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Setting a Good Motivation – How it Helps

I'll get back into the subject of karma but first I would like to say something else, which actually does relate very much to the subject of karma. You all know how we start all of our sessions generating a good motivation. It might seem difficult to understand why we always put all of this effort into creating a good motivation and talking a lot about motivation. Sometimes you may even feel that it is too over the top, "I'm going to become a Buddha for all sentient beings, isn't that really far-fetched? How can I think of that? I don't really want to do that. I mean, I don't even know what enlightenment is, and all these sentient beings, it's just too much. I'm saying it, but I'm not really feeling it in my heart. Sometimes I can get myself to think it's a nice idea, but I don't really in my heart have the motivation to liberate all sentient beings." So there might come this feeling of uneasiness when we're generating this good motivation, that we're trying to cultivate something we don't really feel, and we might say, "Why even do this? Let's just scratch it. Forget about saying all these words that I don't really feel."

I've definitely had this thought [laughter]. I want to tell you about my experience. I just attended another retreat. It was a beautiful retreat. The teacher was very good. The practice was also very excellent. However, what I felt was missing, is that there was no talk of bodhicitta in it. I became more and more anxious because there was no talk of motivation. We were doing this incredible meditation practice, one of these great practices that the Buddha taught and it is really very powerful and very precious, but there was no talk about why we're doing it.

It was just kind of assumed that this practice was going to help us in some way. There was no real talk of why we're doing it. I realized that in my heart, what I was really missing was just even the words of talking about loving kindness and altruism and bodhicitta for other sentient beings. All these years, it seems like I was reciting these words but I didn't really feel them. But yet, when I stopped saying those words, I felt uncomfortable. I realized then that actually something had sunk in from saying those words. Even though I hadn't felt them, somehow, just by reminding myself again and again and again that this is not just for my own little happiness, but for a bigger purpose, that is, for the welfare of others, it has had an impact. Even though we don't really feel it inside, and it might just be an aspiration or something we admire, somehow the force of generating that again and again and again, with effort, even if it's artificial, somehow it has a very strong impact on the mind, which I wasn't even aware of until there was no talk of it.

So I went to complain to the guy who was leading the retreat. [laughter] I was a big headache to him. I kept complaining. "Where is the bodhicitta?" [laughter] I began to see why the first thing all of my teachers would say at the beginning of a teaching, is to remember the motivation, that we are doing it for the enlightenment of all beings. When we hear this motivation, we tend to think, "Oh yes, it's the same old words. All the lamas say the exact same words before all the teachings, so let's finish that up and get to the interesting stuff in the teachings."

Really, just this lack of it in this retreat really woke me up to how very precious just even the words were. To whatever degree that saying those words generated that feeling in our heart, it made it really, really precious.

I began to really understand why having a good motivation is continually emphasized in the Buddha's

teachings. It's very interesting. We do get what we want. If you want enlightenment, you'll eventually get enlightenment. But if you don't want enlightenment and you don't think about it, and you do whatever Dharma practice you're doing with no particular motivation, or with the motivation that "Well, may I feel good," then you'll feel good, and that's it. You get what you asked for.

I began to think that even if one does incredible meditation practice, and develops very high concentration, if there's no cultivation of a proper motivation beforehand, then it becomes like any other worldly action you're doing in your life. Because what you're left with is your basic ordinary motivation, which is "I'm doing this because it makes me feel better right now." There's nothing wrong with this, but it just has the effect of only making us feel better right now. I began to really see that doing a Dharma action isn't a question of knowing the meditation technique only. It's a question of your motivation while you're doing it.

So that's why there is so much emphasis on motivation. That is why we start out with the prayers and why when we wake up in the morning, we take time to think, "Today, I'm going to do whatever I do for the benefit of others." Again and again planting that motivation on our mindstream because even if it is artificial, it will lead to that goal. Whereas if you do a whole practice and you don't have a spiritual motivation, it doesn't become spiritual. It becomes worldly, doesn't it? Instead of lying down for a nap, you meditate to feel better. Instead of taking a Librium or a Valium or whatever it is, you meditate to feel better. It's true. It's less expensive. [laughter] But that's all it gives you, if that's all you're doing it for.

That's why motivation is so important. This relates very much to karma, because the karma of what we do is dependent on our motivation, or why we do it. The whole thing is rooted in why we do something, not so much just what we do. Again and again we come back to this. The mind is the creator. Our intention is the creator.

