

The Unsatisfactory Experiences of Humans – Part 2 of 2 and the Three Unsatisfactory Experiences of Cyclic Existence in General

(lightly edited transcript)

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The disadvantages of samsara - somebody was saying that this is heavy stuff. Really, when we talk about the disadvantages of samsara, it's directly challenging how we live our lives and the on-going attachment that we have to everything in our lives. I was saying I could teach topics like love – I'd probably have a lot more people here [laughter] – but I wouldn't be accurately portraying the teachings. Then somebody else commented: "I'm kind of waiting for you to get to the topic of love and compassion – then it will get better; that's kind of nice."

Then I pointed out that actually, it comes down to the same thing. Before you meditate on love and compassion, you have to meditate on equanimity – getting rid of attachment to friends, aversion to enemies and indifference to everybody else. So it's coming down to the same things that we are getting to here – attachment, anger and ignorance.

If you are having the mind of: "Oh, I wish we will stop talking about all the suffering and unsatisfactory stuff and start talking about bodhicitta," you will find that we will bump into our attachment, anger and ignorance anyway, wherever we turn. We keep trying to wiggle out of it. It's as if the Buddha's got to have a loophole somewhere [laughter]. When you find one, let me know [laughter].

Review

1. Taking birth

Last time, we talked about the unpleasantness and the unsatisfactory nature of taking birth. By taking birth, we are then exposed to ageing, sickness, death, and everything else that comes along with it. Our body acts as the basis for so much difficulty that we experience this lifetime. If we didn't have this body, we wouldn't have to worry about cancer or Aids or heart disease.

But it's interesting, because we think: "I have this body and the body is good. It's the cancer and Aids and heart disease that are the problems." It's like we should get rid of those but be able to keep this body. But what we're pointing out here is that the body, by its very nature, is totally open to all of that, so there is no way you are ever going to conquer Aids, cancer, heart disease and all kinds of illnesses, without getting rid of the body that's under the influence of afflictions [*'afflictions' is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'disturbing attitudes'*] and karma. You might put disease off for a while, but as long as we have a body that is under the control of afflictions* and karma, some kind of sickness at some point is going to come.

2 & 3. Sickness and ageing

Then of course we also have the disadvantages of sickness, which we don't like very much, and the disadvantages of ageing – the difficulties of the whole ageing process. We talked about ageing in terms of the sufferings of someone in old age, but actually it can refer to the whole ageing process – as you

grow up, all the changes you have to go through, adjustments you have to make through childhood, adolescence, young adulthood and middle-age, all the different physical and mental difficulties that go with the process of ageing.

4. Death

Then we also talked about death. It's not what we want to do, and yet it's part of having this body. There is no way to avoid it.

5 & 6. Not getting what we want and meeting with things we don't like

We also face the situations of not getting what we want and meeting with things that we don't like. Even though we try so hard to not meet the things we don't like and we try so hard to get the things we like, we're not successful.

It's interesting to look at the problems that you encounter on a day-to-day basis and ask yourself which category it falls under. Something happened to me just a few days ago. I was very upset by it, thinking: "It just wasn't fair. It wasn't right. People weren't being open-minded," etc. And then I sat down and I said: "Basically, it all boils down to I'm not getting what I want." [laughter] That's because I'm born with a body and mind under the influence of afflictions* and karma. So what's there to be so surprised at? It's just the nature of this type of existence to have the problem of not getting what I want. Of course, Buddha said so. It's just that I didn't listen. [laughter]

It's quite interesting to look at your different experiences and troubles that way. Either I'm not getting what I want, or I am getting what I don't want. Of course I'm going to get what I don't want! Of course. By not removing afflictions* and karma in previous lives, I'm of course going to get what I don't want in this life.

7. Being separated from the things we like

Also, I'm separated from the things I like. I may have some really wonderful experience or wonderful thing or wonderful relationship, but then circumstances change and it isn't there anymore. Of course this happens. As long as I'm under the influence of afflictions* and karma, that's going to happen.

