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Advice for the Student

It is quite important for us to constantly remember exactly what this class is about. It is so easy to get into a habit of thinking, “Well it is Monday, or Wednesday, so I come here,” and we are not really thinking about what we are doing. We just come out of habit. It is also easy to begin to feel like it is a drag and an exertion. “Every Monday and Wednesday, here I am! I could be doing so many other things besides going to this class.” Then our interest peters out and we stop coming.

Think About Why We Study Dharma

I think it is important to deeply and continuously think about what this class is about and what it is that we are trying to do. We are here because of some very fundamental gut feeling that our human potential is not being actualized in the present state and that we are, in fact, living in a state of confusion. We need to remember that there are means and methods to use which improve the quality of our life and make our life meaningful for others. It is for this reason we come here to learn.

We also need to remember that what is going on in these classes is a process of liberation. We are not just coming and getting the latest news, nor are we merely hearing a bunch of information and trying to figure it out. But coming here and listening to teachings is actually the process of us together trying to become fully enlightened Buddhas. In other words, something actually quite significant is happening. We, therefore, need to have that awareness and some kind of sense of appreciation and a joy for what we are doing.

Use Your Time Wisely

Years ago I studied in Dharamsala with Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey. Because we were all travelers from various parts of the world, he used to encourage us to use our time in Dharamsala wisely, because soon circumstances would change and we would all go back to our countries and then it was not going to be possible to be in that teaching situation. Indeed that was exactly what happened. The wind of our karma blew us all in different directions.

Geshela is now in New Zealand and I have not seen him for many years. It is very difficult to see him down in New Zealand. The kinds of teachings he was giving at the library are not being taught there anymore. It is very difficult now to hear teachings in the way he was teaching us. The students from that time are now scattered all over the world. The karma that we had together was over. It was really as he said, according to how much energy we put in and the kind of faith and appreciation we had, then that was what we had to take home with us.

For instance, this last time and every time when I go back to Dharamsala, because I have been going for so many years, each trip makes me think of all the other times I was there. The whole era when Geshe Dhargyey was teaching – that is now over and done. I was fortunate to be there for part of it. That time is not retrievable and is never going to happen again. This last trip I was sitting there thinking, “What did I do all those years? Did I really make use of the time when I was here?” Geshe kept telling us, “Use your time wisely!” and we students kept saying “Oh yes, he is telling us yet again!” But he was really right. [Laughter]

The One Thing That Makes Life Meaningful

When we go somewhere, the only thing that we can ever really, really take with us is the Dharma. When the Tibetans left Tibet, they could not take all their scriptures, teacups, houses and knick-knacks. All they did take with them was the Dharma because they had to leave Tibet really quick. The Dharma is the real thing we have in our hearts and is the thing that comes with us no matter where we go.

When we have the chance to listen to the Dharma, to get the Dharma in our minds and in our hearts, we need to realize that that kind of thing is so difficult to get. It is so incredibly difficult to get Dharma teachings. When you think of all the different places and people in the world and where there actually are teachers, where there is religious freedom, where people have the time and interest, then you realize that Dharma is actually quite difficult to get. Yet this is the one thing that makes our life meaningful.

When we die, everything that we are spending most of the day doing – our job, cultivating our prestige, thinking about our bank account, house and relationships – where are these when we die? It is completely goodbye to all of these, it is finished with nothing there. It is only the Dharma that comes with us both in this life and at the time of death. It is important, therefore, while we have the chance to learn Dharma and think about it, that we put our energy into that, because karma changes so quickly and the opportunity comes to an end. Then what will we do? We have missed an opportunity to learn the Dharma and we cannot take a time ship back in time and do it all over again. It is really important to wisely use our time.

