

The Ten Destructive Actions – Part 5 of 6: The Results of the Ten Destructive Actions

(lightly edited transcript)

by Ven. Thubten Chodron© at Dharma Friendship Foundation, Seattle. 10 Jun 92

[Contents \(click on heading to view text\)](#)

- Maturation result
 - *Strong negative karma results in rebirth in hell realm*
 - *Medium negative karma results in rebirth in hungry ghost realm*
 - *Small destructive action results in rebirth in animal realm*
- Result similar to the cause in terms of experience
 - *Killing*
 - *Stealing*
 - *Unwise sexual behavior*
 - *Lying*
 - *Slandering*
 - *Harsh words*
 - *Idle gossip*
 - *Coveting*
 - *Maliciousness*
 - *Wrong views*
- Other questions and answers

Now we're going to go into the results of karma. Karma is the intentional action. It's the cause. And now we're going to talk about the results of these actions. There're three kinds of results, but one kind of result is broken into two, so there're four kinds of results:

- 1) Maturation result
- 2) Result similar to the cause:
 - a) in terms of experience
 - b) in terms of habitual behavior
- 3) Environmental result

The intentional actions we do that have all four branches complete, and that aren't purified -- they bring all of these results.

Maturation result

The maturation or ripening result is the rebirth that we take, the body and mind that we get. If one has acted negatively, then the body and mind, in other words, what they call the aggregates of the being, are in an unfortunate realm. If it's a karmic seed that ripened or a set of karmic seeds that ripened that are positive, then the result is rebirth in a fortunate realm. So the unfortunate realms are first, the hell realm – that's the short way to say it. A more polite way to say it for Westerners, so they don't freak out, is *life forms of intense misery and suffering*. We can hear that better than we can hear *hell*, can't we? And then second, the life form of intense dissatisfaction. And then third, animals.

The three fortunate realms are human beings, demi-gods and gods or celestial beings.

Strong negative karma results in rebirth in hell realm

In terms of negative karma, if it's a very strong negative karma, then it tends to bring the maturation result of being born in the hell realm. In other words, it makes our mind attracted to the body and mind of a life form that experiences intense pain and suffering. You can see how this works. For example, a soldier in a camp rounds people up and then tortures them and kills them. You can see that psychologically, by what they're doing, they're putting themselves in the position of getting a body and mind that are very susceptible to pain because of the kind of pain that they're causing.

Medium negative karma results in rebirth in hungry ghost realm

If it is medium heaviness in terms of the karma, then the result tends to be rebirth as a life form of dissatisfaction or frustration, that's often called hungry ghost. That's what the Chinese call them. The hungry ghost realm includes these hungry ghosts that have big bellies and thin necks that run around looking for food and they can't find it. And if they find it, it turns into garbage before they can eat it. Or if they eat it, it burns all the way down.

The hungry ghost realm also includes a lot of spirits. It's interesting. When people talk about mediums and channeling and this kind of stuff, a lot of these beings are spirits from the lower realm. Some of them may be gods, but many of them are spirits. This is why we say that they aren't completely trustworthy objects of refuge, because they're exactly like us, stuck in the cycle of confusion.

Small destructive action results in rebirth in animal realm

If the action is a relatively small destructive one, then it leads to rebirth as an animal.

So what realm we're born into is influenced by the six factors that make the karma heavy or light by the strength of the motivation and what the motivation is, to start with. It also depends on whether the action is complete with all of its parts, because if it's a complete, heavy-duty, perfect one, then it's like a confirmed reservation. [laughter]

Result similar to the cause in terms of experience

Now, let's go on to the result similar to the cause, which is broken up into two: in terms of the experience and in terms of our behavior.

The result similar to the cause in terms of our experience, this is really the illustration of 'what goes around, comes around'. The kinds of things we do towards other people creates the experiences that we have ourselves later.

Killing

In terms of killing, it produces a short life with much sickness. This is very helpful to think about whenever we have any of these results. Whenever we get sick, to think, "Ah! This is the karmic result of killing, or assaulting people, or beating them up, or some kind of violence towards others." It's helpful to think about this, because then instead of just going, "Woe is me! I'm so sick. Why does this happen?" It's like, "Hm. Well, maybe I made a mistake myself." Not in the sense of masochistically blaming ourselves, like "Oh! I'm so negative. I killed somebody in my past life. I *deserve* to have this happen to me!" Not that kind of very screwy, psychological thing, but just recognizing that we made our own mistakes that put us in situations where we experience unpleasant results.