Reflecting like this, looking at our daily life experience through this framework, becomes a real centering experience. It cures a lot of the belligerence we have towards other people and external situations, because we see that it is not somebody else's fault. It is like: "Why am I here in the first place? It is because I didn't resolve the problem in the previous life. I set myself up for it." So it stops the feeling of fighting with the world, because we are seeing our own situation in a different light, in a broader perspective. I think this is really helpful.

8. Having a contaminated body and mind

The eighth of the unsatisfactory conditions of human beings is having a contaminated body and mind due to afflictions* and karma.

(Actually, these eight unsatisfactory conditions are not limited to human beings. In fact, I've always wondered why they list these eight as peculiar to human beings, because it seems to me that at least, beings from the human realm downwards go through these. In the upper realms, when you have great concentration, you don't have these unsatisfactory experiences.)

When we say 'contaminated body and mind', it doesn't mean that it is radioactive [laughter]. It means it's contaminated by afflictions* and karma. Because we have this body and mind that are under the influence of afflictions* and karma, we're not free. Everything is contaminated by that.

Again, it's interesting to think about this: "I have a contaminated body and mind," instead of: "This is *me*. Don't tell me I'm contaminated!" [laughter] We don't like to be told we're contaminated. But it is true that we have a contaminated body and mind, isn't it? My body *is* under the influence of afflictions* and karma. It is so because in previous lives, I had ignorance, anger and attachment. In particular, at the end of my last life, I had a lot of attachment to having a body. My mind desperately wanted a body, so it latched onto another body of this life when it had to separate from last life's body. So I got the body because I wanted it. So in future be careful what you want! [laughter] It's under the control of my own

attachment that I got a body that then gets sick and old and dies.

And this body is the basis on which the karma of past lives ripens. We created many different karma in our past lives. We might have punched somebody or did medical experiments and killed a lot of beings in a past life – who knows what we did in previous lives! A lot of the results of those actions get reaped on this life's body.

Just look at your day-to-day experiences. You have a stomachache. Instead of: "It's that lousy guy at the restaurant I ate who didn't clean the dishes," it's like: "Oh, this is the result of my own karma. I have a body on which this karma can ripen because I have ignorance. And I had a lot of grasping at the end of my last life."

It's true that if you have to get born in cyclic existence, a human body is a good one to have. That's why in the initial scope, we aspire and work to get human bodies and good rebirths in an upper realm in the next life. But now, hopefully our mind is a little bit more mature and we're not going to be satisfied with just having a good body because we recognize that it's still under the control of afflictions* and karma, and we're still not free.

It is the same with our mind. Why do we have anger? Why do we lose our temper? Why do we feel lonesome and paranoid? Why do we feel discontent? Why do we feel unloved? All these different mental feelings and emotional feelings that we have – why are they there? Well, in our past lives, we had afflictions*. We didn't purify the mind completely. We didn't realize emptiness. So there is a continuity of the afflictions*, and what we had in our past lives, we have them too in this life.

We had attachment last life, so this life we have lots of attachment. As a result of our attachment, we have discontent. We lost our temper a lot last life, so the seed of the anger continues to this life. These different mental factors just continue on. We have them again in this life because we didn't solve the problems before.

Why do we experience so much mental pain? In many ways, our mental pain is much more excruciating than our physical pain. In our society, the physical pain is minimal, but there is so much mental pain, especially when compared to, let's say, India or China. Why is there so much mental pain?

Again, so much of it is due to afflictions* and karma. The afflictions* that come up in our mind now are a continuation of previous lives' afflictions*. All the different feelings and emotions that we have that are very painful, are the ripenings of previous life karma. Why do we get depressed? Well, maybe in previous lives we harmed others. Why do we feel lonesome sometimes? Well, maybe in previous lives we were very cruel to other people and kick them out of our home.

