

**The Ten Destructive Actions – Part 6 of 6** (lightly edited transcript)  
*by Ven. Thubten Chodron© at Dharma Friendship Foundation, Seattle. 1992*

**Contents (click on heading to view text)**

- The result similar to the cause in terms of our instinctive behavior
    - *Counteracting our habitual behavior*
  - The environmental results of destructive actions
  - How to meditate on these
    - *Thinking about the results our actions might bring*
    - *Thinking about the causes of our experiences*
    - *Generating compassion for others*
    - *Thinking about constructive actions*
  - Questions and answers
- 

We've been talking about karma and the kinds of results that karma brings. Specifically, we were talking about destructive actions and the way they ripen, the kind of experiences they bring. They bring three kinds of results. One of the results is divided into two, so in total there are four results. They are:

- 1) Maturation or ripening result. This is in terms of the rebirth that one takes as a result of the destructive actions, which is rebirth in the lower realms.
- 2) The results similar to the cause:
  - a) in terms of experience
  - b) in terms of instinctive behavior
- 3) Environmental result

Any intentional action that we do that has all four branches complete is going to bring all three kinds of results. The four branches are:

- 1) The object, what you do the action with
- 2) The complete intention, which has three parts
- 3) The action
- 4) The completion of the action

This is very helpful to think about. When we do things, recognize that there is a definite link between what we're doing now and what we're going to experience in the future. Similarly, there is a link between what we are experiencing now and what we did in the past. What we're coming to is that things don't happen causelessly. Contrary to popular belief, things don't happen out of the clear blue sky. In other words, things happen because there are causes.

We talked previously about the maturation result, the kind of rebirth one takes. We also talked about the result similar to the cause in terms of what you experience. This basically means that you yourself will experience whatever you made other people go through in the past. This is very helpful to remember when we get criticized or blamed, when our possessions are ripped off, or our car is bashed into, for example. Similarly, when we're praised or promoted or something good happens, recognize that there's a link between what we experience and the actions we did before.

Tonight we're going to cover the other two: the result similar to the cause in terms of our instinctual behavior and the environmental results of actions.

**The result similar to the cause in terms of our instinctive behavior**

Here, we're still talking about the results of destructive actions that are similar to the cause in terms of our instinctive behavior. We'll get to the constructive actions later.

**Killing**

If we kill, it sets up a pattern to repeatedly kill. If you observe the personalities of very young children, you will see that certain qualities stand out, whether their parents encourage those qualities or not. Sometimes, the qualities are there even though the parents discourage them. This instinctual behavior,

this patterned behavior happens because of this kind of result (the result similar to the cause in terms of instinctive behavior).

However, it doesn't mean that our personality patterns are cast in concrete. It doesn't mean that this is a karmic result and you can never, ever get out of that pattern. It just means that there is a habitual tendency. There is an energy that makes you go in a certain direction, so it might take some equally strong energy to counteract that. You'll find, for example, some young children taking so much delight in swatting insects and throwing stones at dogs – generally cruel behavior. Their parents don't teach it to them, the kids just possess those qualities. That's a karmic result of having killed, tortured, or assaulted others in the past. There is that tendency and habit to do it. But it doesn't mean that the kid has that personality characteristic forever. It just means that there is that tendency. Some special energy has to be put in to counteract it.

### **Stealing**

The result of stealing is that one finds it very easy to steal. You find some kids who shoplift automatically. They'll just take in things that belong to other people. They shoplift, or snitch things when they go to somebody's home, or take things from their parents' wallet. If that karma continues to ripen, they'll grow up as an adult with this same behavior pattern.

### **Unwise sexual behavior**

The result of unwise sexual behavior is the tendency to do that. For example, somebody who goes and sleeps around.

### **Lying**

Habitual lying is a karmic result of lying. Some people are habitual liars. They don't even try, and automatically, the lies come out of their mouth, even from a young age. This has to do with karma.

