

Meditations on Death & Impermanence (including imagining our own death)

(lightly edited transcript)

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Review of Last Session – Transience of Life

In the last session, we talked about the transience of life. Transience or impermanence was Buddha's first teaching and also his last. After he attained enlightenment, he went to Sarnath and taught his five friends. The first thing he taught them was impermanence or transience, the fact that everything is changing moment to moment, the fact that nothing remains stable. And he demonstrated this as his last teaching by himself leaving his body, showing that even the Buddha is impermanent.

Difference Between Eternal and Permanent; Non-eternal and Impermanent

We have to be clear here about the difference between eternal and permanent, and non-eternal and impermanent, because the words "permanent" and "impermanent" in English are a little bit different from the way we are using them in Buddhism. As I am using them, the word "eternal" means it lasts forever without end. So for example, our mind-stream is an eternal phenomenon. It goes on without end. Something that is non-eternal is like this piece of paper because it can go out of existence.

Something can be eternal and also impermanent. "Impermanent" means "changing moment to moment", so something like our mind-stream is eternal, it lasts forever but it is also impermanent because it changes moment to moment. Just look at your own mind -- it changes moment to moment. So does our body and so does everything else around us.

"Permanent" in Buddhist language means something that would not change moment to moment. An example of this would be the emptiness of inherent existence. Since emptiness is a lack of independent existence, and something that lacks this can't change, it is therefore permanent.

Gross Impermanence & Subtle Impermanence

Within impermanence, we can talk about gross impermanence and subtle impermanence. Gross impermanence is like when things break – I drop this glass and it shatters. That's gross impermanence – we can see it with our eyes. We can see something change with our eyes. Or the plant grows from spring to summer, that's gross impermanence. The plant being this big and then this huge.

Subtle impermanence is, for example, when the scientists talk about the movement of the electrons around the nucleus. Within all the atoms and molecules, everything is moving and changing all the time, and yet we can't see it.

Gross impermanence is obviously easier to realize and understand than subtle impermanence, because we can see it. But even for gross impermanence, we have a huge mental block against it. You can see how strongly we grasp even at the gross permanence of things because we freak out when things change. When you have an antique and it breaks, or you have a plate and your kid knocks it off the table, it is like, "Wait! That's not supposed to happen. It is not in the nature of this antique to break. Why is it breaking?" We can't accept even that gross impermanence!

Or when we look into the mirror and we see more gray hair and more wrinkles, we're shocked! That is not supposed to happen, that happens to other people! Even that kind of gross impermanence, our mind is so obscured by ignorance that we reject that and we fight against that. Let alone subtle impermanence and just the fact that nothing remains the same from moment to moment to moment. There is nothing to hold onto when we look on the subtle level.

The ignorance on our mindstream obscures both the gross and subtle levels of impermanence, and we have a lot of grasping to things being permanent. Of course intellectually we say, "Yes! Yes! Everybody dies and my antiques break and the car breaks..." We say it all intellectually but that is intellectual. We can tell what our real grasping is -- we just can't accept it when it happens. That shows that there is a big difference between intellectually knowing something and actually integrating it in our lives so that it becomes our way of relating to the world. It's showing that intellectually knowing something doesn't do the trick of solving our problems. We have to put it in our heart.

Purpose of Meditating on Impermanence

1. Bringing the intellectual understanding of impermanence into our heart

The purpose of doing this meditation on impermanence or transience is so that at least when we are talking about gross impermanence, we bring our intellectual understanding into our heart. And similarly with subtle impermanence. I think we can all intellectually understand the electrons moving and things like this, but in our hearts, we certainly don't. The purpose of this meditation is to clarify our mind so that we perceive things more accurately. If we perceive things more accurately, we are going to have less problems in our lives than if we perceive them inaccurately.

2. Cutting attachment

Grasping at permanence is one of the underlying things that causes the generation of attachment. If we grasp in our hearts at things being permanent and unchanging, then they seem really there and it's very easy to get attached to them.