Who knows what we did in previous lives! They say we've been born as everything and done everything. I think it's useless to hold on to this goody-two-shoes idea of: "Oh, I wouldn't do that!" We wouldn't? All that is needed is to put us in the right situation, and I bet we would do it. You think we're above doing what happened in LA? I'm sure if we were put in the same circumstances, we would have rioted and done exactly the same thing that people did. Why? Because the seeds are within us. It is just that the karma is not ripening right now. But I think a lot of that potential is right there within us. And this is what we are getting at when we say that we are under the influence of afflictions* and karma. Those afflictions* are right there. All that is needed is to have the karma that puts you in that external situation and whammo! There you have it.

I think it's a very humbling experience to think about this, just to see what the root of the problem is. By seeing the root of the problem as the afflictions* and karma, we also recognize that we can do something to change it, because we can control our afflictions*. We have learnt the antidotes to these afflictions*. We have learnt methods to realize emptiness to eliminate them. We have learnt methods to purify the karma. The understanding of emptiness is the ultimate thing that purifies the karma.

So we have within us, the ability to change this whole situation. It might be sobering to recognize that it's all there within us, but it's also very helpful because we have the tools that we can use to change it. Whereas if the situation were really as we so often perceive it to be: "Well, this person is not being very nice to me. This person is being unfair. This one is close-minded. That situation is unjust. This isn't right," then there's no way we can ever solve it, because we can't change everything everybody else

does.

So our old view of always seeing problems as external is really leading us to a dead end. While this other one, although it might be sobering and it might be breath-taking in an alarming way, it actually is very hopeful at the base because we see that we can change it. We have the guides. We have the tools. All we need to do is do it! Sounds easy, huh? [laughter]

So what's missing? Why aren't we doing it? Because we don't see the situation for what it is. Why does a person who has a drug problem not go for help? Because they don't see the severity of their situation. They are painting over it. They are not looking at how horrible the situation is. So they are not going for help.

Similarly, we have to look at how horrible our situation is, not so that we get freaked out and emotional and depressed, but so that we actually go for help and do something about it. The psychologists always say that as long as you are in denial, then you can't change. It's the same in the Dharma. As long as we're denying what our situation is and painting over it, we're just going to perpetuate it again and again. We need to see the disadvantages of cyclic existence and by that, we develop the determination to be free from it.

This determination to be free from cyclic existence is called, in Western terms, having compassion for ourselves. The Buddhas do not use that terminology, but that's basically what it is. Compassion is not wanting someone to suffer. When we look at the severity of cyclic existence and we don't want to continue to suffer within it, then we have compassion for ourselves and we want to free ourselves from it. And we have love for ourselves, which is the wish for ourselves to be happy, to attain liberation. So Buddhism is definitely based on having love and compassion for ourselves.

And when we have that love and compassion for ourselves, when we have this determination to be free from cyclic existence, then we can generate love and compassion for others. We generate love and compassion for ourselves by looking at our own unsatisfactory situation. We generate it for others by looking at their unsatisfactory situations. We see that they are in exactly the same situation as us. But we can't recognize others' misery if we can't recognize our own. How can we get in touch with the severity of somebody else's pain if we can't even acknowledge our own pain?

So, wanting to have love and compassion but not wanting to look at our own situation is a contradiction. With this contradiction, we're not going to be able to have real love and compassion. Therefore, love and compassion is not an escape from looking at our own problems. It's done on the basis of having looked at our own problems.

I remember one time Rinpoche teaching this. He was saying this in the context of the equanimity meditation. He was saying that when there is somebody whom you don't like and you wish harm upon the person, then think that the person is going to get old and sick and die. At that time, I was quite upset with somebody, and when I thought that this person was going to get sick and old and die, then all of a sudden, I found that I couldn't be angry with them anymore. How can I wish harm to somebody who is going to get old and sick and die? They're going to suffer. I don't even have to do anything to cause it. How can I wish them to have suffering anyway?! What kind of integrity do I have as a human being if that's what I want?