Thinking about the Positive Actions

We are on this section about karma. Starting tonight we'll be talking about positive actions. Here again, we'll be talking about intention and motivation, because that's what karma is. It's the mental factor of intention.

The positive actions are generally, restraining ourselves from doing the ten destructive actions by recognizing the harmful results that come from doing them. Simply just not doing a destructive action is not necessarily a positive action. In other words, you need the intention, the awareness not to do it in order to make it a positive action. It's real important. For example, our cat Mahakala comes in the room. He could be sitting right here, and maybe he's not stealing anything right now, but we can't say he's creating any positive karma because he doesn't have the intention not to steal. If you're just sitting here not stealing, you're not creating any positive karma. Having the awareness of the disadvantages of the negative action and the intention to abandon it – that is what creates the positive action.

A positive action has the same four component parts that the negative one has. They are:

- 1) Object
- 2) Intention
- 3) Action
- 4) Completion of the action

Abandoning Killing

The positive action of abandoning killing is not just the cat sitting here sleeping on the cushion, or Joe Blow sitting there smoking his cigar, not killing. There's an object, for example, the mosquito that's on your arm. The positive intention is you recognize the disadvantages of killing. You recognize, "If I kill this, this sentient being is going to be hurt, and if I kill this sentient being, I'm leaving a negative imprint on my own mind that's going to influence me in a harmful way in the future. Therefore, it's not really proper that I kill the mosquito. It's not conducive to my own or others' welfare." That's the intention. Then the third part, action, is your effort in restraining yourself from swatting the mosquito. That initial intention becomes stronger, and so you have the decision now, "I'm not going to do it." You're making an effort. The completion of the action usually follows very quickly after that. It happens when you're really quite definite, "Okay, I'm not going to kill the mosquito." Therefore, we have this whole sequence – the object, the intention, the action, and the completion – for the positive action.

Abandoning Stealing

You might be running off some copies at work using the office copy machine. The object of stealing is all those pieces of paper that you used in the copy machine. The intention would be, "Ah, but if I do this, I'm taking something that belongs to others that hasn't been freely offered, and that is not conducive to my own welfare. If I do that, it leaves a negative imprint on my mind. It may not be a big harm to the company, but if enough people did this, it would be." There's an awareness that this is a harmful action, and that it's not proper to do this. The action itself would be your effort in not doing it, in saying, "Okay. I'm not going to do this." Then, "I could just as easily take five minutes during lunch break, go across the street and pay a nickel to use the copy machine." The completion of the action would be when you say, "Yes, that's what I'm going to do." You're quite definite about abandoning stealing. There's this whole process, this whole awareness that's coming.

As you can see, it's really quite valuable. The more you become aware of the negative actions, the more opportunity you have for deliberately creating the positive ones. That's why we went through so much effort and energy talking about the negative ones first. So that you can identify them, and that gives you the ability to do the positive ones.

Value of Taking Precepts

This is also one of the advantages of taking precepts. If you have precepts, for example, if you've taken the five lay precepts, then you have set the intention not to kill. You have that intention, and by the force of taking that precept, that intention is ever-present, even though at a very subliminal level in your consciousness. Even if you're sitting here, and you're not particularly consciously thinking, "I'm not going to kill," still, because of your previous intention and the force of that existing in your mind, you have the intention not to kill. You're not killing when you're sitting here. You have the whole virtuous action there.

This is the real value in taking the precepts, because it keeps that intention always in the mind, even though at the subliminal level. It's a continuous creation of positive actions. Whereas the person who doesn't have the precept will not have that intention, that action, or the completion of the action. They're just sitting there like the cat.

[Audience:] How is it that you create the positive karma because you don't really have the intention consciously in your mind all the time?

Well, I think there is the object in the sense that beforehand, when you took the precept, you thought, "All these other living beings, I'm not going to kill them." Then you have that intention subliminally in your mind. You're also sitting here in a room full of other sentient beings. You're doing the action of not killing them. You're still quite definite about doing the action of not killing them. You haven't altered your intention from the time you took the precept. If you're breaking your precept now, then you're altering your intention. That's cutting the flow of that intention. But if that intention is still there, that action is still there, that definite-ness about it is still there. It may not be operating in your mind at a conscious level, because otherwise you'll just be sitting there all day, all night, "I'm not going to kill. I'm not going to steal. I'm not going to..." You'll never have time to think about how to eat your Cheerios.