Faith and Confidence in the Teachings is Important

This is where in our practice some feeling of faith, or confidence, in the teachings is really important. There is a sense of joy in the heart about approaching teachings that comes through realizing and appreciating the rarity and the preciousness of the teachings. Then the mind becomes very joyful, buoyant and not drudging. It wants to practice, hear teachings and do retreats because it realizes the preciousness of the Dharma. The mind begins to have another purpose in life besides just accumulating more and more stuff to put into our drawers at home. [Laughter] Then we have to go out and buy more and more drawers because we have too much stuff! [Laughter]

Six root afflictions [‘Afflictions’ is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of ‘disturbing attitudes’.]

4. Ignorance - Continued from last teaching

We have been talking more in depth about the causes of our undesirable experiences. We went into depth about all the undesirable experiences and now we are looking at the causes. We talked about attachment, anger, pride and then last week we started on ignorance.

Different Ways of Looking at Ignorance

General Obscuration

If we could only understand ignorance, we might not be so ignorant! Part of the whole view of ignorance is that we do not realize it even exists, we think that we are pretty on top of our situation and understand things pretty well. Last time we spoke about how there are a couple of different ways to look at ignorance. One way to look at it is that it is like a general obscuration, a general dimness, or darkness, in the mind. Then within that dimness, we grasp at things as being inherently existent. So, one way of looking at ignorance is that it is like a fog.

Self-Grasping

Another way to look at ignorance is to look at it as the actual grasping itself. Here is where we get the terms 'self-grasping ignorance', 'concept of self', 'conception of true existence' and 'grasping at true existence'; these different terms all fall under ignorance.

Not Understanding Emptiness

There are different ways of looking at ignorance. One is to talk about the ignorance that does not understand suchness or emptiness. We don't understand the ultimate truth - emptiness, the deeper way things exist.

Not Understanding Cause and Effect

The other way of looking at ignorance is to talk about the ignorance that does not understand conventional things like cause and effect. And then there is also a lot of misconceptions about cause and effect and the path to enlightenment.

We have both of these forms of ignorance.

Two Truths – Two Forms of Ignorance: of Emptiness and of Cause & Effect

We often talk about the "two truths" to which the two forms of ignorance are related – one for each truth. At the time when we are creating positive karma, the ignorance about cause and effect is not manifest, because some wisdom about what to practice and what to abandon has arisen. But, we still have in our mind the ignorance about emptiness.

For example, when we are creating some sort of positive action, like making offerings, helping somebody, or abandoning a negative action, at that time there is ignorance about emptiness in our mind because we see what we are doing as truly existent. But the ignorance of cause and effect is not manifest at that time, because at that moment we are aware of positive and negative karma and are making an effort to do positive karma.

On the other hand, when we are creating negative karma, we have both types of ignorance manifest. We have both the ignorance towards emptiness and the ignorance towards cause and effect. When we are creating negative karma, we think that what we are doing is okay and do not see it as something to be abandoned. That is what the confusion, the ignorance of cause and effect, is all about – we erroneously think what is to be abandoned, is to be practiced and what is to be practiced, is to be abandoned. So we have everything completely upside down and we create a lot of negative karma which then throws us into one rebirth after another. So, both of these kinds of ignorance are really serious things.

The chief and most serious ignorance is the grasping at inherent existence, the self grasping. This is the chief one, because from it all the other kinds of ignorance comes, as well as attachment and anger and the whole gamut of all our other bad habits. They all come out of self grasping ignorance. This is the real enemy and this is why we say it is the root of samsara. It is the very root from which grows the whole tree of all of our confusion and problems.

Self-Grasping At Persons and At Phenomena

The ignorance about emptiness can be discussed in terms of the self-grasping of persons and the self-grasping of phenomena. Now you are going to say, "Hold on, they are both self-grasping? How can you have self-grasping of phenomena? Isn't a 'self' a person?"

When we talk about self-grasping, the word 'self' does not mean 'self' as in a person or referring to 'I'; it means inherent existence. The word 'self' in Buddhism can have different meanings at different times. We can talk about the 'self' meaning the 'I' or 'person', but when we talk about the self-grasping, the 'self' here means inherent existence. Self-grasping is grasping at inherent existence. The self-grasping of persons happens when we grasp at the inherent existence of people like you and me. The self-grasping of phenomena happens when we grasp at the inherent existence of phenomena. We have both these kinds of grasping. In other words, we are hallucinating on top of everything that exists.