### **[Audience:] Where does it originally come from?**

We can trace the characteristics of this life to a previous life where people did certain actions motivated by ignorance or anger or attachment. There was no beginning to these delusions. They have always been there until now. We have the clear nature of our mind [which is like the sky], but together with it, we also have a bunch of clouds [the delusions] covering it. Even though the cloud and the sky are of different natures, still, it has always been that way since beginningless time. According to Buddhism, there was no beginning. The ignorance has been there and out of the ignorance came these negative actions. To logically posit a beginning would be very difficult.

In Christianity, everybody was perfect and then somebody did something and then somehow, perhaps genetically, it was all passed down after that. How else was it going to get passed down? You run into some difficulty there. Whereas in Buddhism, it wasn't that everything was pure from the beginning and then the minds became defiled. If the minds were completely pure, there is no cause to become defiled.

As a result of our delusions and our karma, we get these habitual tendencies. Now, of course, on our mindstream, we might have many different kinds of karmic imprints from many different kinds of habitual tendencies. We can see that. There are different parts of our character that are quite opposite to each other. Different kinds of habits. Different kinds of mental factors.

### **Slander**

The karmic result of slander that is similar to the cause in terms of instinctive behavior, is again slandering. Somebody who is a trouble maker, who is always interfering in other people's relationships. We meet people like this. Maybe we are one. [laughter] It has to do with this patterned behavior.

### **Harsh speech and Idle talk**

Or people who are always losing their temper. Or always teasing, being very, very cruel. Again, you see young children having the instinctual behavior to be very cruel towards other people verbally. I'm highlighting this instinctual behavior in children to illustrate the point that it is coming not just from this life. But these results surely manifest in adults as well. For example, some people are always talking – blah blah blah. This is the karmic result of idle talk.

## **Coveting**

This one is very interesting. We can look in our own minds. We have a certain coveting mind that is always wanting--wanting more, wanting better. Looking at this. Looking at that. What can I have? What can I get? Totally dissatisfied, greedy mind. Again, it's a karmic pattern. It's a mental attitude, but we have a certain karmic energy behind it because we've fed that very same attitude in previous lives.

My friend, Alex, gives the example of people who, when they walk into a house, have to pick up everything and examine it and ask how much it costs. You know people like that? People who can't walk by a store without going in and checking out the prices. [laughter]

## **Maliciousness**

When we sit down and meditate, all kinds of incredible anger and malicious thoughts may come up. You are trying to watch the breath and instead you're planning how to get your revenge on somebody. It keeps coming up. This is again due to karma. But remember, it's not cast in concrete. These things can be counteracted.

## **Wrong views**

The result of wrong views is the tendency to have wrong views. For example, meeting wrong teachers who teach improper things and not being able to discriminate between a correct teaching and an incorrect teaching. You follow all sorts of weird philosophies that teach wrong ethics, for example.

## **Counteracting our habitual behavior**

It is very helpful to think about these. By looking at our own personality and what's happening now, we can get an idea of the actions we must have done in previous lives. We also see that we have a precious human life with all the opportunities and leisure. Having such a rare opportunity to have access to teachings and the leisure to do that, it is essential that we use it to counteract those habitual tendencies, to do something about that karma. To purify. We get some feeling like, "I have the Buddha nature. These are karmic imprints that are obscuring my mind. I am overwhelmed sometimes by negative mental states, but I have a perfect situation now to do something about that." That gives us some energy to practice. It gives us some energy to go through whatever hardships may come up in the practice.

We're trying to work with the mind and counteract eons and eons of habitual behavior. To do it requires some energy on our part. There will be some obstacles. But if we are aware of these and yet have a sense of the preciousness of this life, then these obstacles won't seem so formidable. We'll have a courageous mind to go ahead and do it instead of a whimpering mind that feels like giving up and going back to sleep every time one small little thing goes wrong in our practice.