You need to have some other conscious thoughts, instead of just constantly repeating the precept to yourself consciously. That's the power of taking the vows, that you put that intention in the mindstream so that all your actions are conjoined with that intention even though it's not a manifest one in your mindstream at all times.

[In response to audience:] You're not actively not holding it. Actively not holding it would be, "I'm not holding this." It's not consciously manifest in your mind, but that doesn't mean that it's having no effect on your mind. It's definitely having an effect on your mind, because you made that intention.

[In response to audience:] You're not having the idea manifest in your mind when you have the precept, but it's working at a subliminal level. If you're just Joe Blow who hasn't taken precepts, and it's the middle of winter and there're no mosquitoes, and you're sitting there thinking, "I'm not going to kill mosquitoes," then I would think that... actually, this is quite an interesting thing. On some level, you don't have the object right there in front of you, but on another level, just your thinking "I'm not going to kill mosquitoes" is putting a good imprint on your mind, isn't it?

It is. What are you doing when you meditate on the four immeasurables on your meditation cushion? “May all sentient beings have happiness”, and you cultivate patience for your boss. Your boss isn’t there, but still, in your mind, you’re cultivating that patience. That’s affecting your mind, isn’t it? The next time you see your boss, you might think twice. It is putting some good imprint in the mind. There’s a real interesting story in the scriptures about some guy, who for some reason – this is a story, so don’t ask me why [laughter] – he was a butcher during the day-time and then at night-time, he took the vow not to kill. He actually had the precept not to kill at night, even though he didn’t have it during day-time when he was killing.

Somehow this ripened in some very interesting karma, where in a future life, during the day-time, he experiences incredible suffering, like bugs eating him, incredible pain and torture. However, at night, he was in this really deva-like realm with all this pleasure. It’s said that this was because he was killing in the day-time and in the night-time he had the precept not to kill.

Recognizing and Rejoicing at Our Own and Others’ Virtues

It’s also really good in the evening when we go through and think about the day’s activities, that we not only look at the things where we did act negatively, but also really congratulate ourselves for all the times we acted constructively. Rejoice at having taken the precepts and having them in our mind and accumulating all the positive potential from that.

This process of recognizing and rejoicing at our own virtues is really, really important. So often, we tend to get into this whole thing of low self-esteem and self-criticism, and it’s precisely because we don’t spend the time recognizing what we are doing well. It’s important to recognize that. That doesn’t mean we get all puffed up and proud over it, but we certainly can recognize and rejoice at our own virtue.

Also, we don’t limit our rejoicing to just “I didn’t kill the mosquito.” There’re all these other people around who are acting constructively. So it’s really essential to rejoice at that too.

If we do these, it helps counteract this very negative image we have of ourselves, because we begin to actively recognize, “Well, no, there is something good that I’m doing.”

The Results of Positive Actions

When we talk about the ten constructive actions, they have four results (actually three results, but one of the results is sub-divided into two):

- 1) Maturation result. This refers to what rebirth you have. The body and mind you take.
- 2) Result similar to the cause (sub-divided into two):
 - a. In terms of your experience. In other words, having been born in a particular realm, what particular events happen to you during your life.
 - b. In terms of your instinctive or habitual behavior. What things you repetitively do, very easily.
- 3) Environmental result. That’s the surroundings that you’re born into.

Maturation Result

What maturation result we get depends on the intensity of the action. If it’s a very intense action, then it creates rebirth in the formless realm, which is considered the highest realm in samsara, where there’s the greatest peace. With a middle intensity positive action, you get born in the form realm. With a small intensity positive action, you get born as a human being.

Remember with the negative actions, for the really heavy actions, the result is rebirth in the hell realm, the middle one in the hungry ghost realm, and the small one in the animal realm. With positive actions, the result is also according to the intensity of the action.

The intensity of an action is determined by how many of the factors that make an action heavy or light (we went through those six factors previously) are present. One factor would be whether we have a very strong motivation.

Also take note that these results are in terms of worldly happiness, with the formless realm having the greatest amount of peace in samsara, then the form realm, then the human realm. So this is again why motivation in our Dharma actions is so important. If we don't motivate properly, then the karma could ripen in a rebirth in the formless realm or the form realm or the human realm, but we may not necessarily have the opportunity to practice Dharma in that rebirth.

[Audience:] What's the formless realm?