I think it is helpful to understand exactly what the term 'self grasping' means. For instance, we look at the clock and we grasp at it as inherently existent. We look at other people and we think they are inherently existent. We look at ourselves and we think we ourselves are inherently existent. We look at our

problems and conclude that they are definitely inherently existent. Everything appears to us as inherently existent.

This is what the ignorance does – it grasps. Then because we have made everything so solid, so reified, we become really attached to some things and averse to other things. We are self-centered, crave for our own pleasure, run after it and will even beat up anybody who gets in the way of it.

[Audience:] Does self-grasping of person includes all of the ‘my, me, mine’ as in my ear?

No. When you are grasping at your ear as inherently existent, that is grasping at phenomena.

[In response to audience:] ‘Mine’ is another way of saying ‘I’. ‘Mine’ is the one who possesses all these things. That is the self-grasping of person. But when you are grasping at your hand, or your foot, as inherently existent, that is the self-grasping of phenomenon. Self-grasping of phenomena is grasping at any of the five aggregates as inherently existent.

Grasping At Emptiness

[In response to audience:] Well we can also grasp at emptiness as inherently existent. Emptiness is not conventional reality, emptiness is ultimate reality. But all the other things, including the person, the ‘I’, are conventional truth. In other words, everything except emptiness is a conventional truth.

We can go into ignorance a little more when we come to the twelve links. I will ask you at that time how much depth you want me to go into as it can be quite confusing; actually it can be quite interesting too. The twelve links is the teaching about how we get born, die and take rebirth in cyclic existence. It teaches how one thing links to another, then links to another and so on, and we wind up going through one life after another. Ignorance is the first link in that whole process and that is why we say it is the root of cyclic existence. It is the main thing that keeps the merry-go-round going. We do not even realize we have ignorance because we think the way we perceive everything is exactly the way it exists. So ignorance is really ignorant. [Laughter]

5. Afflicted doubt

The fifth of the six root afflictions* is called the ‘afflicted doubt’. ‘Afflicted doubt’ is a mental factor that is indecisive and it also wavers towards the wrong answer. It is not the kind of doubt that wonders, “Where did I put my car keys?” It is also not the kind of doubt that is inclined towards the right answer or towards something that is actually correct. It is not the kind of doubt that says, “I am not sure if rebirth exists, but I think maybe it does.” This latter is the kind of doubt that is inclined towards the right conclusion. What we are talking about here in this fifth root affliction is the doubt that is inclined towards the wrong conclusion. So it is the doubt that says, “I really do not think rebirth exists. I am not absolutely positive, but maybe it does not.”

Here we can see how this afflicted doubt functions. It obstructs us from creating virtue because if we have doubt about cause and effect, or doubt about rebirth, or doubt about the existence of enlightenment, then our energy gets scattered. For instance, look in your own mind and look at what is one reason why it becomes so hard to practice sometimes? One of the reasons is that sometimes our mind is not convinced the whole thing is true and there is lots of doubt. Some of the doubts in our mind are towards the right conclusion and some of them are towards the wrong one. The doubt towards a wrong conclusion acts as a brick wall because it makes us lose our energy for practice. We think, “What am I doing? Maybe there is only this life. Why should I do all these practices if there is only this life? Why do I have to put so much energy out?”

Afflicted Doubt Impedes Our Progress

Afflicted doubt impedes our progress and impedes us from doing virtuous things. It prevents us from even trying. They say that doubt is like a two-pointed needle. You cannot sew with a needle that has two points. You start to go this way and it jams on the other point of the needle. When you start to go that way, it jams. This is what the afflicted doubt is like. It won’t let the mind move and it won’t let us practice. It is that kind of skeptical, tough mind that is always listening to teachings and saying, “Yes, but...Yes, but...”