## **The environmental results of destructive actions**

This has to do with the environment that we're born in, the possessions that we have, the resources that are at our disposal. Although here we're mostly talking about the environmental result in the human realm, this karma can also ripen as the environment in other realms of rebirth. For example, somebody is born in a life form of extreme pain. Having that life form, having that body and mind is the maturation result, the rebirth they take. The environmental result is the horrible environment that's either freezing cold or burning hot with very disagreeable creatures all around.

Similarly for an animal. The body and mind of an animal is the maturation result, but whether the animal is born in a nice pleasant country or in a very unpleasant country has to do with the environmental result.

Here, we're going to talk about the environment for human beings.

## **Killing**

As a result of killing, one is born in an unpeaceful place. I don't know about you, but as a kid, I always wondered why was I born? Why was I born as I was, the daughter of these parents in this particular community? Learning about karma explains that. Having the body and mind that I have is a maturation result. Being born in southern California, going to a particular high school and things like that are environmental results. I used to read the newspapers and wander, "Why wasn't I born in these countries where there are so much war and terrorism?"

At the moment, your good karma is ripening, being in a peaceful place. But of course, that doesn't mean you will be in the same environment your whole life. You might be in a peaceful environment for part of your life and a war-torn country in another part of your life. You have different karmas ripening at different points. Sometimes you meet refugees here and when you hear their stories in their countries, what they have experienced is unbelievable. That was a negative karma ripening in the form of the environment result as well as a result similar to the cause in terms of experience. Now, living here, they are experiencing the ripening of very different karma.

The result of killing is being born in a war-torn place. Being born in a low social class, you experience much hostility, living in a place where the medical facilities are very poor, where it's difficult to get medical care. Or a place where the food and the medicine do not have much potency. Even if you can get some medicine, it doesn't do much. The food isn't very nourishing. This is something to think about. When you live in different environments, think of the kind of karma that is ripening at each place.

### **Stealing**

The result of stealing is that we wind up living in a place where the crops fail a lot, and where the weather is not very consistent. You get a lot of drought, water shortage, crop failure, hailstorms, tornados. As a result of stealing from others in the past, depriving other people of their resources, then one is born in an environment where it is difficult to find resources. Or for example (you're going to laugh at this, but you'll get the idea), if somebody gives you a cow, it gives you less milk when you own it than when somebody else owns it. [laughter] The resources fading away. Maybe somebody gives you a car, it gets worse gas mileage when you own it than when somebody else does. [laughter] This is the environmental result of stealing.

### **Unwise sexual behavior**

As a result of unwise sexual behavior, we're born into very inconvenient, smelly, and dirty places, very unpleasant places. People find themselves living in those places even though nice housing is available. They just cannot get it together to get out of their lousy situation.

Actually, it is the same for the other destructive actions. For example with killing, one may have the possibility to go to a place that is peaceful, but somehow, one just doesn't get it together to leave and do it. Why is it that people just get stuck in situations even though there are options made available to them? It is due to the force of this very strong karma that they cannot take advantage of what the environment offers them.

### **[Audience:] What about if one volunteers to work in a refugee camp and has to live in a poor environment?**

If you volunteer to work in a refugee camp, then it is a very different situation. You are being motivated by compassion, hopefully, to go and benefit others. In such a case, living in that kind of environment, if it winds up being inconvenient to you, you are probably purifying some of your negative karma that way. Let's say you go to a place out of compassion, but you wind up living in a place where it is very difficult to get proper medicine. You wind up getting sick. You lose a lot of weight. The food doesn't sustain you. The medicine doesn't keep you well. Your negative karma is certainly influencing that, but I think because of the quality of your motivation, you're purifying [your negative karma] because you're doing that for a very good reason. You're going there to help others.

### **Lying**

The result of lying in terms of the environment, is that we're born into a place where people are generally dishonest. You're born into a country where there is a lot of corruption, where everybody bribes everybody else. Everybody lies to everybody else. That's just the way the environment is, that to get anywhere, you have to lie or give bribes.