So the thing to be learned from that is that if we don't like the result, let's get our act together and stop creating the cause. That's really why we're studying all of these in so much detail. It's not just a bunch of nice, "Oh-isn't-this-interesting" information, but it's something for us to think about and apply to our life. When we hear about these results and we don't like them very much, then we say, "Oh, well, I don't like this so I'm not going to create the cause." It's like if you think of what it's like to be in jail, you think, "Oh, I don't want to go there, so I'm not going to create the cause." Or if you think of what it's like to play with fire-crackers and have your hand blown off, then you think, "I don't want that result. I'm not going to create the cause."

This is something we do a lot in our regular life. We think of causes and results. We make an effort to avoid the causes of unpleasant results. So here, it is the same thing. It has nothing to do with guilt or deserving things. But it has to do with learning from previous mistakes instead of feeling sorry for ourselves, and then making an attempt to do something different in the future. Is that clear to everybody? Anybody stuck on this point?

Sickness in the context of karma

[Audience:] For example, when I get a flu, why do I have to think it's due to my own negative action rather than just having caught a virus that's going around? Also, if it's because of karma, does that mean I don't take medicine?

It's true. It is just a bug going around. But if we think it's just a bug, then it's very likely we're going to get angry at the person who's sitting next to us who sneezed, "who was so inconsiderate that they kept sneezing! They didn't stay home." And we just put all these anger on them blaming them for our sickness. And then when we're angry about being sick, not only do we have the physical discomfort of being sick, but our minds go bananas on top of it. So we get more unhappy.

Whereas if you think, "Oh this person sneezed. That's true, but, why I get sick this particular time is because I have that seed in my mindstream from a mistake I made in a past life. So, rather than blame the other person, I should recognize that if I don't like this result, then I should try in the future to lessen my attachment, my anger and belligerence, so that I don't continually create the cause to get sick like this." In that way, we learn from unfortunate experiences instead of just wallowing in the many horrible things that happened, and constantly asking, "Why?"

As to whether we take medicine when we're sick. In Christianity, they say it's God's will. And so they don't take medicine because it's meant to be. But in the case of Buddhism, this is not Buddha's will. Buddha doesn't want us to get sick. Buddha has been trying for eons to teach us how to avoid creating the cause to get sick, but we don't listen so well. So nobody else is putting it on us. Also, karma is not fatalistic. It's not like, "I got a cold and this is my negative karma, so I just have to live out this karma and suffer." It's "Well, there's medicine, so you take the medicine." Why not? [laughter] Makes you feel better!

From a Buddhist viewpoint, there's no intrinsic virtue in making ourselves suffer. The reason we think like this is because even though we try and avoid suffering, it comes anyway. Considering that we can't avoid it except by purifying, then either we should purify first, or, if the results ripen and we get sick and have unfortunate experiences, then at least we can feel that it's serving some purpose, that it's ripening that karma and finishing that karma. So if you're sick, you can say, "OK, this is that karma finishing. I'm glad."

But that doesn't mean that if you take medicine, you're interfering with that karma. And it doesn't mean that you should deliberately make yourself sick so that you can purify more karma. It's just that we try not to suffer, but since we spend our whole life trying not to suffer, and it comes anyway, then if we can somehow look at it in a different way, we can at least stop the mental suffering.

Wanting to stop creating the causes by practicing Dharma

I often tell you this story of when I got hepatitis in Nepal, because this is when the whole thing came really strong to me. It was my first year of learning Dharma, and I got hepatitis and I was just lying there. Going to the bathroom was the major event of the day. It's all I had energy to do. [laughter] I was completely miserable.

Somebody gave me the "Wheel of Sharp Weapons", and up until that point, whenever I thought about Dharma, I was always thinking, "I should practice Dharma." The "should" mind; lots of "should's". And then after I read this book, I said, "OK. I have hepatitis. This is a result of my own negative actions. Actually that makes sense, because if I'm truthful, and I look back even this life – forget previous lives – I've harmed other people's bodies. I've harmed animals' bodies. I've done lots of that as a kid. So what's there to freak out about when I experience some suffering now. Look at the suffering I've caused to others this life. Looking at what I've done this life, when I think I'm a relatively OK person, and then thinking what I could have done in previous lives – who knows what I was born as in a previous life – it's no big surprise that I'm sick."