Sometimes we do not have much afflicted doubt, but sometimes it comes very forcefully – our mind is completely exploding in doubt. When we have a lot of doubt, we cannot just tell ourselves not to have it.

We cannot say to ourselves, “I should not have doubt, I should have faith. I should be a good Buddhist.” That does not work. That makes the mind even tougher and more obstinate.

Recognize the Doubt

When we are having a lot of doubt, we need to first of all recognize that the doubt is there. In other words, we need to be able to recognize when we have it, instead of just following along and acting on it. We need to be able to recognize when it is there, ask questions and try to specify exactly what our doubt is about and exactly where we are stuck. Then we can discuss it with our Dharma friends and our teachers, and try to get some resolution.

Sometimes, depending on how your doubt works, it is not even a reasonable doubt with a good question. It is just obstinate skepticism that wants to pick a fight. I know that my doubt can sometimes be just like an obnoxious little kid. It is good to be able to identify that in the mind. When that type of doubt arises in the mind, it is good to know we have been through that before and where that takes us. We can then say, “I’m not going to get involved in it this time.” Being able to identify this doubt allows us to keep it from overwhelming us. Do not tell yourself you are bad, that you should not think that way, because that does not do anything except make you angry. I know this from experience! [Laughter]

6. Afflicted views.

The sixth of the six root afflictions* is called ‘afflicted views’. An ‘afflicted view’ is an afflicted intelligence that looks at the aggregates – the body and mind – as being either ‘inherently I’ or ‘inherently mine’. An ‘afflicted view’ is also a kind of afflicted intelligence that, based on that wrong conception, develops further wrong views. ‘Afflicted views’ function as the basis for a lot of our wrong views and misconceptions. They explain how we get stuck intellectually, how we get stuck emotionally and how we generate all sorts of misconceptions.

Five Kinds of Afflicted Views

The above is a general definition of ‘afflicted views’. There are five kinds of ‘afflicted views’ which we will go into now. Sometimes instead of the six root afflictions*, they talk about the ten root afflictions*, because the sixth root affliction has five branches. You have the first five root afflictions*, and the sixth root affliction is divided into five.

a) View of the transitory collection/composite

The first of the afflicted views is called ‘view of the transitory collection’, or ‘view of the transitory composite’. The Tibetan term is ‘jigta’.

The transitory composite or the transitory collection refers to the aggregates – the body and mind. The aggregates are composites; they are collections. They are transitory. They change. But on the basis of these aggregates (body and mind) which are just collections of phenomena that are changing, this view thinks that there is an inherently existent person – a solid, reified, concrete person. There is a wrong view of there being ‘I’, ‘We’, ‘Here I am’. This wrong view is a form of ignorance. It is an afflicted* intelligence. I think it is quite interesting that they call this affliction an intelligence. In other words, it discriminates something. It is intelligent but it is a completely wrong kind of intelligence because it conceives of the aggregates of body and mind, as being an inherently existing ‘I’ or an inherently existing ‘mine’.

When the view of the transitory composite conceives an inherently existing ‘I’, ‘I’ is the agent – as in ‘I am walking and I am talking’. ‘Mine’ is a way of looking at ‘I’, but is the one that possesses all these things – the eyes, ears, legs, hands, nails, teeth. ‘I’ is the agent who is doing something, ‘mine’ is the ‘I’ that possesses things.

‘I’ Is Merely Imputed

We really feel like there is a possessor of these things, don’t we? We talk about, “This is my body. This is my mind. This is my tooth.” We think that there is a ‘mine’, a real solid, existing person that possesses all these things. This is a wrong view because there is a person that possesses these things, but the person that possesses these things is not solid and inherently existent. The person exists by being merely imputed. That is the only way the person exists, but this wrong perception adds extra flavor and thinks that there is something else there.