So, I think recognizing what cyclic existence is all about is very helpful in many ways. It can help us to generate love and compassion for ourselves. It can help us to let go of anger and resentment for other people. It can help us to develop some love and compassion for them, because they're exactly like us. So, this is really a cornerstone.

When the Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths, the first truth of the unsatisfactory conditions is the first thing he taught, so it must have been important. [laughter] But you have to remember that he didn't leave it at just the first Noble Truth or the second Noble Truth – unsatisfactory conditions and their causes. He taught all four, which means he also taught the cessation of the afflictions* and their causes and the problems, and he also taught the path how to do it. It is very important to remember there are four Noble Truths. Don't get stuck in just one.

So, these are the eight unsatisfactory conditions of human beings.

The three sufferings

What I want to go into a little more in-depth now, is what is commonly called the three sufferings. We had the six sufferings. We had the eight sufferings. Now we have the three [laughter]. It's just another way of presenting it. We went over this when we first talked about the Four Noble Truths, but I think it's helpful to go into more depth right now. One or more of these three unsatisfactory conditions permeate all realms in cyclic existence. Thinking about this is designed to help us go beyond just wishing for a good rebirth, to see the defects in that and therefore to wish for liberation.

There are three unsatisfactory conditions:

1. The unsatisfactoriness of suffering
2. The unsatisfactoriness of change
3. Pervading compounded unsatisfactoriness

I wish there were a nice word for the translation of the Sanskrit term 'dukka', instead of 'unsatisfactoriness', or 'suffering' which is a worse translation.

1. The unsatisfactoriness of suffering

The unsatisfactoriness of suffering is feelings, both mental and physical, that all beings acknowledge as painful. This is basically painful feelings, unpleasant feelings. They can be physical ones like stubbing our toe or having an upset stomach. They can be mental ones like getting depressed or anxious. Both the physical and mental sufferings are experienced by animals, by the beings in the hell realms, and by the hungry ghosts. The mental suffering is also experienced by some of the desire realm gods, these gods who live in super-deluxe sense pleasure.

2. The unsatisfactoriness of change

The unsatisfactoriness of change refers to pleasant feelings, happy feelings, things that we normally consider happy. Why do we say that happy feelings are unsatisfactory? Or if you use the old translation, that happy feelings are suffering? (See, that's why 'suffering' doesn't work so well.) Because they don't last very long. And because we have to gather so many external conditions to get them. We have to put in a lot of energy into getting them.

And also, all the things that we do that bring us pleasant feelings, by their very nature, are not inherently pleasurable. When your knees hurt while you're sitting down, all you want to do is get up. When you first stand up, standing is pleasurable. But if you keep standing and standing, it becomes painful, doesn't it? The same activity of standing, which at the beginning, was pleasurable, later becomes painful. So that activity, in and of itself, is not pleasurable.

Why do we call it pleasurable then when we first stand up? It's because the suffering of sitting down has gone away and the suffering of standing up is very small at that point when we first stand up. But as we stand longer, that suffering, which is initially small, grows and grows until it becomes painful. On that small amount of suffering or unsatisfactoriness that we have when we first stand up, we give it the label 'pleasure'. We label it 'pleasure' because the gross discomfort of sitting down has ceased and the gross discomfort of standing up hasn't yet arisen. It's just a little discomfort. So we call it 'pleasure'.

It's the same when you are eating, when you are really hungry. There is a gross feeling of hunger. It feels horrible. When you start to eat, wow, it's such a pleasure! Bliss! Wonderful! We call that pleasurable, but what actually is it? The unpleasant feeling of hunger has gone away. The unpleasantness of eating is very small. Because if we keep eating and eating, it definitely becomes quite unpleasant, doesn't it? If you sit there and stuff yourself, it becomes very painful. Which is more painful: having a stomach that's too full so you feel like you are going to throw up, or being hungry? Both are different forms of pain, but they're both physical pain.