And then, all of a sudden, instead of saying, "I should practice Dharma," I began to say, "I want to practice Dharma," because it began to seem like, "This is a real worthwhile thing to do because if I practice Dharma, then I can purify these causes, which are already in my mindstream. I can train my mind and subdue the afflictions so that I don't continually create more and more of the same stuff." So

then the reason for practicing Dharma changed from this incredible “should” to “I want to”. Does that help?

Imprisonment and karma

Another example is I talked to some of the lamas who were in prison under the Chinese after they took over Tibet. Can you imagine your whole society being destroyed and you're thrown in prison? You're locked up and you're let out twice a day to go pee and that's about it. And you get one bowl of tsampa a day, and everything you had was completely destroyed, your freedom completely gone. Most of us, we'd probably freak out and just sit there and be so totally miserable, perplexed, angry about the whole thing, that our mental state would just be one of complete suffering. Moreover, the body is incarcerated, and the negative mental state would probably make our body very sick. Because when you get really negative mentally, you stop taking care of yourself, you lose that bounce, and then disease comes much more readily.

But many of these lamas, they told me what they did. They practice a variety of techniques – thought-training techniques. One of the techniques was to think, “This is my own negative karma ripening.” So rather than sit there and get so angry at the situation, at the guards who have locked them up, and at the Beijing government, and just sit there and stew in their anger and misery and feel totally frustrated because they couldn't do anything about it, they thought, “Oh! This is the result of my own negative karma. No reason to blame anybody else. No reason to be unhappy. I created the karmic cause of this result. I'm glad it's happening now. It's purifying this karma. It's finishing it.”

And then they would do the taking and giving practice on top of that, and say, “As long as I'm enduring this, and I can't get out of the situation because of my own negative karma, may this suffice for the suffering of all beings in similar situations, and may I take their suffering upon myself, and give them my happiness.” By meditating in this way, they kept their minds very happy, and that's why you see amongst the Tibetan community far fewer numbers of post-traumatic stress syndrome than you do amongst other refugee groups who have had similar kinds of horrendous things happen to them. Because if you can keep your mind buoyant, you don't get post-traumatic stress syndrome afterwards. You don't get completely debilitated while it's going on, and it begins to have some kind of meaning so that you can fit it into your life, and it makes sense and it seems worthwhile.

Like I said, this doesn't mean that we cause suffering on ourselves. It doesn't mean that we stay in suffering as long as we possibly can. There's no kind of masochistic tendency in this. But it's just when suffering is there, rather than reject the situation, and in doing so make it worse, accept the situation and learn from it. And what we learn is that I can improve my own behavior, and then I won't get this kind of results.

Stealing

In the case of stealing, the result similar to the cause in terms of what we experience in the future is poverty. This doesn't mean just people who were born in poor countries, and it doesn't mean we say, “Oh look. Those people born in Ethiopia – they're so poor. It's because they stole from other people in the past. They're bad people. They deserve to suffer.” That's not the way to think. You don't blame anybody for what their present experience is. We know when we experience suffering, we want others to help us. So we develop a compassionate attitude wanting to help people who suffer. It's not a judgmental thing.

Avoid being judgmental

I was thinking about it yesterday. Our society is so incredibly judgmental. We don't like others judging us. But even if others don't judge us, we judge ourselves, and then we start judging other people. It's like it's so hard for us to put down this paradigm of judgment, and yet from a Buddhist viewpoint, it's completely inaccurate and useless.

When we suffer, it doesn't mean we deserve it. It doesn't mean we're bad people. When we make a mistake, it doesn't mean we're bad people. It just means we've made a mistake. There's a difference between a mistaken action and the person who does it. But as long as we equate a bad action with an evil person, then there's no way we can ever feel good about ourselves, no matter how many self-help books you read, and adult-child courses you go to. As long as you equate bad actions with bad persons,

and you see yourself that way, and not only seeing yourself that way, you see other people that way, then the mind gets trapped in hatred and judgment. And there's no way out of it.

The only way out of it is to completely drop that whole paradigm of judgment. Because it's completely our conception, this conceptual garbage. People make mistakes. It doesn't mean they're bad. Everybody has Buddha nature. How can you say a person is bad if they make a mistake? How can we say we're bad if we make a mistake? If we act negatively, we put negative imprints in our own mind, but it doesn't mean we're bad people. When that negative imprint ripens, it doesn't mean we're bad people. It doesn't mean we're getting punished.