What's tricky about all these karmas is that when a negative karma puts us in a bad situation, our mind reacts negatively to the bad situation, and we create more negative karma. It's a spiraling thing. That is why Dharma practice is important. That is why the thought training teachings of transforming bad circumstances into the path are important. Otherwise, when a negative karma ripens, instead of counteracting it with a positive attitude, our garbage mind arises and we do more and more destructive actions and get more and more garbage results.

That's why transforming negative situations into the paths is important. Understanding how karma works helps us to do that. When we're in an environment that's unpleasant, or when we have a bad experience, we can recognize it as, "Oh, this is a result of my own karma." Then instead of getting angry and taking it out on others, we accept it. We try to have an accepting, patient and tolerant attitude to go through it. We learn from the situation so that we come out better people instead of just acting out our same old behavior patterns again and again.

### **Slander**

Environmental result of slander or divisive speech is we are born in a place that is very rocky and uncomfortable, with extremes of high and low places and lots of cliffs. A very uneven land. The place is very dangerous. Cliffs and crevices and lots of things like these. It is interesting, isn't it? In literature or poetry, we use physical examples to talk about mental states. It is similar here.

### **Harsh words**

The environmental result of harsh words is we're born in a place where there are thorns. There is broken glass. There are sharp rocks. The climate is very harsh. It is very arid. There is little water. There are many scorpions and snakes. There are large salt wastes. It's incredible, isn't it? The physical environment is just a reflection of our actions.

### **Idle talk**

Result of idle talk is that we are born in a place where fruit trees don't bear fruit at the proper season. Where the trees have unstable roots and they won't grow. And listen to this one: where the parks, forests and lakes are overcrowded and they are spoiled. Isn't this an interesting one? Living in a polluted environment being a result of idle talk. When we talk garbage, we wind up living in garbage.

### **Coveting**

Karmic result of coveting is that all of our belongings deteriorate quickly. Everything breaks. [laughter] It's incredible. In some places, everything you buy breaks! I have so many examples to give I don't know where to start. When you live in the Third World countries you really see it. Everything you get just doesn't last very long. Everything breaks. The first time we use something is the last time. Or we're born in a place of extreme poverty and constant misfortune. One gets a poor environment as a result of one's coveting mind that's so greedy – wanting more, wanting more.

### **Maliciousness**

Environmental result of maliciousness is that we're caught in war-torn areas. For example, you go to a place on vacation and civil war breaks out there. It happens, doesn't it? People were in the Soviet Union and all of a sudden, everything was upside down. Nobody knew what was going to happen. Or people in China during the Tian An Men Square incident. You go on holiday or on business and all of a sudden, you're in this incredible, dangerous environment. Or you go to a place and there are epidemics. Diseases break out. You can see how this relates to the mental state of causing harm and we wind up in an environment which is quite hostile to us. There are many wild animals, poisonous insects and snakes. The food is very bad tasting.

### **Wrong views**

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

## **How to meditate on these**

### **Thinking about the results our actions might bring**

[Front part of this teaching was not recorded.] I get the result similar to the cause in terms of my experience, result similar to the cause in terms of my instinctual behavior, I get the maturation result of being born in a particular environment. If you think about it and make examples of these things, then it makes it very easy to generate a determination to be very mindful and careful in the future not to continually engage in those harmful behaviors.

It is not a threat. Nobody is threatening us with a rebirth in this kind of environment. You can see how it works psychologically. When the mind goes in a certain direction, it creates a certain propensity for us to

be born in a certain place, to act in a certain way again towards others, or to have other people act towards us in a certain way. If you go home and meditate in this way about the actions and the different kinds of results, it will be very effective.

### **Thinking about the causes of our experiences**

Another way to meditate on it, is to think about our experiences. Before, you started with the actions and thought of the results. Now, you start with the results, the different experiences you had in your life, and think what kinds of actions could have caused them.

I remember when I was in Turkey, I had a bladder infection and had to go to the hospital there. The hospital was completely filthy, and I was wondering how in the world I could get medicine from a hospital that's dirtier inside than outside. This is likely to be the environmental result of killing and harming others – filthy place, difficult to get good medicine.