[In response to audience:] The 'I' exists by being merely imputed. It is just amazing what that means. When you look at your aggregates, there is a body and there is mind. There are all these different parts of your body and all these different parts of your mind – different consciousnesses, different mental factors. And that is all there is to it. That is the basis of imputation. On the basis of that, we conceive 'I'. But there is no 'I' in there at all. There are just all these parts of the body and all these parts of the mind. There is no 'I' in there that you can find in any way, shape or form. The 'I' exists merely because our mind looks at the body and mind and conceives of 'I' and gives it a label. You can't find 'I' anywhere inside those aggregates.

The Body and Parts of the Body Do Not Exist Inherently

[In response to audience:] The aggregates exist, but they do not exist inherently either. What is 'body'? 'Body' exists only because there is the basis of imputation or the basis of designation – all these different parts. On the basis of all these different parts in a certain form, we conceive, "Oh, there is a body." But aside from our conceiving a body, there is no 'body' in all of those parts. The body does not exist inherently. The body exists dependently. All the parts of the body exist dependently. None of them exists beyond being merely labeled.

Due to our ignorance, we think there is something there that is not merely labeled. We think that there is something in the body that really is the body. But there isn't, so it is like we go through our life grasping at phantoms. There are all these parts and they are just like space, but we cannot let them be space; we try and grasp at them; we want to solidify them. You can see how so much difficulty in our life comes from that.

An Unchanging 'I' Cannot Exist

[In response to audience:] Yes, like a statue, a solid thing that goes into different situations; there are some philosophical schools that see 'I' as being like that. But then, is the 'I' changing, or not changing? If you say that it is not changing because it is the one thing that does not change, then it cannot be in different situations, because as soon as something goes in a different situation, it changes. If you say that the 'I' is inherently existent but changes from time to time, that statement is a contradiction. It cannot be both. If it were inherently existent, it could not change at all. You would have to just be that solitary thing and independent, not relating to anything else.

[Audience:] This is really difficult to understand.

Yes, it is. If it were easy, we would already be Buddhas [laughter].

I think that whenever the mind starts to feel, 'No, there is really something there', then we can say to ourselves, 'Okay, if there really is something there, then what is it? Find it! Put a line around it and isolate the thing that is it.'

Becoming Offended As an Example

To me a prime example of this is getting offended. When you feel like your feelings are hurt and you are offended, there is such a strong feeling of "I am hurt! I am offended! I am neglected! I am unappreciated! I, I, I...." We are completely sure that there is an 'I' that is feeling all those things. We are completely sure that there is this solid 'I' that other people do not appreciate, one that they reject and that they are offending and mistreating. We are sure it is there. We feel it so strongly.

Try to hold the feeling of that real strong 'I' that is offended and mistreated, then say to yourself, "Exactly who is this 'I'? Who is it who is offended? Who is it that is not getting treated properly? What is it? Let me find it, isolate it and put a line around it." Do that, then start to investigate and look at all the different parts of yourself and try and find that thing that is being mistreated, unappreciated, ignored and trampled upon. We feel so vividly that it exists. If it existed, we should be able to definitely find it. Yet when we look, when we try to isolate something, what are we going to isolate? Are we going to isolate any part of our body or any part of our mind and say "Ah, that is the 'I' that is offended!"?

The 'I' Exists By Being Imputed

[Audience:] Then how does the 'I' exist?

The 'I' exists by being imputed, but what this wrong view does, is it makes this 'I' concrete. That is why we should always analyze, always check. Like in the Korean Zen tradition, they use the questions "Who

am I?”, or “What is it?” like a koan. We say ‘I’ am feeling all these things, so this tradition asks, ‘Who is feeling? Who am I? What is this?’ When you see something desirable, ask, ‘What is this? What is this thing?’ Therefore the mind is always checking and investigating. There is an appearance of this thing as real, but we check to see if the appearance is actually true.