For example, a relationship. Grasping at permanence is what we do with relationships. If we have a relationship with somebody, there would be some part in our mind that says, "This is it. This is lasting forever." Or "This person is lasting forever." In our hearts, that is the way we feel. We become very attached to it. Because it is permanent, therefore I can cling to it. It gives us the illusion that it is something stable and secure that we can rely on because it is always going to be there, it's never going to change. That is the way it appears to our afflicted [Note: 'afflicted' is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'deluded'] mind. And so we get attached to it. We cling on to it.

And then once we have this attachment, that is what sets us up for so much disappointment and pain because the thing that we think is permanent and unchanging, is actually changing moment by moment. And at some point, this gross impermanence becomes evident to us and then we go, "What? This isn't supposed to happen. This person I love isn't supposed to die. The relationship isn't supposed to end.

Yes, yes, I know impermanence intellectually but believe me, this is really not supposed to happen!"

You see how this grasping at permanence causes the attachment and then because the attachment is out of sync with reality, when reality becomes evident, in other words, when the object's or the person's impermanent nature is evident, then we experience a lot of pain. Whereas if we can get rid of the attachment, we can still relate to the person or the object but when it changes, we won't freak out because we haven't been clinging on to it as being permanent and always there. So you can see that this meditation on impermanence helps us to cut the attachment.

3. Cutting anger

Also, if you meditate on impermanence, it is going to help you cut the anger because often, when the thing we're attached to ends, we get angry! So you see, if we can get rid of the attachment, we are also getting rid of the anger, as we get angry in proportion to the amount of attachment we have for something. They go very well together.

So it is very helpful to remember, for example, whenever we have pain, or pleasure, that it is impermanent. Especially pleasure, it is very important to remember that at some point this pleasure ends and the happiness we experience would be like the happiness we experience in last night's dream. You might have had a really nice dream last night, but when you woke up, the dream was gone.

Similarly, any kind of pleasure we experience in our lives, from another temporal point of view, is not going to be there. It is going to be over and the happiness is like last night's dream. It is just not there any more. So if you think of the happiness you experienced as a kid, or even the happiness as a teenager, the happiness you experienced last night, none of it is existent and happening right now – it's like last night's dream. If we can remember that while we are experiencing pleasure, we won't cling on to the pleasure. We can still experience the pleasure and enjoy it, but we don't cling on to it.

Similarly, when we are experiencing pain, we can remember that it too has the nature of being transient, of arising and ceasing, arising and ceasing. Then also our mind won't get so tight and wound up. Very often when we get depressed, or when we go into crisis, it feels like, "This is lasting forever! My problem is never going to change. It is never going to go away and we're stuck there right in the middle of it." But if we can remember that this too is something that comes into existence due to causes and conditions, therefore its very nature is that it changes, it is not going to last forever, then it helps us to relax. We don't have so much aversion to it.

That's why for example, in the Vipassana type of meditation as taught in the Theravada tradition, let's say when your knee is hurting and your back is hurting or whatever, you focus on that area and you watch the sensation of the pain and you see that it changes! It is not the same pain each moment, it changes. And that gives you some sense of space so that you begin to realize also that problems aren't so concrete.

4. Understanding emptiness

The understanding of impermanence also helps us very much to understand emptiness. It's the preliminary for understanding emptiness. The more we see that things are changeable, the more easily we can come to understand that therefore, there is no solid essence inside of it to hold on to.

How to Meditate on Subtle and Gross Impermanence

Spending some time thinking about both subtle impermanence and gross impermanence is very helpful.

For subtle impermanence, you can just think about the electrons moving and the moments of mind (snapping of fingers). Just think about time and how moments are just like this (snapping of fingers), they're here and they're gone! You get some feeling for subtle impermanence.