In this way, think about the different experiences in your life and think what kind of actions are the causes of these experiences. It is very helpful. It helps us make sense of our life. Instead of feeling like innocent victims of a big, bad world, we understand that our own confused energy got us in this situation. This energy can be purified and changed, but it hasn't been because we have been too busy eating ice-cream. This is very good to realize. Instead of feeling like a victim, we recognize, "Okay, my energy got me here. But I can do something to purify the other imprints on my mindstream and I can be very aware, from now on, of how I think and act and feel and speak."

Thinking like this helps us get ourselves together. It helps us feel some sense of power over our own future, instead of feeling victimized by haphazard things in a big bad world that we can't control.

I really encourage you to spend some time reviewing all the stuff that we have learned about karma and look at your own life in this context. Try and understand your own experiences. It will help you understand a lot about yourself and also help you make some determinations about the future.

We have learned the Prostrations to the Thirty-Five Buddhas, so people can start doing that. Or you can do the Shakyamuni Buddha practice like we do at the beginning of the session, imagining the Buddha and the light coming from Buddha purifying and inspiring us.

### **Generating compassion for others**

We can think of other people also. In your meditation, you might start out thinking about yourself and understanding your own experience, getting a sense of wanting to change and purify. You can then think about what other people do and the results or experiences that they are going to get. Or think about the results that they are experiencing and the kinds of causes they created. If you think about others in this way, compassion arises very easily. We see that people are basically victims of their own confusion. We keep coming back again and again, to ignorance, anger and attachment being the three root causes of the whole mess. Instead of getting angry at people for not getting their lives together, we understand it is a very strong instinctual behavior due to karma.

Or we can think of somebody who is born in an environment that is difficult to get out of. They may be born in a dysfunctional family or in a refugee camp as a result of their actions. This doesn't mean you're blaming them. We understand that just like us, these people want to be happy but because of having acted destructively in the past, wind up experiencing unfortunate results. Compassion for them will arise in our mind.

Some people are caught in very destructive behavior patterns. Even if you try to help them, they don't want it. You can see this is really the working of karma. It doesn't mean we give up hope. Of course it takes the right person and the right moment to change, but at least we begin to understand that there is this force of karmic habit that is influencing ourselves and the people around us.

### **Thinking about constructive actions**

Although we've been spending a lot of time talking about the destructive actions and how they influence us, don't spend your whole meditation thinking only about them. Even though we'll talk about the constructive actions later, you can start thinking about them. Since the constructive actions are the opposites of the ten destructive ones, the results are also the opposites.

Think of all the good things that you've had in your life. We have been able to get an education. We have been born in countries where there is free public education. We took it for granted. We probably hated school. But it was an incredible opportunity that we had to be born in a place where this was available to us. I have met people our age who cannot read and write. What do you do with your life if you cannot read and write? If you're born in an environment where free public education is not available, it is difficult. But we are not in that situation. We have had that incredible fortune.

Similarly, we can think about all the other fortunate things that we've experienced in our life and reflect on the kinds of actions we must have done in the past to experience them, either as an environmental result, or a maturation result, or a result in terms of our experiences or in terms of our instinctual behavior. We do have many positive behavior patterns. Look at them, take notice, rejoice in them. Seeing that there is karma involved there, make a determination to keep that karma up. [laughter]

There is a lot of material here for reflection. I think it is very useful for understanding life, for developing more awareness and compassion.

## Questions and answers

Let me now open it up for questions and some discussion.

**[Audience: Inaudible]**

Being born as a human being with the body and mind that we have is the maturation result. The fact that we live in the country and place we do, with the resources at our disposal – that's the environmental result. The fact that other people treat us the way they do, or we encounter specific experiences in our life – that's the result similar to the cause in terms of our experience. The characteristics we have, certain tendencies – these are the results similar to the cause in terms of our instinctual behavior.