You get born in the formless realm when you have very high states of concentration, very strong samadhi. The mind just gets completely concentrated, let's say, on space. Or concentrated on nothingness. These are very intense states of concentration. You don't have a gross body at that time. You just have the energy of the mind.

[Audience:] What's so good about that?

You don't have to deal with all the hassles that we deal with day to day. You don't need to pay the rent. You don't worry about your golf game. It's quite peaceful. When you have single-pointed concentration, it generates great peace and bliss in the mind. You don't have any of the anxiety, worries, the constant flow of thoughts that we have in our mind now. The formless realm is when you have super-high levels of single-pointed concentration. The form realm is when you have single-pointed concentration, but it's not the super high levels. In the form realm, you have a grosser body, but it's more like a body of light or something similar. It's not quite as painful and problematic as our body.

[Audience:] You won't be reborn again?

Oh no, you're reborn again. You're still in the cycle of existence. That's why it's said that these good rebirths are in terms of worldly happiness. That's why just developing intense concentration is not sufficient to free ourselves from cyclic existence. Many religious traditions and many spiritual practices have ways to develop very strong concentration, very strong samadhi, but that doesn't mean that the people who develop them are liberated from cyclic existence. You might have very strong samadhi, so that the anger, the attachment, etc don't arise consciously or manifestly in your mind, but because the seeds are still there at an unmanifest level, then as soon as you lose that concentration state, they all come back again.

So you might get born in the form realm and the formless realm, and you can have a really long rebirth there. You can stay a really long time in these really nice states. But then after the karma to get reborn there finishes, the only way you go is down, because then your less positive karma or your negative karma starts to ripen.

They say that in samsara, we've been born as everything. Can you imagine this? That we actually have had single-pointed concentration before in the past? We've been born in these formless realms. We've been born in the hell realms. We've done everything within cyclic existence many, many times.

But we never practice the path! We never develop the wisdom that cuts the ignorance. We didn't do it right. That's again why the motivation is so important, because if we don't have the motivation, we might do a positive action, we might get a good rebirth, but then, that causal energy finishes and then another karma ripens again. But if you have a positive motivation, like I want to become a Buddha for the benefit of sentient beings, then you're able to, let's say, take another precious human rebirth, and have the conditions whereby you can practice Dharma, and thereby continue to purify your mind, and to continue to create positive actions.

[Audience: Inaudible]

Right now, you might not be angry. Anger is not manifest in your mind. Likewise, when you are in single-pointed concentration, anger is not manifest in your mind. But, as soon as you start thinking of something, anger comes real quick. So when those beings lose their samadhi, when the karma to be reborn in that realm ends, and they take a lower rebirth, then anger, jealousy, and other afflictions come back again.

[Audience:] What would cause death in these realms?

When the karmic energy finishes. When we create an action to get a result, because the action is impermanent, it doesn't last forever. Therefore the result doesn't last forever either. We experience something as long as the causal energy is there. It's like a flame burning. It will burn as long as the fuel is there. But if the fuel runs out, the flame goes out. Similarly, when the karmic energy to have a certain life finishes, that life ends. Then a different karma ripens, and you get born in a different realm.

I said before that the formless realm is considered the highest in terms of the peacefulness within cyclic existence. However, for attaining enlightenment, the human realm is considered the best one.

This is interesting, that the best thing in samsara isn't necessarily the best thing in terms of Dharma practice. When you have one of these really high states of concentration, you just zap into your concentration. You don't think about anything else. So you never develop wisdom. You just stay in your bliss. There could be an incredibly strong attachment to the bliss of concentration.

That's why from a Dharma perspective, a human rebirth is much more valuable than one of these blissful rebirths in one of the realms of concentration. It's much more valuable than a rebirth as a desire realm god who has a super-duper sense pleasure. A human rebirth is considered better than those, because if you have either a lot of sense pleasure, or a lot of happiness from your concentration, you're so easily distracted from the Dharma. Whereas in a human realm, we have enough problems [laughter] to motivate us to practice.

[Audience: Inaudible]

The method aspect – to create strong Dharma aspirations, for example – is much more difficult to cultivate in other realms. Some people who are aspiring for liberation might sometimes take rebirth as a form realm god, but they've done that specifically with a Dharma motivation and they continue their practice. But ordinarily, with the regular old desire realm gods, it's usually, "Hmm. It's nice. Who needs the Dharma here!"