When you think about gross impermanence, that is where this meditation on death comes in. Because we're really contemplating both the gross impermanence of our body and our lives. So this meditation on death is really a very big motivator that helps us gain energy to practice because it poses that question to us: what is the meaning of life if at the end we die? What is really valuable in our life if at the end we leave behind our body, our wealth and our friends and relatives? If none of these come with us, then

what's valuable in our lives? That helps us to put into perspective how we want to live our lives, so that our lives become very meaningful, our goals are clear and we can direct our energy very readily.

Benefits and Ways to Meditate on Death

1. Nine-point death meditation

We went through the nine-point death meditation last time:

- (a) understanding how death is definite, it's certain, it happens to everybody, it's something that's constantly approaching.
- (b) how the time of death is uncertain. There is no fixed lifespan in our world. We are always going to be in the middle of doing something when we die so we cannot excuse ourselves saying: "I am busy. I can't die now. Come back later!" [laughter].
- (c) how at the time of death what's really important is the Dharma practice. In other words, our own mental attitudes, how we've been able to transform our mind into the nature of loving kindness and wisdom. That is really valuable when we die. The karmic imprints - the imprints from all the constructive actions we've done -- are also very important when we die. Those are the things that would influence what happens to us at death, during the intermediate stage and after that.

2. Imagine others' death

Another way to meditate on death is to imagine our own death. This is a very beneficial meditation. If you find it difficult to imagine your own death, you might even start thinking about the death of people whom you care a great deal about. This isn't being morbid. We are not wishing these people dead but we are trying to be realistic. Especially with those people we are very attached to, I think it is really helpful to our mind to recognize that they are going to die and to imagine them dying and to imagine them being dead. Because some time or another they will be and if we have thought about it beforehand and looked at our emotional reactions and worked through some of those attachment issues or jealousy or anger, then when the person does die, we're going to be able to handle it.

Especially when we are in very close relationships with people and we think about the fact that they might die or we might die, it might also help us to relate to that person in a much healthier way, recognizing that some of the games and tricks we get into really aren't worthwhile. They are a waste of time. So it might help us to actually open up to the people and say what we want to say from our heart. And it might help us also recognize how important it is to forgive people who have harmed us, because some day we're going to die and we don't want to die with all that anger. It may help us also recognize the need to apologize to some of the people we have harmed, or forgive somebody who has apologized to us. Thinking about theirs or our death can really help us overcome the pride that impedes apologizing and forgiving.

So imagining our death or other people's death helps us to keep our relationships with people very clean. We don't tend to stockpile all kinds of twisted emotions because we see that any of us could die at any moment, so what's the use of having this whole storehouse of confused, conflicting emotions and mixed-up communication?

And consider that unless we die first, we will be around when the people we care about die. If we can be mentally prepared for that, then we'll be in a situation of being able to help them when they are dying. If we aren't mentally prepared for their death, then when they are dying, we are going to freak out and we are going to be the one at their bedside crying and saying, "I can't live without you. Don't die!" Like I was saying the last time, when we're dying, the last thing we want is to have somebody around our bed crying. Unless we get some mental stability about the death of the people we are close to, we are going to be acting like that when they die. And if we do, it is going to be completely counter-productive because if it's somebody we care about, we want to be able to help them when they're dying, not hinder them.

If we can think about other people's death to get our own emotions level and stable, give up some of the attachment and the clinging, or the anger and the resentment, then when that person is dying, we can really be with them. We won't be all tangled up in our own emotional mishmash and we'll be able to see where they're at and help them in the death process. And when they die, we'll be in some mental state to do some prayers for them and also be able to help all the other people around who are falling apart. So in that light, I think it's helpful thinking about people we are close to being dead or dying.

3. Imagine our own death

It's also important to think about ourselves and imagine our own death because it is going to happen. And if it is something that we have thought about, and we have rehearsed in our mind, it is going to be much easier than if we go in cold. That's not to say that we are necessarily going to die in the same way we imagine it in our meditation, but just the fact of imagining it in our meditation will help us prepare and it will also help us cut a lot of attachment in our lives. By cutting attachment, actually that leaves us more open to enjoy our lives. When we are attached, we have a lot of fear of losing that which we are attached to. If we cut the attachment, we can still be with the person, still be with the object but there is no clinging fear that it is going to disappear, because we recognize that it is going to disappear. Our mind is relaxed about that and our mind accepts that.