But you see, when we listen to Buddhism, we retrogress to being five-year-olds in Christian Sunday school. We're not listening to what the Buddha is saying, we're stuck back in Sunday school. Actually I don't even think this is what Jesus taught. I don't think Jesus would have been so judgmental. But we just get completely stuck in our own paradigm, which is putting glasses on a world and seeing it through our own afflicted views.

So, poverty is a result of stealing. Having your stuff ripped off. Being robbed. Being forced to give up or share your possessions. You're forced to share things you don't want to share, or your things are confiscated from you, either justly or unjustly. Even things that are technically yours, you can't use. Like you get an inheritance, but then it gets stuck in the courts and you can't get the money, so even things that are legally yours, you can't get your hands on. Just so many obstacles in terms of material possessions and having the resources to live. Not having enough, and having difficulties with what we have.

Unwise sexual behavior

The result of unwise sexual behavior is that you have bad relationships with your spouse and friends. Makes sense, doesn't it? That happens this lifetime. [laughter] Your spouse is unfaithful. You get divorced. And then you get married. And then you get divorced again. Whatever intimate friendships you have, they don't last. Now some people, maybe they have a bad marriage the first time around, and their spouse is unfaithful or something happened, but then the second marriage works out OK. That could be because they had some karma in this direction, it got experienced, the result got used up, and then the opportunity for some other karma to have a good relationship ripened. It doesn't mean that once you have a bad relationship, all your relationships are going to be bad. We've had all sorts of karmic seeds, and all sorts of things can ripen at different times.

Lying

The result of lying is that we don't have very much influence on others. Other people don't trust us. They spread false stories about us behind our back. We're accused of lying even when we haven't, and when we do tell the truth, people think we're lying. Have you ever had that happen? When you told the truth and somebody said, "Why don't you tell me the truth and quit lying?" That kind of thing happens because we've lied in the past, so in this lifetime, people don't believe us. Or people lie to us and they deceive us. I think we've all had that experience.

Other people cheat us. They deceive us. We have a hard time establishing trust in relationships. Other people don't seem to trust us. Even though from our side we're acting honestly, but because of this karmic imprint, it prevents other people from developing trust in us.

Slandering

The result of slandering is that we have very few friends. You can see how it's exactly a result similar to the cause, isn't it? The result that is similar to what we've caused other people to experience. So here, if we use slander or divisive words to split up other people's friendships, the karmic result is we have few friends, or our friends desert us, or they don't want to be with us. Or we're separated from our spiritual teachers and our Dharma friends. We have a bad reputation. We can't get along well with other people. We have difficulty getting along with other people. Why? Because we created disharmony between other people. So here we are, trying to get along, and then other people come, and they interfere with our relationships, they make us disharmonious with the people we live with. And our relationships tend to be really sensitive. They aren't long-lasting. They aren't very stable.

Harsh words

The result of harsh words is that we get criticized. People verbally abuse us. Sometimes we haven't even done anything. Have you ever been the object of somebody's venting? You didn't do anything, but somebody just needed to vent, so they picked you. Or all we did was burn the toast, and all of a sudden all the hostility they had been building up at work came out just because we burnt the toast.

Why does that happen? Because of our own abusive words. Our own insulting harsh words that we used on other people in the past. So we experience the result similar to the cause, we become the recipient of other people's harsh words, other people's blame, even when it isn't something that we deserve from our present life actions. We didn't make a mistake, but people will accuse us unjustly. And we tend to hear a lot of unpleasant news. We live with a lot of noise around us. Even if we say something with a good intention, other people misunderstand us and they get hurt.

That's an interesting one, isn't it? That even when we do speak with a good intention, still, other people hear it as harsh. So again, more friction in the relationship. This is very helpful to think about, because when this happens, instead of getting all mad at the other person -- "I was speaking really nicely, and here they are, dumping on me again. They don't believe me. They're misunderstanding me. Why are they doing this?" -- and we just get angrier and angrier, and then of course we dump on them more, and of course they don't like us more. If, instead of escalating the situation that way, we feel, "Oh, this is the result of my own negative karma from speaking harshly to others. I think I'd better watch what I say to other people." And who amongst us doesn't need to watch what we say to other people?