[Audience:] Where does pure land rebirth fit in to this?

It doesn't really fit into the six realms of existence. Don't get too categorical here. There're many types of pure lands. Sometimes some of the realms in the formless realm are called pure lands. But when we talk about pure lands like Amitabha's pure land or Sukavati, these pure lands are created by the power of a Buddha's pure intention. For instance, before Amitabha Buddha became a Buddha, when he was generating bodhicitta, he made forty-eight very, very strong, committed vows, to really help sentient beings. One of the vows was to create this pure land where all the conditions would be really conducive to Dharma practice. So that everything around one will make one think of the Dharma.

A pure land is a very, very beautiful place. You won't get all angry because things aren't efficient and they don't function properly. Everything works. The whole environment is very beautiful. All the people around you are into Dharma, so everybody you talk to is encouraging and supportive of your practice. Somehow, by the karma of Amitabha and by the karma of the people born there, everything you hear becomes a Dharma teaching. Even when the wind goes through the trees and the birds chirp, they become teachings on impermanence or selflessness to you. They describe the pure land in terms of the quality of the environment, but you can see it also has to do with the state of mind of the person born there. That's one reason why we could see we could create a pure land here and now as well, because if you generate the ability, let's say, to hear the bird's chirping and the motor-cycle going (or whatever), as a teaching on impermanence, it becomes a teaching in the pure land here.

The advantage of being born in a pure land, e.g. Amitabha's pure land, is that once you're born there, you'll never get reborn in the other six realms. Once you're there, it's kind of guaranteed that you're going to get enlightened. So it's like "Phew! At least I don't have to worry about any of these other six hassles." You just do your practice, and you will eventually get enlightened.

Now it's very interesting, we ordinary human beings are always saying, "May I be born in a pure land." But there are these bodhisattvas who are born in the pure land saying, "I want to be born as a human being." Why would that bodhisattva want to be born as a human being? It's because when you have a human

rebirth, due to the elements of the human body, due to the construct of the human body, it can be used to practice the Vajrayana or the tantric method. That is a very quick way to attain enlightenment. When you are a proper vessel, using those techniques can lead you to enlightenment very quickly. Whereas if you're in a pure land, attaining enlightenment can take some time.

So where people wish to be born depends on the aspirations people have. You could see that taking a human rebirth is tricky. If you're qualified and you practice Vajrayana, you can progress quickly. But if you break your tantric vows, or if you get distracted, you'll get into big problems. Whereas if you're born in the pure land, you might take longer, but it's more secure. So I think it's going to depend a lot on people's personality too, what they're attracted to.

[Audience: Inaudible]

You're saying when a great lama dies, we pray for him to be reborn here. But shouldn't he get to stay in the pure land and enjoy because... [Audience speaks.] What we're doing here, is we're looking at our teacher as somebody who has developed bodhicitta, who has developed the realization of emptiness, who has the ability to control what happens to their consciousness. From their side, they can go to a pure land and relax. But what we're doing is, we're really crying out, "Help! I need help and I need you to come here, because my mind is too gross. If you're born in the pure land, and my mind is stuck here, I can't communicate with you. So please, out of compassion, please take rebirth here."

We're not asking our teacher to take rebirth here out of ignorance, anger and attachment. We're saying "Out of your compassion, because we need guidance, please come back to our world." Making that request prayer from our side creates a very strong imprint on the mind to meet pure teachers and teachings, because when we make that prayer with sincerity, we're really valuing having a teacher. We're really valuing the teachings. When we value those things so strongly, we're creating the karma to meet them.

[Audience:] Do they ever refuse?

The compassionate ones don't. [laughter]

I remember in one prayer to Chenrezig, it was saying that Chenrezig is bound to sentient beings by compassion, like a mother bound to her child by compassion. Chenrezig's compassion binds him to us. You can feel this, because as you start to develop compassion, you feel much more responsibility for others. It's not like, "Ciao guys! I'm sick of you. Good-bye." [laughter]

You can see that by the prayer His Holiness makes. I can't remember the words exactly, but it's something to the effect of "As long as space exists, as long as sentient beings exist, I will come back and help and be involved."