How to Meditate On One's Own Death

In imagining our own death, we can do this meditation many times with different scenarios. You can, for example, imagine yourself getting cancer. Hearing that we have cancer, and then begin to think about "Well, if I know I am going to die, what do I need to clean up in my life? What emotions do I want to work out? What relationships do I want to clear up? What possessions do I want to give away?" This would help us begin to loosen the grasping at all these things.

So in your meditation, you can imagine just dying of cancer and go to the very day of your death and imagining your body losing strength. Or you can imagine your body losing strength all along the whole process. But especially towards the end, when you're losing strength and you can't get out of bed, really think, "Is there anything in my life that I have remorse over?" If you play this video now -- "I'm going to die soon, what do I have remorse over?", then after we end the meditation session or even in the meditation session, we can start to do something to counteract the remorse and the regret. We get some energy to do purification practices, for example. Or we get some energy to forgive somebody, or to apologize. Or we get some energy to give away things that we definitely don't need and imagine when you are dying, giving away the things that you do need now.

We have so much wealth in America but let alone give away the things we do need, we can't even give away the things we don't need. Our house is stuffed with junk and yet we can't bring ourselves to give it away! So this kind of meditation is at least going to get us going and giving away the things we don't need and then at least imagining giving away the things that we do need.

Different Dying Experience of Two Students; Mind Frame of a Third Student

First Student

I had one student in Singapore. I met him because we had a mutual friend. I met him because he was dying. He had cancer. He was thirty-one and had a bachelor's degree from the National University of Singapore. He had just been accepted to an American university to do his Ph.D. program. He was going to leave for the university when he realized he had cancer. He had to cancel the trip and had to undergo the various treatments.

My friend took me to see him and we talked about it. He was more in the denial stage at that point and then later on, he got really angry and upset and suicidal. He was just saying, "My life is completely useless. Here I am, I can't do anything. There are all these people working and I can't do anything at all. I should just kill myself."

I said, "First of all, that doesn't solve the problem. Second of all, from the Buddhist point of view, in one way you can make your life much more meaningful than all those people who are running around the city. Because all the people who were "successful" in the world running around making all that money, they are doing so with the motivation of attachment. Just running around filling their lives with distraction. But you, even though you are sick, you have the chance to practice the Dharma because you can just lie on this bed and make your mind virtuous and create incredible merit and transform your mind."

Slowly we worked through the depression and suicidal thing. I really admired him. I think his dying was one of the most precious things somebody has ever shared with me. It was an incredible experience. At one point he was very clear about his death. His books were his most priceless possession given that he was intellectual. When he realized he was dying, he began to give his books away as he recognized that

his generosity would create a lot of merit, make other people happy and also free him from the attachment.

One Sunday afternoon, he called all of us together. He was living with his sister. He called his sister, his brother-in-law and me and our friend together, and also the mortician because he wanted to talk about his funeral. We sat down and we discussed what was going to happen at his funeral. He was very clear. He said to his family, "If you are going to cry when I'm dying, you do it in the living room. I don't want you in my room going hysterical." He was really straight with them, he was incredible.

We had it all planned out and I knew that they would call me when it was happening, I would come as quickly as possible and I would be giving him blessed pills and saying mantras. We had it all planned out. With the mortician, we talked about the funeral, the kind of casket, he wanted Buddhists things here and not Taoist things, he wanted prayers said by different people. And at one point he was so cute. He wanted our Dharma group to come and do Chenrezig mantra around him, and he said, "Then you'll all stand around me and I can just lie there and enjoy hearing it." [laughter] It is really quite incredible.

Then of course there was one false alarm. I remember I was going to teach and all of a sudden the phone rang and his sister said he was dying. So I excused myself from the teaching and I went out there. We gave him the pills. I was saying mantra and the family was standing in the back all nervous. They weren't crying. We were going on and we put the Prajnaparamita text on his crown. This kind of went on for a while, and then he said, "I want to get up." So he didn't die that night, but he could barely move. He was just totally skin and bones.