By the way, it is quite interesting to note that the result similar to the cause in terms of instinctual behavior is, in one way, the most serious of all the results. You might wonder why, because the maturation result is more painful. If you're born with a horrible, painful body and mind, that's more painful than anything else. Actually in the long run, that one is not so bad. On the other hand, the karma of the instinctual behavior makes you create more and more causes for all four results. It is the one that is really poisonous.

**[Audience: Inaudible]**

Let's say you killed a human being with all four parts complete. You will get all of the results. They will not all ripen in the same lifetime and at the same time. But they will ripen, unless they are purified. Let's say you killed in a past life and in the next life, you're born in a very painful body and mind, a very painful life form. After that lifetime, you are born as a human being because a good karma ripened. In this human life, you do a lot of purification practice. Due to this purification, you do not experience the results that you would have experienced from the killing done before. Or you may experience them, but they don't last very long and they're not very intense.

**[Audience: Inaudible]**

Once the result has been experienced, the causal energy will be exhausted. For example, if you kill and as a result, you're born in a lower life form, that result has been experienced. That killing karma has been exhausted. But you might still have the other types of results to experience.

Purification must be done before you get the result. It's like you have to take the cake out of the oven before it burns. If you let the cake burn before you take it out of the oven, you will still have a burned cake. After you have experienced the painful result, the causal energy for that particular karma has been exhausted.

Karma is a very tricky, subtle thing, because like I keep saying, it's not like a one-to-one correspondence. It's not like you kill one time and you get born in that kind of body one time. Sometimes it requires many karmic causes to get one rebirth. Sometimes one karmic cause can produce many

rebirths. It depends on the severity of the action, the frequency, and things like that. It's not just a one-to-one neat correspondence. Things can get quite complicated. That's why they say that at the end of the day, only the Buddha knows all the subtleties about any particular individual's karma.

### **[Audience: Inaudible]**

Buddha wasn't always a Buddha. All the beings who were Buddhas were originally like us, but they purified and they developed their good qualities. They cleansed their mind so that things could naturally appear. The mind is just like a mirror. It has the possibility of reflecting or perceiving all existent phenomena. When the mirror is dirty, it can't reflect anything. When the mind is confused by afflictions [['Afflictions' is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'disturbing attitudes'.](#)] and contaminated karma, it can't reflect. But as one goes along the steps of the path and purifies the mind, it's like cleaning the mirror, so more and more things become perceivable.

### **Buddha and God**

[In response to audience:] A Buddha is omniscient in the sense that a Buddha can perceive everything that exists. But a Buddha is not omnipotent in the sense of being able to do anything they want to do, independent of causes, independent of other factors. There is a lot of difference between God and Buddha. Huge differences.

### **[Audience:] When we think about karma, isn't there the danger of getting very ego-centric, "All this stuff is happening because of me and my karma," like I'm so important?**

There is that danger but that comes from not understanding things well. For example, we share the environment we live in, don't we? This city is not created by just one of us. Even talking this life. This city is not created by one person alone. Many, many people did. Similarly, all of our karma from previous lives is involved in creating the environment that we experience together. It's not necessary to become ego-centric or paranoid, like we are the cause of everything. It's not like that because everything is very interdependent.

### **[Audience:] Does karma or cause and effect occur independent of a Buddha's will?**

For us, they say that the power of our karma and the ability of the Buddha to help us are equal. If we have very strong karma in one direction, the Buddha cannot overwrite that. We have to purify it.

The Buddhas, from their side, have this incredible compassion, wisdom and skill, and they have all sorts of abilities. They can intervene but only if we have created the karmic cause for some kind of intervention. Buddhas cannot function independently of our karma. If they could, they would have purified all of our minds and transformed this whole environment into a pure land.