Idle gossip

The result similar to the cause in terms of idle gossip is we're unable to keep others' confidence, so we become the big blabbermouth of the community. Again, people don't trust us, because we blab all the time. They laugh at us. They don't take us seriously. They don't believe what we say. Our words don't carry any weight. Other people view us as just blabbermouth jesters. And you can see exactly how this follows from idle talk, because we're putting that energy out in the universe, so it comes right back. That's how people perceive us.

Coveting

For coveting, the result similar to the cause is that we can't complete our projects. This is interesting, because when you covet things, what do you do? You want this. And then you want this. And then you want that. The mind is always jumping around wanting many things, being continually restless, so the result is we can't complete anything. With a mind that is always involved in this coveting and dissatisfaction, we start something and then we want to do something else. Ever had that? Some people are really like that. Can't carry a project through. Do a little bit. Then do something else. Do something else. Lots of things begun. Nothing finished. Karmic result of coveting.

We can't fulfill our wishes and hope. We continually long for more than we have, so we're never satisfied. I'm sure all of us are like that to some extent, but some people really epitomize this. It's like no matter what they have, they can't be happy with it.

I had one high school friend, and we were very close friends from before high school. All he wanted was a Porsche. I went through high school hearing about "I want a Porsche. I want a Porsche. If I only had a Porsche. Blah. Blah. Blah." I could barely tell a Porsche from a BMW. But to him, the coveting mind was completely stuck on a Porsche. Completely miserable. He made me miserable and I was his friend. He made his parents miserable. He made his brothers and sisters miserable. He's in constant dissatisfaction because he didn't have a Porsche.

Well, finally, after high school, he got a Porsche. He was happy for one month, and then again, continual dissatisfaction. "Oh, this doesn't work. Why didn't I get this kind of Porsche? Oh, I don't want a Porsche. I want a BMW." The mind that is continually dissatisfied. Maybe because it happened while I was so young, and it lasted so many years, it had always remained in my mind as an excellent example of the result of coveting. He came from a nice family. It was a middle class family. But he couldn't enjoy any of the things he had because of his constant frustration and dissatisfaction that had very little to do with the environment, but really, karmically created.

Also, another result of coveting is that whatever venture we do undertake fails. We can't bring things to fruition. Again, you can see this grasping, clinging mind, when we get grasping and clingy, we can't bring things together.

[Audience:] Is it alright if we covet an austere life instead of life's excesses?

If you're psychologically healthy, I don't think you would covet an austere life. If somehow psychologically, you have this idea of "I want to make myself undergo austerity," then you're not psychologically, completely together. [laughter]

I remember there was one monk, when we were living at Kopan in Nepal. Lama Yeshe walked into his room. He had been sleeping on just a simple mat on the cold stone floor. He thought, "This is great. Look how austere I am." And Lama walked in and say, "What are you on? Some Milarepa trip? Go get yourself a mattress!" [laughter] He just really cut through it. Because the monk was on a Milarepa trip.

Maliciousness

The result of maliciousness – this one is real interesting – is you feel guilty. Look at the psychological mechanism here. How karma works psychologically. What does a malicious mind do? It attacks others. It thinks of how to harm them. It inflicts harm on others. It makes them feel miserable. So what's the karmic result in future lives? We feel guilty. We turn that maliciousness in on ourselves and feel guilty. We feel suspicious. Why? Because we've caused other people fear. We feel paranoid. Fear. Paranoia. Discomfort. Suspicion. Ill at ease. All of these things happening because of no apparent reason. This is the karmic result of maliciousness.

I had one other high school friend. I didn't know what happened, but at one point in her life, she could barely walk out of her flat, because she was just so afraid. She lived in a nice community. She was married to a nice guy. Externally, things were okay in her life. But she was just completely overwhelmed by fear. Why does that happen? Karmic result of maliciousness. Fortunately she isn't like that now. Karma doesn't last forever. Once you've experienced the result, it finishes. But we can even look in our own life, when we get fearful, nervous, tensed, suspicious for no reason at all. Because this is exactly how we've caused other people to feel in the past. So if we feel guilty about things when we haven't done anything, or we beat ourselves up emotionally when we haven't done anything at all -- why do these happen? Why do we experience so much emotional torment? They are the result of maliciousness.

[Audience:] Besides karma, aren't our experiences and behavior influenced by psychological and physical factors in this life too?

That's completely possible. In other words, when we say our experiences and behavior are due to karma, it doesn't mean that karma is the only cause of them. Because anything that exists, it has a principal cause, and it has cooperative conditions. The principal cause is the chief thing that makes that thing happen. The cooperative conditions are all the other things.