I was visiting him everyday. On some days he was conscious and some days he was barely conscious because by that time, he was taking liquid morphine for the pain. Then one day when I went to his house to visit him and found the door locked, I said to my friend Jan who had driven me up there, "Jan, let's go to the hospital. I don't know why this door is locked but it shouldn't be locked and my guess is he had gone to the hospital." And sure enough, he had woken up that morning and said to his sister, "Take me to the hospital otherwise I am going to die today." It was interesting, even with so much preparation and talking we had about his death, at the very end he was afraid, he didn't want to die.

They took him to the hospital and they put him on the drip. I came into the hospital room and the doctor was leaning over his bed and Mai Heng (that was his name) was saying (weakly), "Don't confuse me. Don't confuse me." I knew instantly what was happening, because Singapore is full of well-meaning Christians who want to convert people. I knew that was what was going on. As I approached the bed and the doctor saw me, he just said to Mai Heng, "You are an intelligent person. You decide." And then the doctor left. I had to spend some time calming Mai Heng down. He was upset, so we talked. And then I went to talk to the doctor. [laughter]

I kind of amaze myself sometimes. I don't get like this very often. I had a very calm and peaceful tone of voice but I looked him straight in the eyes. I told him that his role was to take care of the patient's body and we were not talking religion here, we were talking about the benefit of the patient and death time was not the time to convert anybody. Anyway, that's an aside.

I went back to Mai Heng at that point, who was choking in bed and having great difficulty breathing. He called his sister over and I couldn't hear what he said to his sister. His sister told me later, and this was the last thing Mai Heng said, that he reminded her to give away all his remaining money. I thought that was so incredible. His last thought was just "Give what I have to other people so that they can benefit."

Then his breathing got shorter and he stopped breathing and I stayed for a while and put the pill on his head. Like I told you last time, there are these pills that we can grind and put with honey or yogurt, and put the pill on his head. We had that all planned out, we were expecting him to die in his house. As there was no honey and no yogurt in the hospital, we used the Mars bar that Jan had. [Laughter] You make do with what you have. We put this on his crown and we said some mantra. And because it was a hospital, I tried to shoo the doctor away for as long as I could. I explained to the doctor. But then eventually the doctor had to come so he pronounced him dead and then the morticians came.

And then the funeral. In the Chinese culture, they usually bring the body home. He lived in one of these big apartment blocks so they had the funeral downstairs. It's incredible in Chinese funerals. They have all the families come. The body sits there for like two or three days and all the families come and the

people play "mahjong", they hang out and talk and they eat. It is incredible. Some people are really sitting there trying to work emotionally through what is going on. And then other people are just kind of there, it's so incredible... We're so ignorant that even in the face of death, we block out the fact that we are going to die. If all those people who come to the funeral realize that they are going to be lying in the casket one day too, then what's the use of hanging around playing "mahjong"?

Anyway, I spent a good deal of time with the family then. He had one sister who was Christian. We talked for a bit. Then our Dharma group came up a few times and we all stood around and we did the Chenrezig mantra and the practice was very, very powerful. After a few days, they took the body to the crematorium. Singapore is such a small island that there is no room for burial. So the body was cremated and then you come back a few hours later and you pick through the bones with chopsticks, to take out the big pieces of bones and then put them in urns. It is an incredible thing to pick through your friend's bones. I mean it really brings home, "Yes! This is impermanence. This person is no longer here." Because you are picking up the remnants of their charred bones and dentures and whatever it is. It is quite powerful. Anyway, like I said, I think that's one of the most treasured experiences I had with another human being because we were able to be quite direct and honest with each other.

Second Student

At the same time, there was another student of mine who was dying, also a young man. He was twenty-five and had a brain tumor. His family was doing the exact opposite -- complete denial all along. The family did not tell him he had cancer; only that he had a tumor. They could not mention the word "cancer" to him.