This ‘wrong view of the transitory composite’ is a real tricky one. There is a whole lot to say on this one, but I will not go into all the different things. Just figuring out what is the wrong perception of ‘I’ is the basis of a lot of philosophical debate between the different Buddhist schools. Within the Buddhist teachings there are different philosophical tenets and each of these philosophical tenets defines this mental factor in a slightly different way. There is a lot of debate going on and the debate is all aimed at us fine-tuning our own investigating abilities to understand our own mind.

Exactly what is this wrong conception of ‘I’? What is this appearance of ‘I’? What is the object to be negated when we are meditating on emptiness? In other words, how am I really thinking of ‘I’? That is the question, isn’t it? Do we ever sit and examine how we think we exist? We go through our life with such a strong feeling of ‘I’ all the time and yet, do we ever examine and ask ourselves what is this? How does this ‘I’ exist? We are always feeding it. We are always protecting it. We are always trying to make it happy. But what in the world is it?

[Audience:] Is it useful to debate how the ‘I’ exists?

Yes, because the debates get us to look at exactly how we think we exist and what is the wrong conception of ‘I’. When we have a strong feeling of ‘I’, are we thinking of it as being the same as the body and mind, or are we thinking of it as different from the body and mind? Are we viewing the aggregates and thinking they are the body and mind? Are we viewing the ‘I’ and thinking that it is inherently existent? What is really going on here? There are these different levels in the meditation on emptiness and there are different levels of the object to be negated, different levels of wrong conception about ‘I’ that we start peeling away. The grossest level is this idea of a soul. The grossest level of the conception of ‘I’ is that there is this permanent, part-less, independent self, or soul, and when we die, it floats up and goes on as some unchanging essential core that is me. This is real prominent. You find it in Christianity and in many religions.

The Soul

[In response to audience:] Yes, it is the Christian idea of a *soul* and the Hindu view of *atma*. Also, when you look in the new age things, they are talking about *essence*. It is so interesting. We are always trying to figure out who we are, but in Buddhism we should be trying to figure out who we are not [laughter]! In other words, I am not some kind of soul that is there, permanent, part-less and independent – that is the grossest level of concept of ‘I’. When you get into the tenet systems, you start looking at that and figuring out why there cannot be a soul and why having a soul is logically impossible.

The Mere ‘I’

[Audience:] So what is this sense of self, the sense of an ‘I’ then?

It is the mere ‘I’. “What do you mean it is the mere ‘I’? We want something to grab onto!” What is the mere ‘I’? That is the whole point! The mere ‘I’ is just that which is merely labeled on the basis of whatever aggregates happen to be manifest at that particular moment. The body and the mind are constantly changing, constantly changing, and on top of that whole flux of constant change there is just the appearance and the label of mere ‘I’. That’s it, folks!

Continuity Of Subtle Body And Subtle Mind

[Audience:] Then why do we refer to ‘I’ when we talk about rebirth?

Because linguistically we do have the word ‘I’ and because we do say a person is reborn...

[Teachings lost due to change of tape during recording]

...We talk about mere ‘I’ but then part of our mind says, “Hold on, tell me what the mere ‘I’ is. I want to know. I want something to pin point and say that is what is reborn and I want to be able to see that coming out of one body and going into the next body.” Well there we are, grasping at inherent existence

again, aren't we? Our mind just does not feel comfortable letting things be merely labeled, merely designated. We want them to be something. So we ask, "Who is reborn?"

There is a continuity of extremely subtle body and extremely subtle mind that goes from one lifetime to the next, but it is changing moment by moment. On top of that changing continuum, we label 'I'. That is what is reborn, but there is nothing solid there, nothing you can identify. You cannot say, "Here is the extremely subtle body and mind that is fixed and permanent in space and now it is being reborn." You cannot say that because if it were fixed and permanent, how could it change and be reborn? To be reborn implies change and that means it is not the same in the second moment as it was in the first moment. So if something is constantly changing, then where is the inherent, fixed essence that is supposed to be in it?