Like if we look at a flower. The principal cause would be a seed. The cooperative conditions are the water, the earth and the sunshine. Now, that doesn't mean that the water, earth and sunshine are irrelevant, because they're only cooperative conditions. We all know that there's no way the seed can grow without them. So those things do count, and they are important, and whether they are there or not, are going to influence things. But the chief thing, the propelling thing, is the seed.

So we can say that maybe one of the chief impetuses, the energy behind it, would be the karma. But then you're right, there're definitely things going on in this very lifetime psychologically that sustain the momentum. There's a psychological reason why an addict keeps shooting and shooting and shooting. So there's some of that going on too. But it's like the karma was the principal energy that created the circumstance so that the mind would go into that way of thinking so easily.

And then there also is a hormonal influence too, but that is influenced by karma, because karma influences the body we got born in. So it doesn't mean that the karma is sitting there and pushing your pituitary gland, and there is a hormonal influence, but then we're born into the bodies -- it's like, you enter Honeybare Café for some reason, then once you're there, you're going to hear the music, you're going to eat the food, you're going to meet the people. So the karma might propel us towards that body,

and then once we're in that body, we'll live with that particular nervous system and genes and hormonal system and digestive system and everything else in it.

So when we say these things are due to karma, it doesn't mean it's only karma. There're definitely many other things going on. It doesn't mean that, like, if somebody is suspicious and paranoid, that you just say, "Well, this is their karma, so can't do anything. Psychology won't help because it's karma." That's clearly not true, because many times, some therapy or talking or this group or that group can really help.

But then like you said, why is it sometimes it helps and sometimes you go through it ten years and it's not helping? Well, that's because the karma is really heavy, really strong. That principal energy is like a bull-dozer, so until it gets weakened and exhausted, the mind can't click in to another way of viewing it.

This is why we're constantly emphasizing the importance of purification practice, because if you purify before the karma ripens, then you don't have the problem. Or if you have a problem, then it won't be as strong as it otherwise would be.

And then often times, even if the result comes, you can weaken the impact through purification practices. Of course it depends on what the result is -- if you've broken your leg, you can't purify the karma of having broken your leg because your leg is broken already. You can't go back into the past and undo it. But let's say you got the karma to get cancer. That karma is ripening in the cancer, but then if you do a lot of intense purification, it can purify that karma and enable maybe some of the medicine or diet or whatever you are taking to cure your body. So, often, in the Tibetan community, when people are still healthy enough, when they get sick physically, or sick mentally, but they're not too sick, then they're given purification practices to do. If somebody's completely flipped out, then difficult to have them purify, because the mind can't think straight. But if people are just suffering from a lot of sadness or guilt or this kind of thing, purification is very, very useful. But therapy and vitamins and these things help too. [laughter]

This is all coming down to dependent arising. That means that something happens not because of one factor, but because of a whole conglomeration of many, many different factors coming to make it. So again, you have to remember that although I'm saying this is a result of that, it doesn't mean it's a result of *only* that.

Wrong views

The karmic result of wrong views is that when we try and practice Dharma, we feel dull. Like you're feeling pretty good during the day, and you come to teachings, but the mind just can't hold it together. This is karmic obscuration.

When I was living in the different Dharma centers, sometimes a high lama would come, and would be teaching, and then of course, the day when you finally got to sit in the front row, you couldn't stay awake! You drank two cups of coffee before, and even though your mind was fine, this incredibly weird kind of dullness just comes over. I see a lot of nodding heads. [laughter] Just out of the clear, blue sky, this fog. This dullness. You cannot, for the life of you, stay awake. But as soon as you dedicate the merits and get up, you're completely okay. Wide awake. I've seen this happen so many times. [laughter] So this is the karmic result of wrong views.

We're awake for worldly activities, and snoozing during the Dharma ones. No impetus. No interest in the Dharma. Or even if you actually go to the teachings, or you read a book, you find it very difficult to understand. You struggle with it. It's like your mind just gets contorted. "I can't get this!" You know? Like that? That's the result of wrong views. When it takes a long, long time to generate Dharma understanding. It's like you go to teachings year after year after year, and something is not sinking in. You know the words but your heart feels like this desert. The teacher talks about love and compassion and you just sit there and your mind is blank.