The pain that comes from eating is still very small at the moment when you first start eating to assuage your hunger. So we label it 'pleasure'. We label it 'happiness'. But in and of itself, that feeling is not happiness. It's not pleasure. Because if that feeling were inherently pleasurable, then the more we ate, the happier we should be. But quite the opposite happens. It's like with anything that we do, it is

pleasurable and nice for a while, and then it goes bad. Just examine the things you do that are conditioned by afflictions* and karma, the things we do to seek worldly pleasure. We start out with some pleasure, but if we keep doing the same thing, it invariably goes bad. There's nothing we will be able to find, that if we keep doing, always gets better, because if there were, we would be doing that instead of sitting here.

[Audience:] How about real love?

Is it real love? You're with a fantastic person and it's wonderful. But if you're with them for another hour, and another hour, and another hour ... as one person said: "If you say that you've been married ten years and you haven't had a fight, it tells me that either you don't live together, or you don't speak to each other." [laughter]

People might say: "Oh, this is happiness," but they're picking out certain things that they label 'happiness' on. But with any relationship, with any person, there're difficulties, even if you care about that person very much. Many things go on in a relationship. The same person who at one time causes us pleasurable feeling, can also cause us to have a painful feeling at other times. It happens all the time. This is why it's an unsatisfactory condition of change, because the pleasurable thing changes into something unpleasant if you do it long enough.

Why doesn't the pleasure last? Because it is in the nature of unsatisfactoriness. Because it's governed by afflictions* and karma. So we're coming back to the causes again – the afflictions* and karma.

3. Pervading compounded unsatisfactoriness

So, we've looked at unpleasant feelings, the unsatisfactoriness of suffering. We've looked at pleasant feelings as also being unsatisfactory, because they change.

What about neutral feelings, or contaminated feelings of equanimity? We're just feeling neutral. They're definitely better than outright suffering. This is one of the reasons why people develop very deep concentration. At the beginning of their concentration they get incredible feelings of happiness. But then they transcend that and they go on to experiencing feelings of equanimity, just a feeling of neutrality which is supposedly better than some of the happy feelings that you get when you have deep concentration. And yet that is not free of the afflictions* and karma, so it's contaminated equanimity or contaminated neutrality.

Well, what is so unsatisfactory about that? Well, just when you have it, you may have a neutral feeling, but because you're still under the control of afflictions* and karma, all it takes is the slightest little change in circumstances, and you will experience suffering again. Take a neutral feeling that you have now, for example, your little toe right now – it's not, I hope, feeling very painful. It's probably not feeling incredibly blissful either. You're probably not thinking very much about your little toes. There is a neutral feeling about it.

But all it takes is the slightest change in conditions, and that neutral feeling becomes a painful one. All it takes is a cat jumping on you with his claws. Or you stepping on a thorn, or stepping on a nail, or going into a bathtub that's too hot or too cold. It just takes the slightest change in condition. It's like almost all the circumstances are there to change it into something unpleasant. That is why being content with a neutral feeling is not liberation, is not satisfactory, because as long as we are under the control of afflictions* and karma, the whole suffering will come again.

It's called 'pervading' because it pervades the feeling of pain and pleasure. This whole condition of being under the influence of afflictions* and karma pervades the feeling of pain and pleasure because they are conditioned by it. It's pervading because it pervades all of the realms in cyclic existence. Anywhere you take rebirth, you have this kind of unsatisfactory condition. It pervades everything. It pervades our whole body in that the body or any part of it is just set up to experience suffering. It pervades any kind of body. It pervades any kind of aggregates that you get in cyclic existence. They are just set up for the experience of pain with the slightest change of condition.