While he was still healthy, I had written to my teacher to get some Dharma practices because there are some very, very potent Dharma practices that can help cure people who are very ill, even with cancer. I got the practice for him and asked him to come over so I could teach it to him, but he was too busy. One day when we were taking the eight precepts on Buddha's birthday, his company was also going on an outing and he went on the outing with his company, because he said that his colleagues would be very upset if he didn't go.

He was so caught up with his feeling of having to be a good worker and to have a good reputation. The reason he couldn't come learn the practices was because he was working overtime in his job. Even though he had had surgery for this tumor, when he went back to work, he was a workaholic and he just kept doing it. So it was very difficult because here, even though there's a method to help him while he is recovering from the surgery, while there is still a chance, he doesn't have time even to take the eight precepts which are so incredibly virtuous for twenty-four hours. He didn't have the time.

He was an incredibly nice person. You can't believe it, he is so kind and gentle. He went out of his way to help me with many, many things. One time I was leaving for India and he had to drive and get all these things, he was incredibly nice. Just incredible. To help, he would go out of his way. To do Dharma practice, no.

And there's a practice in Buddhism of liberating animals because they say that if we can prolong others' lives, then that karmically creates the cause for our own lives to be prolonged. Of course if I asked him to go and liberate animals, he wouldn't do it, he didn't have the time. If I told him to go and do it for his own benefit, he would say, "I don't have time." So I had to say, "I want to liberate animals, will you help me?" Then he did it. It's incredible, you know! So on several occasions we would go down to the market. We would buy different animals, insects and fish and we would go and liberate them in ponds and parks and we would make prayers and say mantras. I had to do it this way to get him to do some practice. Because otherwise he wouldn't.

Then, at one point he started feeling very dizzy and the headaches were coming back and he had to stop working. He said to me, "Oh! Well I can't work now maybe I'll go to Malaysia on vacation. I haven't been able to do that yet." I was sitting there thinking, "You're in no state to go to Malaysia!" He was getting out of touch with what's going on. The brain tumor just kept getting worse and worse and he was hospitalized for a few weeks. I would go to see him. It was so touching. His whole face was swollen, he couldn't get up or anything. I would come in to do mantras and then talk with him. He didn't have much control over his hands. But he would be kind of lying there and when I start to do the mantras he would kind of go like this [pay respect with his hands]. It almost made me cry.

That went on for a while and then one day he died. Before he died, while his mind was still clear (before he was hospitalized), I said to the family, "We have to tell him he's going to die. We have to tell him that the cancer is there and that it doesn't look too good, there is always a chance of recovery but it doesn't look too good". The family said, "No. The doctor said we shouldn't tell him." What they really meant was, "We can't face it." So he never had the opportunity to straighten out any of his affairs. And I couldn't go beyond what the parents wanted. At the end, right before he died, by the time his mind was really gone, his mother came and said to me, "We should have told him." But at that point, it was useless.

So, we see how different people react to death and how death becomes a very different experience based on whether one is willing to face it and acknowledge it or not.

Third Student

And at the same time that all these were going on, there was one young man who was in the Buddhist society in the university. We had become very good friends and he was talking about taking refuge and wanted me to do the refuge ceremony. I explained that when we take refuge, we automatically take the precept not to kill because the whole foundation of Buddhism is non-violence. He thought about it and he came back and said, "No. I can't do that because there're cockroaches that come into our kitchen and my mother will be very upset if I don't kill them."

It was so incredible for me because here we have two other young men dying due to previously created karma, which probably has something to do with killing or harming or torturing others' bodies, and experiencing the karmic result of their own previous lives' harm. And here's somebody else who's healthy now, who has the possibility to take the precept to abandon that negative action and he can't. Mentally his mind won't let him because he feels obliged to kill the cockroaches. These are the layers of ignorance on sentient beings' minds. Thinking about all of these and trying to imagine their experience as being ours and seeing how we are going to react, I think it can really help us in our own meditation on death and our own contemplation on how to make best use of our lives.

