisis subsides, so does your awareness, and you're kind of back to the old habits.

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

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

[In response to audience:] This is what I think. It'll be helpful to teach kids, from the time they are very young, and adults too, that every time we're criticized, let's just stop and reflect on our own behavior – did I do that? If I did it, maybe I have to say, "Yes, I did it," – but is it all that horrible of a thing that I did it?

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

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

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

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

There are two things that are going on: first of all, we have to know what to do with the criticism internally; then we have to know how to deal with the person who is criticizing externally. You need both those factors, because if you don't deal with the effect of the criticism internally, but just try and stop the person who's criticizing you, you're still believing what they're saying. You're still internalizing it, only you're letting all your anger out on them, or somewhere else: "It's all the world's fault, it's all these people's fault, because they're criticizing me!" The real issue is I'm believing what they're saying. So the big thing is first, we have to work with that part of us that hates ourselves. And then we need to think about how to deal with the other person who is doing whatever they're doing. But if we don't look at that part of ourselves that beats up on ourselves, then even if the other person stops criticizing us, we'll take over.

It isn't a thing of "Do I internalize the criticism or do I throw it away?" It's "Let's look at the information that the person is sharing. Let's see if there's anything I can learn from it." Suppose someone tells me that I'm a completely horrible nun, that I keep my vows poorly and that I'm a very bad example. I will

look at my own behavior. I will go through my list of vows and I think, "Well, I keep them moderately well. Not perfectly. But I kind of do well within the boundaries. There is room for improvement but I'm not a total catastrophe." That's what's important, not what this person says about me.

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

It's very interesting. I find that when people start criticizing me, my instant reaction is "Uuh!" And then I kind of go, "OK, I'm going to sit here and listen to them. I'm going to open the doorway and let them criticize. Let them give me some information. They might tell me something that's interesting and that's useful for me. They're also telling me a lot about themselves and how they're seeing things. That will help me know how to relate to them better." So that's what I try and do.

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

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

(ii) Aversion to criticism & attachment to praise: two sides of a coin

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

(iii) Getting in touch with our human dignity

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

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

So it's a thing of not just getting whoever it is who's beating the woman to stop, it's also getting her to stop hating herself at the same time. Developing a balanced sense of self-confidence – that's what it's all about. To get that balanced sense of self-confidence, you need to get rid of the attachment to the praise and the aversion to the blame, thinking, "I am a valuable human being. I'm alive. I have the Buddha nature. I have inner qualities. I have a precious human life. I have the basis to have a happy

life and to do something useful for society." That's completely in tune with reality. Saying, "I am wonderful. I am fantastic. I have to have the best of everything. I have to be treated like royalty. Everybody has to appreciate me and tell me how wonderful I am," – this kind of attitude is poison.

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

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

(iv) Assessing ourselves; having a balanced, reliable sense of self-confidence

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

(v) Ways to develop our innate sense of human dignity.

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

Another way, I think, is just to sit down and think about what Buddha nature means. There's a chapter in "Open Heart, Clear Mind" about that. Think about what it means to have the potential to become a Buddha. What does that mean? What is this clear and knowing nature of my mind? What are these good qualities that I have? We are not completely awful. We have many good qualities within. We can look inside, notice those and pick them out. They may only be this big right now, but the thing is, whenever you have a sprout, the sprout has the potential to become a tree. We don't need to put down the sprout because it's a sprout. We need to look at the sprout and say: "Wow! You can become a tree." So we can look at our own good qualities now and say: "Wow! Look! Sure I might get angry and blow my top and bad mouth other people, but I can also talk nicely to people and I do have some kind of a kind heart, and if I put the spotlight on that, and stop beating up on myself so much, that might actually grow."

(vi) Learning not to get entrapped in our negative image of ourselves

The wisdom side of us recognizes that the awful image we have of ourselves is a hallucination. Through the process of all of our conceptualization, we have put ourselves in this tiny little room and feel

entrapped by the world. But it's actually our image of ourselves that has entrapped us, so we should say: "This is just an image. I don't need to hang on to that. Okay, I did bungle something as a kid, and I did get scolded. But I'm forty years old now and I don't need to act like a three-year-old. I'm not a three-year-old. I don't need to hold on to whatever it was that happened." Whether it happened when you were three, or twenty-three, or forty-three or eighty-three, you don't need to hold on to that, because that was one event in your whole life, and it's not the defining character of who you are. But we just kind of highlight certain things and then cast them in mental concrete, and then fight against the walls that we've put around ourselves. Recognize that we don't need to do that. When you start to see this judgmental mind coming: "Why can't you do this right? Why can't you do that right? Why don't you do this? You should do this. You ought to do this. Somebody else is doing this. Why can't you be like them?", or when you're doing the breathing meditation and the mind goes: "Why can't you concentrate better? Why can't you ..." Just look at it and say, "Be quiet." Or just look at it and say: "It's chattering away but I don't need to believe it. I don't need to think like this. This thought is not me. This is just a thought going through my mind. It's not me. It's not even realistic." Learn to identify which of our thoughts and feelings are based on reality, and which are based on hallucination.

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

Non-attachment to money

[In response to audience:] Well, if you take the example, let's say, of somebody who's practicing to be a bodhisattva. They may have inherited five million dollars, but that doesn't mean that in the very next week, they're going to give all five million away. They may want to spend some time and check out how best to give it so that it becomes beneficial to other people. They may want to take some of that money and invest it, and use the interest to support a Dharma center. They may take another amount of the money and just give it away to make a shelter for homeless people, or give it to a Children's Home, or something like that. Just because you're unattached to it doesn't mean you get rid of it all of a sudden. Or that you just throw it away recklessly.

Meditate on the Issues!

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

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>