[In response to audience:] Aggregates are the body and mind. It's said that we have five aggregates. One is the physical one, the form aggregate. Four are mental ones – different aspects of our mind.

It's called 'compounded' or 'conditioned' because it arose in such a way that by its very nature, it can experience the other two kinds of unsatisfactoriness. 'Compounded' means conditioned, put together through conditions. It's conditioned through the afflictions* and karma.

[In response to audience:] Yes, it pervades any kind of rebirth that you take in cyclic existence, from the lowest one in the hell realms to the super-duper sense pleasure deluxe in the god realms to even the very high stages where you have total single-pointed concentration. It pervades even these beings, because they have not developed wisdom.

It is said that we ourselves have been reborn in those incredible states of single-pointed concentration before. Imagine this. We've all had single-pointed concentration in previous lives. We've been born everywhere in cyclic existence. We've been born in the form realms and the formless realms where they have this incredible concentration. We may have experienced great happiness and the feeling of equanimity. But because we never freed ourselves from the ignorance, when the karma that conditioned that rebirth ran out, we are back to a rebirth where there is more pain.

[Audience: Inaudible]

Yes, I think our mind would definitely be a lot more peaceful if we could accept the change, because a lot of the mental pain comes about because we reject change. Accepting the change would eliminate a lot of that pain. It would eliminate the mental pain that accompanies getting old and sick and dying, and all the other kinds of mental pain. We may still have the physical pain, like when we stub our toe. But we won't have all the mental pain that goes along with it, that we add on and that we confuse so often with the physical pain. Sometimes we have a hard time distinguishing what is coming from the physical body and what is coming from the mind. They're different kinds of pain.

[In response to audience:] If you are very attached to your body and you experience some physical pain, then a lot of mental pain starts. You start to worry: "Maybe I'm going to get sick. Maybe this is some horrible disease. Maybe I'm not going to recover. Oh, this is terrible! Maybe I'm going to get sicker and sicker. What am I going to do? How am I going to support myself if I get sick? Who's going to take care of me?" All that becomes incredibly painful! That would definitely affect the physical pain, and the more anxious you get about it, the more difficult it is for the body to heal, and the physical pain is going to increase.

So they say that the wise sees pain as something that arises from contaminated aggregates (*contaminated* meaning being under the influence of afflictions* and karma), and endeavor to stop aversion to that pain. What we're talking about is the freaked-out aversion: "I don't want this to happen to me!" The acceptance that you were talking about is: "Well, this is the nature of my body, so if it's painful, it's painful. I don't need to get all freaked out about it. I can accept that." So you stop the aversion to the pain. That already cuts a lot of pain.

The wise also sees pleasure as unsatisfactory and stop the attachment to the pleasure. That is the challenge for America. In America, we are raised to seek more and more pleasure, because this is the foundation for a good economy. [laughter] That's how to be a patriotic citizen. Consume! We're taught that if we're going to be healthy, this is what you should want.

It's very interesting sometimes. The societal model of being healthy and the Dharma model of being healthy can be very different. Societal model of healthy is you have great desires and you go all out to fulfill as many desires as you can. And your desires are mostly sense desires. If you happen to have that karma from previous lives and you get them, you're called 'successful'. If you don't have that good karma, then you blame everybody else for not letting you have it. [laughter] So it winds up being a big merry-go-round. Therefore giving up the attachment to the seeking of sense pleasure is a very radical thing for us.

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

Sometimes at the beginning of the practice, we say this very idealistically to ourselves: "Oh, sense pleasure – this is the root of all the problems." And then we superimpose all our Judeo-Christian ideas of: "Oh, you're a sinner if you crave for pleasure." "It's bad! You *shouldn't* do it. You're *not supposed to* do it. Sense pleasure is evil! Lust is horrible!" We imposed all of our very judgmental attitudes on this,

and then we try and let go of all the things that we are attached to.