Let's take some time now and do some meditation on this. Let's spend 10 to 15 minutes doing this meditation of envisioning our own death. If you want just to spend some time thinking about the stories I told you, you could do that and then move on to imagining the scenario of your own death, what it feels like, how the people you are close to are reacting, how your own mind is reacting, check up the kind of work or things that you would like to clear up before you die, so that we can start to make preparation. OK? Is that clear, on what to do?

[Meditation.]

Questions and Answers

Eternal and Permanent

[In response to audience:] The question is about "eternal" and "permanent". Once one has become a Buddha, that is eternal, one is always a Buddha, you never fall back to not being a Buddha. But one's mind is still impermanent, one's mind changes moment by moment. The empty nature of the Buddha's mind, the lack of inherent existence of the Buddha's mind is permanent and is also eternal.

Bodies of the Buddha – Permanent / Impermanent / Eternal / Not Eternal

[In response to audience:] When we talk about the Buddha, sometimes we talk about the different bodies of the Buddha. That doesn't mean physical bodies of the Buddha. When we talk about the Buddha's wisdom consciousness, that's called the wisdom Dharmakaya, the mind that's full of compassion and wisdom. That mind is eternally a Buddha from the time that person attains enlightenment. From then on, that person is eternally a Buddha. But his/her mindstream is changing moment by moment. This is because a Buddha perceives different things every moment, so of course the mindstream that perceives them is impermanent, changing moment by moment. That's what they call the wisdom Dharmakaya.

Sometimes we talk about the nature Dharmakaya, the nature body of the Buddha. That refers to the lack of inherent existence of the Buddha's mind. That is a permanent phenomenon. It doesn't change. It

doesn't go in and out of existence and doesn't change moment by moment.

The different manifestation bodies of the Buddha are also impermanent. The bodies, either what they call the enjoyment body or the emanation body, are the different physical forms in which a Buddha can appear in. The emanation body particularly is not eternal. For example, if we look at the Buddha, from the point of view of him having been enlightened before manifesting the appearance of Shakyamuni twenty-five hundred years ago, that body of the Buddha appearing as that historical figure, is not eternal. And also the body changed moment by moment, and so it is impermanent.

Types of Buddha Nature – Permanent / Impermanent

[In response to audience:] There're two kinds of Buddha nature. One kind is permanent. One kind is impermanent. The empty nature of our own mind is permanent; the clear and knowing nature of our mind is impermanent. The clear and knowing nature is just our ability to perceive objects -- for objects to arise and for us to engage in them – the thing that makes that process happen. This is impermanent, because each moment of mind is clear and knowing and yet each moment is different from the previous moment.

Understanding Impermanence Leads to Understanding Emptiness

[In response to audience:] Emptiness means the lack of some solid, existing, independent something. Currently, that's how everything appears to us. Like there is a real solid thing that's "me" and there is a real solid something in here that's the watch, and there is a real solid something in here that's glass, that's completely independent of everything else. Actually, nothing exists as solid, independent entities. That's what we mean by inherent existence – solid, independent entities that exist in and of themselves, completely independent of influence from any other thing. That's how things appear to us. That's how we grasp them to exist but it is a complete hallucination that we are grasping at.

Now if we understand impermanence, then we begin to understand that everything changes moment by moment. So if we start to look at a thing and we recognize that this thing is made up of all these atoms and molecules with the electrons spinning, then we begin to get this feeling, "Hold on! Maybe there is nothing solid in here to grasp onto as existing in and of itself because it's just all these parts that are together, and all these parts are changing." So it helps us get some sense of insubstantiality.

So if we kind of sit and think about that for a while in terms of our body, the fact that you have all these particles whirling around, giving the illusion of something solid but it's actually just a little bit of material substance and a lot of space. Then we also come to have a different feeling about our body. It doesn't seem like there's this thing made of lead anymore.

Let's dedicate. Please do this meditation at home.

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>