Every Time We Act, We Change

[In response to audience:] If there were a fixed 'I', an inherently existent 'I', then rebirth would be impossible. Enlightenment would be impossible. Even talking would be impossible, because if there were a fixed thing that was unchanging and inherently me, then I could not do anything at all, because every time I act, I change.

Stuck In Daydreams, Hopes, Nostalgia and Fears

[In response to audience:] When we are talking in Buddhism about being in the present, we are not negating the existence of the past and the future. The past and future definitely exist so it is not a question of saying there is no past and there is no future. There was a past, because you were a little girl. There is a future because you are going to become something else in the next moment. So past and future do exist, but the thing is we solidify them. What Buddhism is getting at, is not to solidify things and not to think that the past is existing right now, or the future is existing right now. Do not get stuck in our daydreams, or our hopes, or our fears, or our nostalgia. But we are not negating the existence of past and future.

Why Care About the Next Life?

[Audience:] If there is no connection between the 'I' now and what 'I' will become in the next life, then why should I care what will happen in the next life, because there is just this life?

Well, because you still exist. That is the thing, the mere 'I' is reborn, the mere 'I' does exist. When you think of your childhood, you were a very, very different person then. But this sense of 'I' and this person who wants to be happy and not have pain, this sense of 'I' is in a continuity from that little girl until now.

When you were a little kid, the adult you did not exist and the little kid could have said, "Oh, why should I study? Why should I go to school and get a career if the connection between now and the future is just this merely labeled thing?" Yet there is continuity. Although the person we are going to become in the future life is not existent right now, that person will exist and at that time we will have that sense of 'I'. The person tomorrow is not exactly the same person as who you are now. But you know that when you get there, that person is going to want to be happy. [Laughter] So that is why we care.

Is It 'Wrong View' or 'Self-grasping'?

[In response to audience:] The 'wrong view of the transitory collection' is regarding how we look at our own self. When we look at another person as inherently existent, that is just self-grasping of persons and not 'wrong view of the transitory collection'. However, if that other person is grasping at themselves as inherently existent, then that is their own 'wrong view of the transitory collection'.

b) View holding to an extreme

Nihilism and Eternalism

Now the second of the afflicted views is called 'view holding to an extreme'. This is an afflicted intelligence that refers to the inherently existent 'I' or 'mine' (that was conceived by the view of the transitory collection) in either an eternal way or a nihilistic way. I will explain what these two terms mean.

From the wrong view of the transitory collection, we have this feeling of a solid, independent, concrete person. This second view, 'view holding to an extreme', looks at this solid, independent, concrete person and says one of two things. It can either say, "Ah, this thing is eternal, this is solid, unchanging and

never becomes anything else.” Or it looks at that solid person and says, “After a person dies, that person does not exist anymore and there is nothing there at all.”

So here is where we get the two extremes called nihilism and eternalism (which sometimes is called permanence). You will hear these two terms very often in teachings about emptiness, because we tend to fall to two extremes. With the first extreme we make the ‘I’ unchanging. This ‘I’ survives death, continues indefinitely, it is a soul. That is the eternalistic view of this inherently existent I.

The flip side of that is the nihilistic view saying, “When I die, my body disintegrates and I completely disintegrate; there is no person there. So, therefore, there are no future lives and there is nobody who accumulates karma, or experiences the result of karma.”

When we are trying to meditate on emptiness, we tend to flip flop between these two extremes. One moment our mind is grasping at an ‘I’ and the next moment, our mind is saying, “There is no I; There is no solid I; There is nothing that exists at all! There is just space.” This is why understanding the middle view is so difficult because it means going beyond getting stuck in these two extremes.

Having the Nihilistic View is Dangerous

They say, of these two extreme views, the nihilistic view is the worse one. We are already eternalistic and grasping at the inherently existent ‘I’ as continuing on forever. With that view we just create a lot of negative karma. But the nihilistic view is so dangerous because it throws karma out of the window. At least, if we are grasping at inherent existence, we might have some idea of karma and value it and that is to our benefit.