So again, from this, you can see why bodhicitta is so important. If other beings didn't have bodhicitta or the altruistic intention, they wouldn't come back to help us. They get born in the pure land, they attain nirvana. Good for them. Who cares about us? That's why they say that the altruistic intention is the source of happiness for all beings, because that's the link that keeps the holy beings bound to us, and by their being bound to us, then they have to help us. But we do not just leave it at "They're bound to me and they have to help me." Rather, we cultivate the altruistic attitude and are bound to sentient beings in turn, because we recognize that that becomes the source of happiness of all other beings. We'll continue to help as long as they are around.

[Audience: Inaudible]

Spiritual motivation is important, because if you have a motivation to become an arhat, or to become a Buddha, then you will take a rebirth in a situation where you're able to continue to practice. It's not like Joe Blow out on the street who developed samadhi because he thinks it's great to have samadhi and it feels good, and he then gets reborn in the formless realm. He didn't have a spiritual motivation.

[Audience: Inaudible]

If you don't have a really firm determination to be free of samsara, if it's a weak determination to be free of

samsara, and you start doing lots and lots of concentration practice, they say the experience can be so blissful that it's easy to get lost. You need to have a teacher around to say, "Hey! Hold on. Remember your motivation and think of the suffering of cyclic existence." If you have a good teacher, your teacher will train you to use that concentration to develop wisdom, to develop bodhicitta and everything else. That's why having the determination to be free from samsara is so important, and that's why you need to have a teacher.

[Audience:] How do you start trying to pull out of that (attachment)?

That's a really good question. I think we all understand that. The reason that all these pleasures seem so fantastic is that they give you an immediate zap. Hot fudge sundaes – definitely big sugar rush. [laughter] Whereas if we say, "May I become enlightened," we don't get any kind of immediate zap.

What we have to do is start thinking of the limitations of hot fudge sundaes and all these kinds of things, and the advantages of enlightenment.

For example, if you show a kid who is in pre-school, a college text book and says, "Mama says read this," they're going to look at the book and go, "I don't even know which way is up! This is insurmountable. How can mama expect me to read this?"

But then, if the kid starts to learn the alphabets, then they begin to say, "Oh yes, I can read the alphabets, so I can at least tell that this is something familiar and has the same alphabet. I can't read it, but there's something going on here."

As the kid starts progressing and learns to read more, they can pick out some words and some phrases, though they can't understand the meaning. As they train more and more, they can start to get some of the concepts. So it's like this gradual process of learning to read the book.

Now, if a little toddler just learned the alphabets, and says, "Oh I feel so good learning the alphabets. Why learn to read the college textbook? Learning the alphabets is good enough for me. Mama gave me a lollipop for that, and that's all I want. That's good enough. That's all the happiness I need."

Mama will be there saying, "Well, a lollipop is nice, but think of your future. You have to have a career and earn a livelihood. How are you going to support yourself?"

Then the kid says, "No, I just want a lollipop. Don't talk to me about careers and all these things."

That's because the kid has a limited view. The kid is only seeing the advantages of getting the lollipop and learning the alphabets, but they're not at all aware of the advantages of learning to read the college textbooks.

So it's a thing of cultivating the motivation slowly, slowly, slowly, and seeing the limitations of hot fudge sundaes and banana splits.

[In response to audience:] Well, you do it at the same time. You begin to see the disadvantages of the hot fudge sundaes. That makes you more eager to practice the Dharma. As you practice the Dharma, you start to realize that it works, and that you actually are happier – forget about enlightenment, you're even happier now practicing the Dharma – then you get more enthusiasm. "Oh, it makes me happier now. Enlightenment must be even better." So then hot fudge sundaes just aren't quite as important as they used to be. For instance, when you're really hungry and you want a sugar fix, hot fudge sundaes seem really glamorous. Yet if you sit there and you imagine eating hot fudge sundae after hot fudge sundae, even the thought of it makes you feel quite ill. So you begin to realize that hot fudge sundaes have their limitations. They can't make you everlastingly happy. They just can't do it.

Offering hot fudge sundae to the Buddha

[In response to audience:] Offer it not with the feeling of, "A hot fudge sundae is bad and I'm bad if I'm attached to it. So I'm going to deny myself a hot fudge sundae in order to be holy." Don't ever have that motivation.

It's more just sitting and thinking, "Well, I eat this hot fudge sundae. It's great. But it'll be gone. What do I have fifteen minutes from now when it's gone? I'm still sitting here dissatisfied. It's not going to solve my problems." But if you can really generate this feeling of wanting happiness for other beings, so that you're going to offer this hot fudge sundae to the Buddha in order to create the positive potential for the happiness of others, to lead them to enlightenment, and you transform the hot fudge sundae into the blissful wisdom nectar which is infinitely more delicious, and offer that to the Buddha, and the Buddhas just really love it, then you can feel a real sense of happiness from offering it.