That is why I said Buddha is not omnipotent. The Buddhas cannot go beyond the force of our karma, but they can work within the force of our karma. For example, some of us are going down to Los Angeles to hear His Holiness teach. Not everybody who attends the teaching may believe that His Holiness is a Buddha, but for the sake of this example, please just assume that they all believe it. His Holiness cannot come in and rearrange all of our karma. But by going to Los Angeles and manifesting giving teachings, it is like the Buddha is appearing in a way corresponding to our karma. We have created the karma to receive the benefit of listening to teachings from somebody like His Holiness. A Buddha appears in this way so that we can get benefit from their wisdom and guidance. Or they will appear in other ways that we can benefit from. Maybe they will appear as your boss. [laughter]

### **[Audience:] Do animals have karma?**

Yes, animals do have karma.

### **[Audience: Inaudible]**

All right, comparing human and animal behavior. We say that a human rebirth is precious because of our human intelligence and the opportunity that it affords. But there is a trick to it. Human intelligence gives us the incredible opportunity to practice the Dharma, to purify, to discriminate positive and negative

actions, to think about compassion and consciously develop it, and to think about the nature of reality and develop the wisdom for understanding it. Human intelligence has this incredible facet to it. But if we don't use the human intelligence that way, then like you said, in many ways, human beings wind up acting worse than animals. Human beings kill out of malice. Human beings kill when it's completely unnecessary. Whereas animals in general do not.

**[Audience: Inaudible]**

Karma means intentional action. Animals do act intentionally. They do create karma. They are experiencing results in terms of their experience, their behavior, their environment, their body and mind. A human being can get reborn as an animal. If you have a human being who acts worse than an animal, the body very soon begins to correspond with the mind, and the person takes rebirth as an animal. They also have, implanted on their mindstream, imprints of all sorts of other actions they did when they were human beings. These can ripen while they are in an animal body. After that karma to be reborn as a beaver or a gopher or whatever it is, is exhausted, then other karma ripens and that mindstream can be reborn in a different body and a different environment.

**[Audience:] How can an animal, for example a shark, get out of that [realm]?**

It is quite difficult. Which is why at the beginning of *lamrim*, there is so much emphasis on the preciousness of a precious human life. For once, we have so many opportunities in front of us. They say that just having a precious human life is like being half-way to Enlightenment, because it is so difficult to get.

Let's say somebody has been reborn as a shark. How are they going to get out of it? They're going to have to depend on some kind of good karma that they've created in a previous life, maybe when they were a human. That good karma hasn't ripened yet because all the shark karma ripened in the mean time. But maybe when that shark dies, there's somebody near by who says some mantra and sets the cooperative condition for their good karma to ripen.

That's why when animals are dying or anybody is dying, it is very good to say mantra around them. It's like setting the stage or the environment for their own good karma to ripen.

Some animals can create good karma but it's more through the power of the object. You probably noticed the Tibetans taking their dogs around when they do the circumambulations of the stupas and the holy objects.

**[Audience: Inaudible]**

We're influencing their karma in the sense that we create the environment for their karma to ripen. Our environment influences us a lot. If you go to a smoky place, it influences you. If you go out in the clear air, it makes different things arise in your mind. If we can act in a positive way to influence somebody's environment constructively, then it can make more positive mental attitudes arise in their mind. It can make it easier for their own good karma to ripen. It's like you may plant a seed in the ground but it needs water and fertilizer to grow. Saying the mantra is like giving the water and the fertilizer. But that person has planted the seed. They've created the action.

**[Audience:] Is it ego-centric to want to control things? Are we thinking that we are independent people when we want to control?**

The word 'control' is really touchy because we can control things to a certain extent, but we can't control everything. In other words, I can control whether I come into this room or don't come into the room. If I'm standing on the porch, I can control whether I open the door and come in. But I can't control what is going on in this room at the moment I enter. Things are already going on. We have influence only over certain things. We don't have influence over absolutely everything. The trick is, with things that we don't have influence over, relax and stop trying to control, because it only makes us become uptight. But the things that we can control, then take the initiative and put our energy in a good direction, instead of just lying back saying, "Oh, I can't control everything ..." In other words, dependency does not mean that you can't do anything. The fact that things are dependently arising does not mean that you have no influence. It means you have influence, but it depends a lot on other things too.