But when we do that, we're not doing it with a proper reason. We're doing it with the Judeo-Christian idea of: "I'm bad and I'm a sinner. My body is evil, so let's squeeze myself, wear a horsehair shirt and go sit in the sea when it's thirty-seven degrees and whip myself!" That's not the way to get rid of the attachment. Buddha was very clear about that. Going on an extreme ascetic practice is not the way to cure yourself of attachment.

Or we may push ourselves: "I'm a bad person because I have sense desires! I'm not supposed to have these. I'm not supposed to want these." All these *should's* and *supposed-to's* and *ought-to's* and then squeezing ourselves to try and become what we think is a good practitioner. That's not the way to do it either. Because that is not coming from understanding. That's coming from having an idealized, self-created vision of what it means to be holy and trying to squeeze ourselves into that, without really understanding what it means to be holy.

This comes from very deep understanding, which means we have to think about it. To think about it, we have to get rid of some of the resistance that we have to thinking about it. Because at first sight, at first hearing, it makes us feel uneasy: "I don't want to think about this!" So I don't think about it, or I meditate on the four immeasurables or the purification practice or something else instead. But then it just stays in there and you're anxious. You're nervous. You feel weird. Then when you sit there and you crave for chocolate, or you crave for pizza, then you say: "I'm bad. I'm not supposed to do that. That's sense desire. So I'm not going to have chocolate! I'm not going to have pizza! I'm going to eat oatmeal, three meals a day!" [laughter] "No sugar and no milk, just plain oatmeal!" "Uncooked!" [laughter]

We do some heavy 'should' trip on ourselves, and then we get all tied up in knots! That happens because there's no understanding. Therefore we have to sit and think about these things, and open our mind to understanding them. It might make some of our previously held beliefs a little shaky. It might make our ego shake a bit. (If you have that perspective that this is making the *ego* shakes, that's good. If you think that it's making *you* shake, then that is not beneficial.) So you do the meditation, gain the understanding, and then you lose interest in pursuing sense desire. Instead of having to do some big: "I shouldn't do this!" trip, it's just: "Who wants to do this?! It doesn't bring lasting pleasure, so why am I wasting my time doing this?" This comes from understanding.

While you are in the process of gaining that understanding, when your understanding is still intellectual, you may want to distance yourself from the things that you are attached to, simply because the understanding very quickly leaves us when the chocolate ice-cream is in front of us. It's like, we have a little bit of understanding of: "This isn't going to bring me real, lasting happiness," but we forget that very quickly because of the force of previous habits. So at the beginning, sometimes you may need to distance yourself from the things that you are most attached to, not as a way of punishing yourself, not as a way of making yourself unhappy, but just as a way of not letting yourself be controlled by those things. It's a way of freeing yourself. Instead of those things controlling you, you're saying: "I actually have some choice in the matter."

And then, not just distancing yourself from the things you are attached to, but also using your time to gain understanding of how those things don't bring lasting happiness. Think deeply about the unsatisfactoriness of change, so that you lose interest in those things. And then, when you have lost interest in those objects of attachment, and when you are facing them again, or you are eating them again, you can enjoy them without clinging and grasping and craving, and without sadness when they disappear.

That changes our relationship with these objects. It doesn't mean that by letting go of that attachment, you're never going to have any pleasure again, because what we're trying to do is to understand that attachment is not pleasurable. And this means really piercing one of our biggest afflictions [['afflictions'](#) is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'delusions'], the affliction of thinking that objects of attachment are pleasurable and that being attached to them is pleasurable.

[Audience: Inaudible]

If you are referring to an *external* abundance, there're some things where there is just not an abundance of. There isn't an abundance of timber wood that can be chopped down. There isn't an abundance of ozone.