What to Dedicate Towards

[In response to audience:] Well, again, it depends a lot what you're praying for and what you're dedicating for. You'll notice that there are whole Buddhist traditions dedicated to being reborn in the pure land. So the motivation of people following those traditions is to be reborn in the pure land. When they dedicate and pray to be reborn in the pure land, that sets a really strong imprint in their mind to get that result. Whereas somebody else might say, "No, I want to have a precious human rebirth, to be able to meet a fully qualified tantric master and be a fully qualified tantric disciple and do the tantric practice." Then you pray and dedicate towards that. It doesn't mean you have to choose between these. I think it's good to cover all our bases. Pray and dedicate for everything. [Laughter] It's very much going to depend on different people's aspiration.

One day in the Ganden monastery in Tibet, the care-taker monk went into the hall and saw that a cat was sitting on Je Rinpoche's throne. The care-taker told his lama who had psychic powers about it. The lama saw that in a previous life, this cat had been an old lady who had come to the throne to make prayers like most Tibetans. She had prayed at that time, "May I sit on the Ganden throne." But she didn't say, "May I sit on the Ganden throne as a human being who practices the Dharma." So you got to really check up how you dedicate. [Laughter]

Well, in answer to your question, they do say if you have a really full, intense motivation for enlightenment, you get that (enlightenment). If it's a middle spiritual motivation, then you might get the result of a solitary realizer, and a smaller motivation would bring the result of being a hearer.

Results Similar to the Cause in terms of Our Experience

The results similar to the cause in terms of our experience for constructive actions are basically the opposite of the results similar to the cause for the destructive actions.

Abandoning killing – you have a long life.

Abandoning stealing – you have the resources that you need and you have access to those resources.

Abandoning sexual misconduct – you have a very good relationship with your spouse, good relationships with the people around you.

Abandon lying – other people believe what you say. You have a good reputation amongst other people.

It's interesting. You can see that positive results from doing positive actions can be experienced in this very life. By abandoning unwise sexual behavior, you will have a better relationship with your spouse. Definitely. If you abandon lying, other people will give more weight to your words. So it benefits this life as well. But here, we're talking about the karmic results for future lives.

Abandoning slander or divisive words – we have more friends and we are more in harmony with other people. Our relationships with other people are more stable, more satisfying. There isn't all the picking and nagging and haggling. With divisive words, we are splitting up people's relationships, so a result of abandoning that is that we have steady, firm relationships that don't get split up.

Abandoning harsh words – we live more harmoniously with others and others speak kindly to us. That again leads to better relationships with people and more friendships.

Abandoning idle talk – our words carry more weight. People will listen to us instead of just thinking, "This is a blabber-mouth."

Abandoning coveting – we can fulfill our wishes. We can start a project, finish it, and accomplish our goals.

Abandoning maliciousness – we don't experience unnecessary fear, paranoia and suspicion. This one is real interesting, isn't it? Because again, we can see that if we have malicious thoughts for others, we psychologically create the cause for ourselves to be paranoid, suspicious, anxious. If we abandon that, our own mind will be peaceful. No unnecessary fear and anxiety.

Abandoning wrong views – we're born intelligent, with very good wisdom. Here we're talking about Dharma wisdom, not worldly wisdom. People can have a lot of worldly wisdom but be very ignorant in terms of Dharma. Very close-minded. People who may not have so much worldly wisdom – they may flunk their math class – may understand the Dharma very well. That's the important kind of wisdom, the important kind of intelligence.

Results Similar to the Cause in terms of Our Behavior

Abandoning killing – as young children, we are instinctively kind to others. We instinctively don't kill.

Abandoning stealing – our instinctive behavior is to be honest with others and to respect other people's property.

Abandoning unwise sexual conduct – we won't be tempted to engage in extra-marital affairs, or to get into dysfunctional sexual relationships with people.

Abandoning lying – it'll be very easy to tell the truth. We won't feel compelled to lie.

Abandoning slander – we'll have a very good disposition. Again, we'll create harmony in our environment instead of creating division.

Abandoning harsh words – we have an inclination to speak pleasantly to other people.

Abandoning idle talk – we have the inclination to speak to others in a meaningful way.