## Collective karma

[In response to audience:] They're definitely collective karma. A whole group of people who have acted similarly in the past, experiencing a similar kind of result in the present. For example, you're born in a country where everything is corrupt. Every person who lives in that environment, their karma is participating in being in that environment. But still, within that, everybody has their own individual experience. Some people are completely overwhelmed by the corruption, while others find a way to deal with it. Some people act unethically within the corruption; other people don't. In that situation, you have a group karma, but you also have individual karma.

It's the same thing right now. We have a group karma where we are all sitting here together. And yet being here, maybe one person has a stomach ache while somebody else is completely blissful. One person says, "Wow, this teaching is incredible!" Another person says, "This doesn't make any sense to me at all!" And yet we're sharing the same environment. There's a common karmic result in the environment, yet there are individual karmic results experienced by each of us having our own individual experience.

## Purification

[In response to audience:] Purification is an active process. Purification is different than just experiencing the results of your karma. Also when you purify, you are getting it to ripen quickly. Let's say you have two people. One person does Nyung Nay and gets very sick. [laughter] The other doesn't practice Dharma and they get sick. The person who doesn't practice Dharma is just experiencing the result of their negative karma when they get sick. The karma ripens. It is finished. What about the person who gets sick when they're doing Nyung Nay? Because they are deliberately trying to purify, it's probably incredible amounts of karma that would have produced lower rebirths for eons, ripening in this sickness for a short time. Why? Because you're engaging in the force of the purification process.

### [Audience:] How important is it to eliminate the self-centered motivation behind this?

As much as we can, it's important to do that. The reason karma is taught towards the beginning of *lamrim* and it's taught in a very personal way, is that we tend to be very self-centered beings, and the one thing that's going to get us moving is thinking about ourselves. It's taught at the beginning because at the beginning of the path, our minds are gross and the only thing that's going to get us moving is thinking about *me*. But the more we can expand our mind and think about others, about liberation and enlightenment and things like that, and develop that kind of motivation for purifying, the more powerful the purification is going to be. One of the advantages of developing bodhicitta or the altruistic intention is that you're able to purify karma very quickly. Why? Because of the power of the motivation. You are doing it for the sake of other beings instead of just doing it for your own benefit. The more you can broaden your motivation, the more beneficial it will be.

### [Audience:] How do we enlarge our motivation?

You can do it two ways. You can start out with, "Let's take care of myself and prepare for my next rebirth." In addition, we can think, "If I get a good rebirth next time, I can continue to practice the Dharma. I can continue to benefit others." You start out first with yourself and then expand it.

Or you can think, "I really want to be able to benefit others. In order to benefit others, I have to have a good rebirth to be able to practice the Dharma." You first think of the benefit of others and then see how that includes your own good rebirth. It's actually better to do it this latter way, but we start with where we are. We do it the way we can, and then expand it later.

### [Audience:] Are there exact ways to purify specific kinds of actions?

I think we can work both in general ways and in specific ways. For example, with the thirty-five Buddhas, each of them, by the power of their promise and their vow, helps you purify a specific kind of karma more intensely when you think of them and reveal the negativities in front of them.

Also, I think certain kinds of actions can give us a greater sense of purification. With the four opponent powers, depending on what remedial action we choose to do for the last power of remedial behavior, it can give us a little more impetus to develop the regret and determination not to do the action again. For example you feel you've stolen a lot, especially from the poor. Then when you do the purification practice, for that fourth power of remedial behavior, you may want to deliberately choose to do some community service with the poor. Now, probably doing prostrations could purify it equally as well, but by choosing to do the community service, it increases the sense of regret and the determination not to do it again. It makes it very powerful for you.

They say that to purify breaking of bodhisattva vows, the practice of prostrations to the thirty-five Buddhas is very good. To purify breaking of tantric vows, the Vajrasattva purification is especially good. To purify breaking of commitments made to spiritual teachers, there is a practice called samaya vajra.

Let's sit quietly for a few minutes.

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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>