Or they talk about love and compassion and you just get so angry. Incredible anger! I remember there were times at the teachings of these high lamas when my mind got so angry, and I was wondering at that time, "How can my mind be so angry hearing teaching from a high lama?" But after you talked to other people, you realize that people's minds can be in all sorts of weird states in the middle of teachings and initiations. [laughter]

And I think actually, when that happens, in a Dharma setting like that, it's good to think this is purification. Not just the ripening of karma, but purification of the karma. Purification of karma means the karmic seed would have ripened into something this big, but you're only experiencing a relatively small result instead, because you're purifying it. Often, when you're in a Dharma situation like that, and something unpleasant happens, it could be a very strong karmic seed ripening in a relatively minor way. This explains why you might sit in a teaching and be very, very angry.

One other thing that I've seen is, whenever we have an introductory course in Kopan, inevitably, almost everybody gets sick. Or when His Holiness teaches in the spring time, almost everybody gets sick. It's usually just colds. I don't want to scare you away. Maybe I shouldn't tell you this. But so many people get colds. I think this is negative karma ripening, because we're in a Dharma environment that provokes it to ripen quickly.

So a result of wrong views is the mind is dull. It's ignorant. You feel very stupid. You feel very heavy. You feel completely confused. So whenever that happens to our mind, and it does happen to all of us, then it's good to do some purification. Like when you're studying something, or you're reading something or you're meditating, and your mind is just stuck and confused, then get up and do some prostrations, and do it for a few days. Just really emphasize purification. It is very, very helpful.

I think I've told you the story of when I did the Vajrasattva retreat the first summer after I had met the Dharma. I sat in the retreat for three months. My mind went completely berserk, but I was trying to say some of the Vajrasattva mantras. And when I went back to Kopan the following year and listened to the teachings, all of a sudden it was like, "Oh, was this what Lama Zopa was talking about last year?" It's like I was understanding things in a completely different way the second year compared to the first, and I think that's because of having done the purification practice.

Other questions and answers

[Audience:] It seems to me that purification is an unpleasant and painful process?

You shouldn't think the purification caused you to suffer, because the purification didn't. Our own negative karma did. The negative imprints are like the ink in an ink bottle. The purification is washing the ink out. It's not putting the ink in the bottle. It comes up and then it flows out the top of the bottle, and it's gone. If you understand this, then when the anger and weird states of mind come up in a Dharma situation like what we've mentioned, you don't take them so seriously. You don't jump in and really believe all those thoughts. It's just your negative karma getting purified.

One nun I know, she was doing retreat. She got this incredible boil apparently on her cheek. A very painful boil on her cheek. It was during her break time and she was walking around, and she saw Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Rinpoche said, "How are you?" and she said, "Oh, Rinpoche, I have this huge boil.." And Rinpoche said, "Fantastic!" [laughter] "This is so good. You're purifying so much negative karma. You would have been born in the lower realms for eons, and now it's like all finishing by this boil."

[Audience:] When we're in the middle of the day and our patience is being tried and we need to do some purification real quick, what do we do?

The breathing meditation, but what you do is, you imagine that whole tumultuous feeling inside, and when you exhale, you exhale that in the form of smoke and that comes out of you and the moment it goes out, it just dissipates. It just completely evaporates and it doesn't exist anymore. And then when you inhale, you imagine inhaling light, which has this nature of being peaceful and compassionate. So you're focused on your breath, and you're doing that purification exhaling the smoke and inhaling the light. That's really good to do. Can't say, "Hey! Can you be quiet? I need to prostrate." [laughter]

[Audience:] How do we deal with the feeling of being threatened by this link between karma and result – that if I don't do this right, I get reborn in a lower realm?

It's not a threat. [laughter] When we're thinking that, we're going back to Sunday school. This kind of cultural feeling we have of a threat -- "You'd better do it or else," or "Be careful because you're going to get punished." It's more just a thing of result. When you get a peach, the peach isn't the punishment of

the peach seed. It's just the result. And the chili pepper isn't the punishment of the chili seed. It's just the result. So nobody is threatening us. And there's no 'or else', but it's like "If you like peaches, plant peach trees." And if you've planted chilies instead and you don't like chilies, then take the chili seeds out of the ground. So it's a feet-on-the-ground, 'let's just look at this reasonably' approach. We don't need threat and fear and guilt. That stuff we can leave somewhere else. This really involves a new way of thinking. This is a challenge to us to see things in a new way without all these judgment. It's coming back to the same judgment thing, isn't it?

No form of suffering is a punishment. There's no concept of punishment in Buddhism.

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>