Abandoning coveting – there is the inclination, the tendency for the mind to be content and peaceful instead of always being restless and dissatisfied. When our mind is really dissatisfied, it's very good to think about this. Abandoning coveting is the way to make the mind peaceful.

Abandoning maliciousness – the mind becomes peaceful in the sense that we aren't tormented by a lot of anger and jealousy.

Abandoning wrong views – we will be able to easily understand the Dharma and easily have correct understanding.

This is real interesting to think about. I think it's good to spend some time thinking about your own life situation. When you read the newspapers and watch TV, spend some time thinking about it. When you experience something painful, ask: what are the karmic causes for that? When you experience something good, what are the karmic causes for that? Look at your own personality tendencies. Some people might be compulsive liars, and some people might be compulsive truth tellers. Look at the different tendencies in your mind.

Actually, sometimes, we might have both tendencies. It's not like you lie all the time or you tell the truth all the time. You might have habitual karma in both directions, but which one is stronger? Which one do you want to really nourish and encourage? It is very helpful to think about this. It also helps us to see the advantages of constructive actions. We really begin to appreciate it. Also, when we do this, we start becoming cognizant of the good conditions that we have in our life, instead of just taking them for granted. Recognizing the good conditions and opportunities we have and thinking of the good karma we created in order to enjoy that, gives us some energy to be able to keep on acting constructively.

I'll give you one little example of how that worked with me, where I kind of got a feeling for this. The early

years of my ordination was quite difficult financially, to put it mildly. At one point, I was living in France. I was living at the monastery. They gave the nuns the horse stables to live in. [laughter] The French winters are freezing cold. It's really cold. This was an old building. There was no insulation. The wind would blow through the bricks. It was so cold, and all there were, were little gas-heaters to put in our rooms. There was no such thing as central heating then. But I was really broke, and I couldn't afford a heater.

I was there the whole winter, and I couldn't afford a heater. It was miserable. I did a lot of prostrations that winter to keep warm. [laughter] I couldn't afford a heater and the nuns as a group didn't have enough money to give everybody individually a heater. You had to pay for it yourself, and I wasn't able to. Then other things happened that year too. There were teachings in Italy. It seemed that I wasn't going to be able to go for the teachings because I didn't have enough money to pay for a ticket, and these kinds of things.

So there were just a lot of financial problems and at one point, I sat myself down and I really had a good talk with myself. "Look. This is all due to your miserliness. Karmically, when you have problems with resources and you're miserable because you can't afford these things, it is a result of being miserly." Looking at my behavior, looking at how I was acting, I said, "You're still acting and creating more karma to be miserly, because you're still thinking, 'This is my doughnut. This is my this. This is my that.'"

I was sitting there thinking, "Here I am, belly-aching, belly-aching that I'm so poor. It's a result of my own karmic action, and I'm creating more karma to have the same experience again." At that point I said to myself, "I need to change." It's like "I think I need to re-think this whole thing, because I don't want to continue this way." Even if I don't have a lot of stuff and I can't give a whole lot, I've got to at least start being a little bit more generous with things.

It was really good for me to come right up against it and really face it, instead of belly-aching "Oh, I don't have so much money. Why doesn't somebody give me some money to have a heater? Why don't they have more compassion for nuns?" "Well, this is your own karma, kiddo! What do you want?" I had to really sit and look at that and think about it, and see how until then, I hadn't been doing much to counteract that. Then that gave me a lot of energy to begin to review my relationship to possessions, and to begin to start to share a little bit more than I had been sharing previously. So this kind of contemplation and awareness of the results of karma – both the negative karmas and the positive karmas, reflecting on them in terms of your life – can give you some positive energy to develop your good qualities.

[Audience:] But isn't it a selfish kind of motivation, to just want my future to be better?

This is why we talk about the three levels of motivation: the first level of motivation being the wish for a good rebirth, followed by the wish for liberation, then the wish for enlightenment. It's because the motivation to have a good rebirth is the easiest one to generate. "I want to have more in my next rebirth. I don't like this." It was completely selfish, but I was beginning to think at least about my future rebirths. So at least that got me going. It got me going somehow, in a positive direction. Then from there, once I got going, then I could reflect, "Oh, but look. That motivation is pretty selfish, isn't it? You're completely blocking out all these other people who are freezing cold." So then the motivation began to expand and expand.

Okay. So let's just sit and quietly think about this.

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>