You hear a lot of people say, “There is no good and there is no bad; it is all empty.” If that is so, then there is no need to keep ethics because it is all empty and good and bad are just a creation of our mind. Therefore, we can do anything we want. That is an incredibly dangerous nihilistic view that comes from misunderstanding emptiness. You hear many people talking like this.

That is why understanding the middle path is so subtle, because you are trying to understand that things are not inherently existent, but they sure do exist and they sure do function. There is a real subtle distinction there. In one text by Lama Tsong Khapa he praises the Buddha for delineating this middle view in such a fine way and for being able to balance everything, because it is so easy to flip flop.

Religious, Ethnic and Nationalistic Identities

[In response to audience:] When we start thinking about this, we can see we are full of wrong views. Grasping onto religious identity, ethnic identity, or nationalistic feelings and things like that are all based on this wrong view of the self. It is all based on creating something where there is nothing [laughter] and viewing it with all sorts of incredible meaning. Conventionally, we can say, “I am a woman”, or “I am Caucasian”, or “I am this or that,” but try finding somebody who is a woman, or somebody who is Caucasian, or somebody who is Buddhist and drawing a line around them, and it will be very difficult.

Teaching Children

[Audience:] Is there a way to keep us from becoming so self grasping in the first place and to teach this to kids?

One thing that I think is real helpful and which I think we can understand as a kid, or even as a grown-up, is whenever we start getting this strong feeling “This is mine!”, then just stop and ask, “Who does this belong to?” Also, when I look at this clock and say, “This is mine! You can’t play with it!” what inside of this clock is mine? Where can I find the ‘mine’ inside of this? What am I going to point to as ‘mine’? I think even kids can understand that. There is a ball, or a truck, if it is ‘mine’ what is ‘mine’ in the whole thing? So I think that is one way kids can begin to approach it.

c) Holding wrong views as supreme

The third kind of wrong view is ‘holding wrong views as supreme’. This is an afflicted intelligence that either looks at the first view (‘the view of the transitory collection’), the second one (‘the view holding to an extreme’) or fifth view (‘wrong views’, to be explained in the next teaching) and says that all these wrong views are the best views to have [laughter]. When you start looking in your mind, you can start to see all these different things. You can begin to identify all your different wrong views and then identify the wrong view that thinks that these wrong views are the best views to have.

It is like somebody might be prejudiced and then there is another mind that looks at their own prejudice and says, "Oh, but being prejudiced is good. It's right! Everybody should be like this." So now you not only have the prejudice, but you also have the view that thinks the prejudice is the best way to believe.

I will leave the next two wrong views for the next session. They are interesting. One is called 'holding bad ethnics and modes of conduct as supreme' and the other one is just called regular old 'wrong views'. [laughter]

Are there any questions?

Definition of 'Afflicted Views'

[Audience:] Can you please give again the definition of 'afflicted views'?

The definition of afflicted views is either an afflicted intelligence that looks at the aggregates as an inherently existent 'I' or 'mine', or in dependence upon that view, it is an afflicted intelligence that generates all kinds of other wrong views. That is why afflicted view is a broad, overarching category for 'wrong view of the transitory collection', 'view of the extreme', 'holding wrong views as supreme' and the other two that will be explained in the next session.

Pride

[In response to audience:] So you are noticing how much pride plays a role? That's real good. That is exactly how you should be looking at the teachings, taking it and becoming aware of what is going on in your own mind. The pride comes up all the time. We are always making a big deal out of *me*. It is really funny. I think this is also where we have to develop a sense of humor, to be able to laugh at ourselves and at how we think sometimes. I think a sense of humor is really important; we need some way of being able to laugh at our own garbage, instead of expecting ourselves to be perfect, because that is a kind of pride, isn't it? "*I shouldn't have all these afflictions* [*'Afflictions'* is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'delusions']. *I should be a gold-star Dharma student* [laughter]."

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.'