That is different from having an *internal* feeling of abundance. That's an attitude that you have, in other words, the attitude that whatever I have is enough. Whatever I have is good enough. Whatever I have, I'm appreciative for. I'm grateful for. I enjoy. And so there is a feeling of contentment. Maybe that's what a Buddhist translation would be. It's a feeling of contentment so that whether you have a lot or a little, whether there is actually external abundance or external poverty, your mind feels abundant, your mind feels content.

[Audience: Inaudible]

It's true because we're taught this is the meaning of life. This is the purpose of life. If you don't do it, there's something wrong with you. And not only that, but from our side, we will experience the anxiety of: "If I don't do this, what am I going to do? What am I going to do with my time?" Although we have so many time-saving devices, we're busier than ever. I think we're afraid of the time-saving devices because we don't know what to do with the free time they provide us. So we create other things that we need and other things we have to do to make sure we fill the time. We are avoiding becoming friends with ourselves. We are looking for something outside rather than learning to sit and breathe and like ourselves, and be friends with ourselves, and be content with being with ourselves because we're a nice person.

This is all an escape from looking at ourselves. What you could do with your time, instead, is to work to purify your mind and free yourself from the ignorance and anger and attachment. Purify the negative karma so that it doesn't ripen. Meditate on bodhicitta. Do things out of bodhicitta for the benefit of others. His Holiness stays very, very busy. He doesn't worry about not having enough things to fill his time. But his purpose of life is not to get better and more sense pleasures.

I think this anxiety that you are stating comes because we haven't been able to see what else we could do. But there are a whole lot of other things that we could do.

[Audience: Inaudible]

Wanting it – it's a difficult word in English because it can be talked about in so many ways. The word 'want' in and of itself can be used in so many ways. We can definitely see that it's better for others and for the Dalai Lama if Tibet were free. So if you can aid in the creation of the causes to bring that about, great. But it's not like: "Tibet has got to be free because I'm the head of the Tibetans. I want my country back. This is mine! I want to live in the Potala because I want to be with all that gold and treasure and stuff that these people shipped off to China. I want them all back!"

The mind is looking and seeing: "Well, if there is the choice between this and that, this is preferable, because it brings more benefit to self and others. But it's not out of an attached, clinging mind.

[In response to audience:] There is a difficulty with the word 'desire' too, because the word 'desire', like the word 'wanting' in English, is often used in one way. But it can be used to mean a preference, an aspiration, a positive wish, too.

[Audience: Inaudible]

I think to be fully content so that the attitude will never change, you definitely need the realization of emptiness. If you're developing just some contentment so that you can deal with your life situations better, that's good, but having the compounded pervasive unsatisfactoriness means that all it takes is for the conditions to change a little bit, and because you don't have full control over your satisfaction and your feeling of contentment, because you still have the seed of the afflictions* inside, it will come up again. So you realize that you may have the contentment now, but as long as the potential in your mind

exists for it to be otherwise, then you're not liberated. So then you still want to be liberated.

[Audience:] What is the meaning of liberation?

Liberation is the state of being out of cyclic existence, not being under the influence of the afflictions* and karma anymore. You will not be obliged by the afflictions* and karma to take a contaminated body.

[Audience:] Are all bodhisattvas liberated?

Not all bodhisattvas are liberated. The lower level bodhisattvas are not necessarily liberated. They just have very firm altruism. When they reach what's called the eighth bhumi, the eighth bodhisattva stage, then they have removed all the afflictions* and karma forever.

[Audience: Inaudible]

There're many bodhisattvas. They don't all advertise. [laughter] The real bodhisattvas don't advertise. The fake ones do.

All these material that I have been teaching is all material for meditation. All the things that you are getting here are not teachings to just listen to and then it goes in one ear and out the other, but it's material for doing checking meditations. You have the outline#. You have the points to sit and think about according to your own life. And then discuss it with each other and share what you are experiencing; what your feelings and fears are about the whole thing. And ask questions and keep meditating on it.

Let's sit and meditate right now.

#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>

*'Afflictions' is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'disturbing attitudes.'